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Field education in international social work: Where we are and where we should go

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Abstract

A critical review of current knowledge about international field education yielded four main conclusions. First, an unresolved debate exists relating to the meaning of international social work (ISW). Second, various motives drive students, faculty and professionals to participate in ISW. Third, developing a curriculum for ISW presents unique challenges. Fourth, four competing models of international field placement exist: (1) Independent/one-time; (2) Neighbor-country; (3) Onsite group; and (4) Exchange/reciprocal. Based on the review, principles for effective ISW field placement, especially intensive preparation and collaboration between sending and host schools, as well as directions for future research are offered.

Keywords

field placements abroad, global social work, globalization, international social work, social work education

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The growing interest in the impact of globalizing forces on welfare services and on professional practice led to the recognition of the importance of an international component in social work practice and professional education (Gray et al., 2008; Kendall, 2002; Mathiesen and Lager, 2007; Nagy and Falk, 2000; Payne and Askeland, 2008; Tice and Long, 2009). The revised version of the Council for Social Work Education's standards for reaffirmation of educational programs clearly manifest this recognition (Council of Social Work Education, 2004). The standards emphasize the need for 'preparing social workers to recognize the global context of social work practice' (Educational Policy, Article 1.2) and call for the inclusion of international and cross-cultural content in social work curricula. In addition, initiatives have been established to promote standards for international work, enhance faculty development and international collaboration and foster the development of relevant knowledge. For example, the mission of the Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education is to 'promote the implementation of programs and initiatives within the global social work education community' (Council of Social Work Education, 2001).

Because they recognized the importance of international content in social work education, programs developed strategies for equipping students with the global perspective necessary to work effectively with diverse groups both domestically and abroad (Boyle et al., 1999; Caragata and Sanchez, 2002; Dominelli and Bernard, 2003; Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996; Johnson, 2004; Mathiesen and Lager, 2007; Nagy and Falk, 2000; Razack, 2002; Trevillion, 1997; Xu, 2006). However, programs vary in the volume of courses, availability of international field placements and organizational context for such placements (e.g. learning centers vs. direct contact with agencies in the host country) and institutional commitment to ISW. For example, the University of Calgary in Canada has been a pioneer in offering a concentration in ISW since 1996 (Gilchrist, Ramsay and Drover, 2009); some programs (e.g. Tulane in New Orleans, Silver in NYU, Adelphi in NY, Indiana State University, Boston College, Case Western State University and many more) offer short-term international programs in India, Gahanna, Mexico and other African, Asian, Latin American and European countries); other schools (such as the University of Michigan) offer courses on ISW.

A major component of ISW education is an international field placement. Estimates of the number of schools that offer opportunities for international field experience vary. It has been documented that between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s the number of accredited graduate schools in the USA that placed students internationally increased from 13 to 33 percent

(Healy, 1986, 2008). Since 1998, the number of schools that demonstrated commitment to ISW decreased, but programs that continued to provide their students with the opportunity for an international experience tended to intensify long-term relationships with sites abroad (Panos et al., 2004; Pettys et al., 2005; Rai, 2004).

The goals of the current article are twofold. First, to present a critical review of the state-of-the-art knowledge relating to international student exchanges; second, to offer implications for further development of educational strategies designed to use practicum abroad as a way for encouraging internationally ready social workers. The article comprises six parts. First, existing definitions of ISW are reviewed. In the second part, the motivation of students, faculty and professionals to participate in international programs is discussed. The third section identifies challenges involved in ISW, specifically in practicum abroad. Fourth, models for ISW education and outcome assessments are discussed. Fifth, a model for the effective implementation of practicum abroad is presented and illustrated through a case study. Finally, directions for the future are suggested. It should be noted that because of the authors' culture of origin, the writing reflects western perspectives and values.

Definitions: What is International Social Work?

George Warren (1943) is often credited with the conceptualization of ISW to describe the practice in agencies engaged in organized international efforts, although efforts to do so preceded him (Kendall, 2002). Originally, the concept referred to the provision of services in different parts of the world. Later, inspired by the work of organizations such as the Red Cross with refugees after the two world wars, the definition expanded to include domestic social work practice with foreign-born populations (Sanders and Pedersen, 1984). Thus, 'since the 1990s, rather than emphasizing specific social work activities, many experts have defined international social work from a broad perspective as a professional practice that crosses national boundaries, and relies on contacts and exchanges between countries' (Xu, 2006: 680). In addition, some social work issues such as child- and women-trafficking, international adoption and asylum seeking involve crossing borders by definition.

Diverse and not clearly differentiated concepts have been used to describe working across national geographical or social borders; for example, global, international, transnational and cross-national social work as well as globalized welfare (Mohan, 2008; Webb, 2003). Efforts have been made to identify the uniqueness of ISW, especially in comparison to cross-cultural

social work. ISW has been viewed as focusing on comparative social development, social problems, social welfare and social policy as well as practice models and methods in different countries; cross-cultural social work has been viewed as focusing on cultural diversity, inter-cultural communication and cross-cultural understanding (Nagy and Falk, 2000). Emphasizing the power difference between western countries that dominate the current professional knowledge base and the moral obligation of social work to enhance justice, Mohan (2008: 18) suggested the following definition: 'International social work should be redefined as a professional discipline that promotes transnational knowledge studies and experiences to foster equality and justice as vehicles of international understanding, collaboration and collective human development.'

Although definitions vary and are sometimes blurred (Gray and Fook, 2004; Powell and Robinson, 2007), a view of ISW evolved that emphasizes cross-national conceptual, organizational, practice and policy components. Six specific aspects have been identified relative to ISW: (1) a supranational level of consciousness and problem definition including social problems stemming from international pressures and events; (2) international organizations using social work methods or personnel; (3) social work and advocacy cooperation and collaboration between countries and/or practice across borders; (4) mutual exchange of ideas, resources, and services as well as transfer of methods and knowledge about social work between countries; (5) comparative social policy and efforts to influence policy; and (6) practices related to problems caused by the mutual effects of local and global situations and processes (Dominelli and Bernard, 2003; Healy, 2008; Lyons, 1999; Midgley, 2001; Xu, 2006).

This inclusive perspective creates a wide professional space for working with and on behalf of 'others' both within and from different countries in accordance with the goals of the profession. Furthermore, it allows the development of programs to meet the professional mission as conceptualized by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) to promote 'the development of social work education throughout the world, develop standards to enhance quality of social work education, encourage international exchange, provide forums for sharing social work research and scholarship, and promoting human rights and social development through policy and advocacy activities' (http://www.iassw-aiets.org).

The debate about ISW goes beyond definitions and reflects ideological differences. Some critiques have blamed contemporary ISW for focusing on the wrong theories and concepts (Midgley, 2001) and for preoccupation with organizational and welfare issues as well as models for collaboration, while neglecting to enhance 'inclusive citizenship, universal equality, freedom and

justice' (Mohan, 2005: 248). Others criticized the current discourse and practice of ISW as paternalistic, elitist and exclusionary. ISW has been characterized as 'professional imperialism under which the dominant model of social work has been disseminated around the world … primarily Western "experts" teach or consult in non-Western countries', while ignoring power differences between them (Haug, 2005: 127). The most extreme analysis challenged the whole idea of ISW (McDonald, Harris and Winsersteen, 2003) and emphasized the critical role that national contexts, state and specific circumstances play in shaping social work. One of the strongest critiques has been Webb (2003), who analyzed the flaws of arguments for ISW and stated that 'The notion of social work as an international profession is refuted' (p. 197); instead, he advocated for emphasizing the specific national contexts and locally situated practices.

However, while these voices are important, ISW has become a dominant developing aspect of the field of social work.

Motivation for participation in international programs

Motivating factors for participating in ISW programs, relating to students, faculty and professionals, have been discussed. While it has been suggested that motivation may be complex and multi-layered (Wehbi, 2008), students reported three main motives. First, they viewed the experience as an opportunity for professional and personal development, which would enhance their learning experience and their ability to practice with a global understanding both abroad and locally. Second, citing altruistic reasons, students viewed ISW as an opportunity to contribute and make a difference in the host country, and to promote human rights, social justice and equity and to combat oppression (Magnus, 2009). Specifically, students with family origins and social ties in the destination country cited the wish to give back and to enhance existing emotional bonds. Finally, students identified motives of personal interest in the opportunity for an adventure – curiosity about and fascination with cultures that are different from their own (Gilin and Young, 2009; Lindsey, 2005; Pettys et al., 2005; Rai, 2004; Razack, 2009; Wehbi, 2008).

Educators have been motivated by an increasing recognition of their responsibility to prepare students for the demands of changing social environments, circumstances and needs. This motivation is informed by the desire for fidelity to professional values and for meeting accreditation standards (Powell and Robinson, 2007). Consequently, faculty increasingly wish to respond to the effects of globalization on contemporary practice, to

help improve students' ability to perform cross-nationally and cross-culturally, and to develop innovative practices for individual practitioners as well as for the profession as a whole (Gilin and Young, 2009; Midgley, 1992; Panos et al., 2004).

Social workers' incentive to study social problems and intervention strategies in other countries has been related to the ability to transfer such knowledge to their own communities (Midgley, 1992). However, a disparity has been documented between social service agencies' rhetoric about the importance of ISW and the actual involvement in practicing it in social welfare agencies (Xu, 2006).

Challenges in ISW educational programs

Developing and implementing ISW educational programs presents unique challenges in addition to those involved in the introduction of any new curriculum content. General challenges include the negotiation of competing interests of faculty members, addressing the expectations of students, meeting requirements for accreditation, and financial burdens (Nagy and Falk, 2000; Panos et al., 2004; Rai, 2004). The main unique challenges are the development of a curriculum that encourages a locally specific and relevant – rather than western – perspective, addressing issues of students' safety, logistics and cost.

The most dominant challenge in developing ISW programs and preparing students for international placement is freeing them from abiding exclusively by dominant western paradigms and helping them 'confront different views of human behavior, learn different systems of social welfare and see different ways to remediate social problems' (Barlow, 2007: 243). Many approaches developed in western culture have limited relevance for working in non-western contexts (Kreitzer et al., 2009; Pawar et al., 2004). For example, concepts such as individualism, objectivity and professional distance as well as values of self-determination are useful in social work practice in western cultures but are incompatible with other, more collectivistic cultures that value interdependence. The transfer of the western lens, models of interventions and training may lead to superficial understanding and lack of sensitivity to nuances and heterogeneity in the host culture and its social systems. To effectively perform in non-western environments, professional knowledge developed in the context of western paradigms needs to be combined with local knowledge and traditional approaches to helping (Gelkopf et al., 2008; Midgley, 2001). It has been claimed that because it assumes a homogenized professional knowledge base and is built on a western ideological 'infrastructure', social work has often failed in achieving

this goal and has practiced professional and intellectual colonialism by 'importing' western thinking into other cultures rather than adopting local, culture-specific wisdom (Heron and Pilkington, 2009). The tendency to impose a western perspective of social work worldwide has been evident as professionals in non-western countries tried to assimilate western theories, models, concepts, literature and education and apply it in their own countries (Alphonse et al., 2008; Gray et al., 2008; Yunas, 2007).

Ethically, the application of western-based knowledge, rather than developing locally relevant knowledge, may reinforce misconceptions and cultural stereotypes as well as reproducing social injustice, inequities in international involvement and oppressive relationships (Dominelli, 2005; Razack, 2002; Wehbi, 2008). Gray and colleagues (2008: 1–2) posit that 'globalization of knowledge and Western culture continues to reaffirm the west's view of itself as the centre and wellspring of knowledge'. This view has been illustrated by the global education standards adopted by the IASSW and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (Sewpaul and Jones, 2004). Importing these unadjusted standards represents the promotion of the dominance of western practice models while downplaying the importance of local contexts (Gray 2005; Gray and Fook, 2004).

To avoid the risk of sending a message of universality and implied superiority of western-based perspectives and knowledge, the challenge becomes how to present a balanced approach to students training in ISW. For example, Alphonse and colleagues (2008) suggested the development of a terminology and perspectives compatible with eastern communal thinking rather than imposing language and views that are anchored in western thinking. Similarly, Gray and colleagues (2008) documented the lack of applicability of western notions of social work practice with non-western cultures and recommended the development of 'home-made' conceptual frameworks and practice principles to support a two-way exchange of knowledge between indigenous and western cultures.

Students' safety issues are a second challenge in the development of ISW education. International placements, especially in the developing world, present potential risks to personal safety. Sending schools need to be able to meet their ethical and legal responsibility of equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary for coping with such risks, while maintaining the ability to function and learn within a cultural context that is foreign and often threatening (Heron, 2005).

Additional challenges include identifying qualified supervision and contact persons as well as facilitating and establishing practicum sites, procedures for mutual exchange, administrative infrastructure, maintaining

accountability and integrating the international experience with the general curriculum (Panos et al., 2004). Furthermore, the high costs involved are especially prohibitive to both students and faculty.

Barlow (2007: 243) listed strategies for addressing the aforementioned challenges:

> Facilitating successful international field placements requires attention to multiple issues: building and sustaining international field partnerships, developing mutually agreed upon learning arrangements; supporting the language and cultural preparation of students prior to their departures; monitoring the quality of their experiences; and engaging in their debriefings upon their return. Additionally, engaging with the students while they are in the international setting and the nature of this involvement is a crucial, though seldom documented, aspect of student support.

Models of international student exchanges

Educational programs in ISW vary in the number of students, rigor of selection and preparation processes, length and intensity of program, theoretical perspective, the longevity of the program and the models used (Abram et al., 2005; Barlow, 2007; Gilin and Young, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Mathiesen and Lager, 2007; Panos et al., 2004; Pettys et al., 2005; Rai, 2004). Specifically, four main models of international field placement have been identified. These models differ in the number and characteristics of placed students, the screening criteria, the processes of preparations, contacts with host agencies and supervisory arrangements.

The *independent/one-time model* is typically initiated by a student with an interest in a specific country or a faculty member who becomes aware of a specific placement opportunity. This model involves minimal input from the home university.

In the *neighbor-country model* students are placed in a geographically close country, such as Canada or Mexico for US students. Often such students were or currently are citizens or residents of the placement country and the involvement of the home university is quite similar to other national placements. Although potentially affected by the different nature of the welfare systems in the host country, these are mostly international placements by name and the experience is very similar to traditional US placements.

The *onsite group model* involves the exchange of a group of students accompanied by faculty from the home university, who typically spend two to three weeks in the host country. During this stay, students are placed in the host country and a local faculty member serves as a field supervisor and/or liaison.

The *exchange/reciprocal model* is the most demanding of the home university's resources (including manpower and funding) and involves its faculty in providing field seminars, supervision and guest lecturers in the host country.

Mutual evaluation and debriefing of ISW experience have been recognized as very important irrespective of the particular model (Mathiesen and Lager, 2007). Several efforts to assess outcomes of ISW, using diverse measures, have been reported. For example, Krajewski-Jaime, Brown and Kaufman (1996) used a cultural competence scale to assess the degree of intercultural sensitivity and cultural awareness achieved by students and faculty in a Mexico-based program. Students' reports relating to the developmental process that they experienced and the degree to which they gained a deeper awareness of cultural differences were documented. Barlow (2007) used a case study approach to assess the experience of Canadian social work practicum students in a child welfare agency in Southern India and found that participants were anxious because they were challenged to psychologically relocate themselves and examine their values. In their assessment of the experience of 16 MSW students who participated in a brief international course, Gilin and Young (2009) found that the immersion in another culture and language, the on-site exposure to several social service programs, their staff and their clients, and the provision of information on the historical and social policy contexts by local experts enhanced students' knowledge beyond what they had already acquired in their MSW program. Pettys et al. (2005) reported that field directors viewed placement models with intensive involvement of faculty members from the host university as generating the greatest learning and providing the most personal security for students. Specifically, students' awareness of the connection between particular social policies and social service practices increased. In addition, they developed new ideas about innovative social work practices that could be used in their own country and a deepened empathy and respect for members of cultural groups other than their own. Finally, they were able to expand and consolidate their own professional identities. Similarly, Panos and colleagues (2004) and Asamoah and colleagues (1997) concluded that ISW experience prepared students to work with culturally diverse clients by providing them with a more global understanding of people, institutions, cultural differences and the effects of their own cultural values and perceptions on assessment and interventions.

However, systematic comparison of the effectiveness and efficiency of diverse models of ISW has not been conducted. Such a comparative analysis is anticipated to offer guidelines for tailoring differential culture-specific programs for ISW and principles for using resources in a way that secures cost-benefit.

A proposed model for effective implementation of ISW

Informed by the literature reviewed above and adopting the principles of the reciprocal/exchange approach, a comprehensive model for effectively implementing ISW has been developed. This model contains three phases.

A preparatory phase

This phase involves: development of criteria for students appropriate for the program; identification of students who meet these criteria; identification of faculty and staff in the sending and host countries to be involved in training them; identification of suitable agencies. Of utmost importance is the development and implementation of training to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for navigating a foreign environment in general and particularly the specific host country.

The component generally involves: (1) helping students to reflect critically on their motivation for choosing an international placement; (2) guiding students to develop realistic expectations about the placement; (3) helping students to be ready to cope with unfamiliar and sometimes incomprehensible situations; (4) equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills for working in an environment that is different than their own.

The aforementioned preparation should include both cognitive and emotional components. On the cognitive level, students need to: (1) be educated about power relations between and within societies; (2) learn principles of assessing situations from an organizational perspective; (3) understand potential risks in the destination country; (4) know about the historical roots of the current reality and how it has been shaped by global economic and political pressures and colonialism; (5) be familiar with the relationship between their own country and the destination country (Pettys et al., 2005; Wehbi, 2008); (6) understand their potential contribution to the destination country as well as the limitations of their contribution.

On the emotional level, because a different socio-cultural environment may trigger the development of: identification, a sense of superiority and judgment, feelings of helplessness, hostility, guilt for being privileged, shame for feeling superior, and fear, it is of utmost importance to create a safe environment for students to share and process their concerns, biases and reactions (Magnus, 2009). For example, all students who prepare for training in a different culture should understand the implications of being in minority status (e.g. Caucasian students who go to an Asian, African or Latin country) and should become aware of their own attitudes

towards 'the other' as well the ways in which that they may be perceived and treated.

The culture-specific aspects include helping students to explore their assumptions and biases relative to the host community and providing them with knowledge about its history, social, economic and political conditions. Special attention should be paid to information about social problems and social work interventions, the western nature of practice and education in most non-western host countries and the absence of their own culturally relevant social work education and practice (Kreitzer et al., 2009; Nikku, 2010). Students should also be advised about norms for inter-personal behaviors such as acceptable dress codes, gender relationships and what is viewed as disrespectful.

The faculty and staff in the host country should also receive training focusing on two main aspects. First, they need to understand the experience of students who come with a different set of values and beliefs, which may be misinterpreted as patronizing and/or judgmental. Second, based on such understanding, they should learn effective strategies for helping the students to develop appropriate skills for working with diverse people and environments in the host country.

The actual stay abroad phase

The actual visit abroad exposes students to a different social environment. It is designed to enable their learning about its unique social problems, social welfare policy and the legal framework for service provision, the structure of local agencies as well as their relationships with the local administration and with international organizations, and the role of social work. Close accompaniment by a supervisor or a mentor with expertise in professional education in cross-cultural context, journal writing, reflective assignments, acknowledgment of the emotional impact and ongoing discussions are beneficial in facilitating participants' processing of their experience (Barlow, 2007; Berger, 2010). In addition, a professional space for the faculty and staff involved in the program should be created to provide support for the educators in containing and addressing trainees' issues. In particular, it is of utmost importance to attend to the possible effects of the absence of natural support systems and possible changes in faculty–student boundaries and relationships during the experience abroad because of local conditions (e.g. accommodation and eating arrangements). During the stay, students should be required to document daily in a journal their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

The post experience phase

Of the greatest importance is the continued 'digestion' and conceptualization of the experience, allowing students to transfer this into effective learning. They need to gain understanding of their new skills, perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and behaviors in order to integrate these into their professional identity before they graduate. Small group discussions offer a useful avenue for students' critical reflection on their journey as documented in their journals. Specifically, students should be expected to conceptualize their experience based on the 5 'I's relating to cross-national work: personal *interest*, the *information* they need, the *instruction* they received, the *interaction* they had and the *integration* of the above to achieve long-term learning (Payne and Askeland, 2008).

A case illustration

The aforementioned model informed the collaborative effort of an Israeli and an Ethiopian school of social work in the development of a program for training BSW-level students in ISW. The goals of the program are twofold. First, the program is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills for interventions in issues impacted by global socio-political-cultural processes and international policies. Second, the program seeks to train social workers in developing the necessary abilities to plan and implement social work interventions in the developing world and international organizations. Although the model is conceptualized as reciprocal exchange, the implementation has to this date been one-sided: Israeli students have been placed in Ethiopia, whereas Ethiopian students' practicum in Israel is still to be accomplished.

Up to 10 advanced-year BSW students who expressed an interest in learning ISW were selected to participate in the program. An interview was conducted to assess their ability to cope with stressful events and insecure situations as well as their interpersonal communication style and ability to interact effectively with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. The selected group participated in a three-phases training. The first phase included a language (Amharic or Hebrew) course, courses addressing the encounter with 'the other' and coping with foreign, unfamiliar social environments and situations of uncertainty, and content about globalization and international rights as well as the destination country's historical and socio-political background and cultural norms. Teaching strategies combined lectures, small group exercises and experiential learning. For field education, students were placed in the home country in agencies that provide services

to refugees, immigrants and labor migrants – international organizations such as Physicians for Human Rights and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as social services of the ministry for foreign affairs. In addition, students participated in a seminar, which offered them opportunities to process their practice experiences. They were required to identify resources and develop a database about a social problem, social welfare and social work in the host country.

In the second phase, students spent three weeks in the host country and learned a curriculum developed collaboratively by the schools in the sending and host countries. Students were placed for four days a week in local agencies and were mentored by local students as well as participating in field visits. A faculty member from their home school with expertise in field education accompanied the group throughout the experience abroad. This faculty was available to address students' concerns as well as co-facilitating a weekly discussion group together with a local faculty. These diverse encounters with local faculty, practitioners and students offered the visiting students opportunities to acquire direct experience with the social problems and the structure, policies and practices of social welfare and social work in the host country. In addition, they faced situations that required them to apply the cultural-sensitive strategies and communication skills that they learned.

Upon their return, students took part in a series of group discussions focusing on reflective retrospective processing and conceptualization of the experience and the learning gained from it. A final integrative assignment required students to present a comprehensive review of a social problem in the host country and a critical discussion of the role of a practitioner working internationally in the context of the identified problem. Sample topics included a comparative analysis of international versus cross-cultural social work, coping with different perceptions of the role of social workers, particularly when students felt that clients' issues had not been properly addressed, and critiquing from a respectful rather than patronizing position.

Discussion and conclusions

Despite the criticism by some of ISW as a 'modern colonialism', which enhances and maintains inequalities, discrimination and socioeconomic gaps between rich and poor all over the world (Mohan, 2010), the IASSW and IFSW declarations demand the involvement of social workers internationally. The goals are to minimize the negative effects of globalization on social problems, prevent the erosion of human rights of excluded and neglected populations and provide support during crises in developing countries.

The review of the literature highlights the debate around philosophical, ethical and practical issues inherent in ISW as well as the diversity of programs that address these issues – especially in the US and Europe. It points to the importance of preparing students, faculty and practitioners and deepening their professional knowledge and skills in ISW.

Conceptual, operational, logistic and financial challenges in the development and maintenance of a solid program for ISW have been identified. Although ISW has existed as a distinctive field for many years, no consensus exists about its definition, benefits and risks, the desirable 'product' (i.e. what the characteristics of the ISW graduate should be), a relevant curriculum, an effective conceptual and professional framework and clear guidelines for teaching and practicing international content. The development of a solid foundation for the construction of an ISW 'core' is of utmost importance (Harris, 1997). The available knowledge suggests that cultural, ethnic, and racial sensitivity are not enough to prepare graduates who are ready for ISW adequately. At a minimum, professional education programs should make a deliberate effort to include in syllabi literature on social work practices and programs in other countries as well as comparative knowledge (Gilin and Young, 2009).

In spite of the absence of consensus and clarity about ISW, several directions can be offered for future development and research. First, to create an egalitarian context for ISW, the sending school and the host organization need to collaborate fully in all phases of conceptualizing the goals, objectives, policy, structure and strategies of the program. Such collaboration is anticipated to enhance mutual learning, assure a balanced division of power and responsibilities and minimize imposition of western values and misunderstanding caused by cultural differences.

The bedrock of mutual collaboration is an intensive process of preparation of the systems as a whole as well as the specific groups of stakeholders such as faculty, social services and students. The preparation must include an educational component with an emphasis on understanding the debate about the nature and meaning of ISW and its implications, strategies for coping with culture shock and management of emergency situations. It must address security and medical challenges in environments that may expose students and faculty to different types of diseases and traumatic events without providing sufficient or appropriate resources. One critical component in the preparation process is the focus on educating participants about the philosophical, ethical and practical issues that pertain to ISW, helping them to conceptualize their understanding of the position of their particular program in the context of this debate and to understand the possible implications of this position for their activities and experience abroad.

Because financial obstacles appear to be a major barrier to the development of and participation in international professional education, schools that have an interest in implementing ISW must fundraise to create and maintain a solid and professional program. Opportunities for support from government and public and private sources should be explored and developed. In addition, creative strategies should be developed to make programs more affordable, such as hospitality arrangements for hosting students with families who have been screened for safety, rather than staying in dormitories. Such accommodation arrangements have been functioning effectively in language programs abroad and could be easily adopted for social work students.

The review also identified gaps in knowledge. For example, while the motivation of students for participation in international programs has been documented, knowledge about the motivation of faculty is very limited. Better understanding of what ignites faculty's interest is needed to inform initiatives for successful recruitment of educators who can and want to develop scholarly international professional educational collaboration.

Collaborative efforts may inform program-specific decisions regarding the breadth of international content, choosing the specific model (i.e. number and composition of courses, duration and intensity of international placement), location (i.e. anticipated educational benefits of certain countries) and type of agencies (governmental, local, non-governmental organization [NGO]). Channels for the development of such collaboration can include ongoing mutual feedback between the sending school and host organizations, and discussion forums and collection of feedback from students and faculty who participated in international programs (Panos et al., 2004). Based on this feedback, strategies for enhancing the quality of the experiences can be developed.

The establishment of a resource center for ISW might serve as a clearing house for sharing relevant knowledge and offering ongoing exchange of ideas for problem-solving. Such a center could guide the development of a manual for working in international situations and a code of ethics. It could also help social workers from all over the world to learn from each other's experiences and pave the road for better understanding of diverse aspects of ISW. Furthermore, it could inform the development of models for training in issues specific to ISW, such as culturally sensitive supervision.

More research is needed about challenges and obstacles relating to ISW training, specifically the component of a practicum abroad, and effective strategies for addressing them – logistic issues as well as evaluation of diverse models. For example, how do the experiences and outcomes of students who are accompanied by a faculty member from the sending school

compare to those who are not? What kind of support needs to be developed for faculty involved in the project (based on personal experience of both authors, the task of accompanying students abroad can be tasking and take a heavy toll)? What are the characteristics of educators, students and practitioners who are most appropriate for participation in ISW programs? How do partnerships with a school of social work in the host country compare to partnerships with agencies? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different models? Such knowledge can yield a rich menu of routes for ISW and provide schools with information to help them identify and develop directions for meeting their unique foci and needs.

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