

A Reciprocal Working Model for Fieldwork with International Social Work Students

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Abstract

The literature on social work education includes descriptions of several models for international social work (ISW) training, as well as criticisms relating to methods of implementing these models. The current article describes a new version of a fieldwork reciprocal working model, which aims to enhance and broaden social workers' perceptions of ISW, as well as to provide a basis for better integration of local and global social work programmes. In addition, it aims to reduce the possibility of replicating colonialist and patronising professionalism. By presenting and analysing two case summaries of an experiment with a reciprocal working model for fieldwork, the article highlights the contribution of this combined training method to strengthening the students' competence to engage in ISW in their local domains. In addition, the difficulties and challenges accompanying the model are discussed. Recommendations for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Fieldwork education, international social work, local and global social work, reciprocal model

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Introduction

International social work (ISW) combines global and local efforts to assist populations in distress and individuals who have lost their rights (Healy, 2001). It is commonly argued that ISW crosses boundaries and combines understanding of global processes which influence policy and practice beyond the local level (Lyons and Ramanthan, 1999; Webb, 2003). As a result, a wide variety of training programmes have been adapted to the professional and educational vision defined by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IFSW, 2000). These models include theoretical and applied knowledge on a wide range of topics relating to ISW, from general information about social work in different parts of the world to courses focusing on global trends and their implications for the countries in which the students are trained. Several programmes also include fieldwork training in a foreign country (usually a developing country). A review of the literature on existing models of fieldwork training in ISW (Nuttman-Shwartz and Berger, 2012) reveals that of several models for training in ISW at different schools, the reciprocal model is the one that provides the most suitable opportunity for students from the sending country to encounter local social work practice in the host country. In the reciprocal model, a faculty member from the sending country accompanies the students and provides supervision and training in the host country. Thus, the students receive familiar and regular supervision in a supportive, containing professional environment.

Notwithstanding the above, several studies have identified and emphasised the complexity and shortcomings of current models of ISW, including the reciprocal model.

The main criticisms of ISW relates to contemporary approaches to social work that advocate general social sensitivity (Nimmagadda and Cowger, 2011), prevention of oppression in particular (Dominelli, 2009; Healy, 2005) and social relativity (Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie, 2011). In the same vein, efforts should be made to avoid replicating colonialist behaviour and patronising professionalism when visiting students seek to apply knowledge and theories deriving from northern (developed) countries to regions that are defined as disadvantaged and in need of assistance.

In fact, only a few of the programmes offered in the world integrate local and international fieldwork. In response to the above criticisms, the present article will present a broader version of a reciprocal model for fieldwork training in ISW. The proposed model includes training in the sending country (Israel) as well as in the host country (India). As mentioned, it is

also consistent with the values and theoretical foundation of the social work profession. Based on two summaries of the fieldwork experience in the host country, we will discuss the significance of this training model and its contribution to understanding issues related to international and local contexts of social work.

International social work programme: implementation of the reciprocal model

The programme is intended for third-year Bachelor of Social Work students. It is a separate track, which includes compulsory theoretical and experimental courses as well as fieldwork. In the fieldwork training, students are required to participate in a seminar on ISW in Israel and abroad. The seminar aims to link the students' experience in the fieldwork practicum with theoretical knowledge about human rights in the context of ISW. The seminar is conducted while the students are engaging in fieldwork at various social services that work with organisations and populations from foreign countries in the country of origin (for the entire academic year). Most of the services are provided by civil society organisations. The fieldwork abroad also includes encounters with students in the host country, which aim to facilitate a discussion about similarities and differences between the cultures, social structures, social problems and the social work profession in each country. This programme provides students with tools to cope with some of the above-mentioned difficulties, such as the lack of a containing environment, lack of experience, lack of knowledge about global work in the local context and language barriers.

Local and international fieldwork

Fieldwork training is based on two types of co-operation: co-operation with services in the sending country (in our case, Israel) and co-operation with organisations, services and academic institutions in the host country (in our case, India).

At the local level, most of the fieldwork training in ISW is with populations that seek asylum and with refugees. Placements include three types of organisations: municipal social services provided to work with immigrants and refugees who seek asylum in the city of Tel Aviv. The services focus on short-term interventions at the micro level and on mediation between communities and the government authorities at the macro level. In addition, the students are placed in non-profit welfare institutions that assist, support and empower refugees and seekers of asylum in Israel. Finally, the students in the programme are exposed to a national government service which is a detainment facility for infiltrators and illegal residents, most of whom are from African

countries. This variety of placements allows students to work in governmental services, where they can gain experience at all levels of social work intervention, particularly in work with clients from populations that have no status in Israel.

At the international level, the fieldwork in India exposes ISW students to the local impact of globalisation. For example, the students are exposed to the rapid process of urbanisation in India, as well as to the development of international companies and the growing migration from villages to cities. Beyond the need to understand these developments, there is also a need to offer inter-generational interventions and develop solutions to socio-epidemiological problems deriving from these changes (e.g. the spread of disease as well as problems related to sanitation and homeless populations). Most of the existing services are provided by independent social service organisations that rely on government funding.

Six students participated in the experimental programme presented here, and the duration of training abroad was only three weeks, which include about eighteen work days. Fieldwork placements were at three centres that provide educational and emotional responses to children and teenage girls living in slum neighbourhoods. The students paired up so that every two students had the same field placement. Another fieldwork setting was a centre for adolescent boys who were abandoned or left at the train station in the city. During their fieldwork training, the students became familiar with the welfare institutions and social work system in India. At the same time, as part of the reciprocal setting, the Israeli students and the local professionals worked together in an attempt to adapt interventions for the children and teenage girls at the centres. These interventions were originally provided to Israeli children who have experienced crises and trauma.

During their stay in India, the Israeli delegation co-operated with the School of Social Work at Nagpur University. They met students from Nagpur in classes as well as at social events, in addition to collaborating in research projects on the significance of the encounter with students from different countries. Every day, the Israeli students attended a fieldwork seminar, which was conducted by a faculty member from their school who accompanied the participants in the fieldwork training programme in the host country. As part of their training, they observed similarities and differences in approaches to social work in both countries. In Israel, the problem of refugees is serious, but it is not nearly as widespread as in India. Solutions range from responses provided by the state (e.g. detention camps for infiltrators seeking asylum) and public services for refugees, to services provided by civil society organisations, which are financed mainly by private and international sources. As such, ISW at the local level in Israel focuses on foreign populations. By contrast, the problem of refugees in India is a widespread social phenomenon. The problem has been expanding and the need to deal with children and youth at risk who are in the midst of a social transition poses a challenge for society at large. In that context, the range of solutions is local,

regional and state-wide even if the responses are provided by non-profit organisations. Despite this, both countries have populations that need protection and basic living conditions. In both countries, local residents are concerned with finding employment in order to sustain themselves.

Thus, it can be concluded that, according to the reciprocal model described here, which includes fieldwork in two countries, students are primarily exposed to the local impact of globalisation, from the theoretical and practical perspectives. However, there are differences in the way that the model is implemented in each country, as well as differences in the implications of globalisation. Hence, there is a need to adapt the students' approaches and translate intervention into the local language in a way that reflects the scope of the problem and the norms of social work practice in that country.

In addition, the combination of fieldwork placements in both countries enables the Israeli students to examine the significance of working in India in light of their prior fieldwork experience in Israel. The combined programme exposes students to the problem of oppression, and emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity and social relativity in developed and developing countries (in this case, Israel and India). This exposure reduces the possibility of replicating colonialist and patronising professionalism, because the students deal with the same issues in both countries, and are able to understand that the problems are not just 'there', but also exist 'here', in their own country, where they will be practising social work in the future.

The existing literature has focused mainly on experiences and insights gained during the fieldwork practicum in the host country (Kreitzer *et al.*, 2011). However, to the best of our knowledge, the significance of learning in the country of origin and in the host country has not been examined. Nor has research dealt with the contribution of the learning experience to understanding issues that are relevant to local and international fieldwork training in ISW (e.g. the issue of patronising professionalism, ethical questions, questions relating to the essence of cultural sensitivity and knowledge about social work outside of the local culture).

Methods

Six Israeli students were placed in three fieldwork settings. Two of the placements were at social centres for children and teenagers who live in the slums, and the third was a centre for street kids. Every centre had at least one local social worker who accompanied the Israeli students. After the students returned to Israel, they were asked to write an open narrative summarising their experience in the fieldwork placement, taking into account the observation and intervention stages. The summary reports portray the students' insights about the professional encounter. Based on the literature dealing

with students who provide assistance to residents of developing countries, the programme was conducted in two stages: the stage of observation and the stage of intervention. In the first stage, the Israeli students were paired with a local social worker, and they observed the activities, clients and methods of intervention used at the social service. In that process, the students were encouraged to ask the local social worker questions and clarify issues that emerged from their observation. In the second stage, they implemented interventions with the approval of the local social worker, which were adapted to the needs of the local population as well as to the local norms. It was assumed that these interventions could also be useful to the local social workers, who might not have been familiar with the approaches proposed by the students due to differences in perspectives of the problems and their solutions. The success of the interventions was evaluated on the basis of the extent to which the local social worker was willing to adopt them in the future, after the student returned to Israel.

Two summaries were chosen as representative examples of the reciprocal model. The summaries are based on documentation of the experiences of two students in two different field placements at social centres for children and teenagers who live in the slums. The narratives are presented with the consent of the students, following a translation that is as close as possible to the original and almost unedited.

The ethics committee at Sapir College confirmed and approved our study; in addition, the Israeli students filled a written consent statement approving the use of their narratives for research purposes.

The narratives shed light on the ways that the Israeli students coped with issues described in the literature. These issues include questions about the meaning of the encounter between developed countries and developing countries, questions relating to modern colonialism and patronising professionalism, and ethical questions, as well as questions relating to the essence of cultural sensitivity and knowledge about social work outside of the local culture.

Summaries and analysis of the reports

Summary 1: 'Sometimes I'm happy, and sometimes I'm sad'

Our fieldwork training in India was at an organisation that operates five learning centres for children in slum neighbourhoods. These are neighbourhoods of immigrants who moved from the poor villages to the city in the hope of improving their lives. The living conditions in these neighbourhoods are very difficult. Crowding, poverty and lack of a welfare policy create many needs which the organisation has to deal with. The learning centre (I worked at) is the only setting that seeks to provide a solution to needs that arise from the reality of life for children in the neighbourhood. Because

there is no social service department, the centre operates on several levels. At the formal level, the learning centre provides the neighbourhood children with assistance in doing homework. The children, who live in terribly crowded conditions, arrive at the centre in order to receive help with their homework in a quiet, encouraging environment. Additionally, the learning centre offers workshops and groups for all residents of the neighbourhood, which deal with needs that have been identified in the field (e.g. parenting, addiction and hygiene). Concomitantly, the staff of the learning centre identifies children with special needs in the areas of health and behaviour, and conducts a variety of focused interventions, including individual counselling for parents and group activities. They also establish contact with external organisations that deal with child welfare. The whole place is essentially a tiny room with a low tin ceiling and a rusty ceiling fan that only blows the unbearable Nagpur heat from one corner of the room to the other. The staff, which does the amazing work described above, consists of one social worker and one teacher who comes for two hours a day.

The fieldwork training for Israeli students in India was conducted in several stages, as mentioned.

Regarding the first stage, namely the stage of observation: because the students were in an unfamiliar culture, they needed to explore the new place and examine its strengths and weaknesses. The students raised questions such as: How can one social worker bring dozens of kids every afternoon to a room without a computer or television? How do the children sit there day after day, do their homework and participate in activities? Other questions included: How do the local social workers identify needs, mobilise the community and promote awareness of the importance of education? How do they encourage the neighbourhood girls to go to school even though education for girls is against the local tradition and against the lifestyle that their parents grew up with? It is essential to explore differences and observe the other perspective, which is different from the approach to social work practice in Israel. Social work in India combines community work with extraordinary sensitivity to individuals. One social worker is able to work with children who each encompass an entire world of experiences, pain and strength. Social workers also interpret and understand the children's distress in a different way, which reflects the local reality. For example, the local social workers' interpretations of the children's situation focused on physical factors and health. They did not acknowledge the internal, emotional world of each child, but viewed the child as following a set of acquired behaviours and as the exclusive product of environmental learning. When we asked the local social worker to provide us with some background on one of the girls at the centre who clearly had difficulty participating in the activities and constantly acted out and disrupted, we were told that the girl's problems were caused by learned behaviour or by organic problems. However, the local social worker did not relate at all to the girl's emotional world or to the girl's personal experience as an independent, individual entity, whereas social workers in

Israel are used to addressing those aspects. Several days later, I found out incidentally that the girl, who was eleven years old, had lost her mother a year earlier and was responsible for raising her two little brothers and maintaining the household. She was only allowed to go to the learning centre after she had finished all of her household chores. In our view, this is a girl whose disruptive behaviour tells the whole story of her difficulty, her efforts to cope and what she's feeling.

The second stage included actual intervention. In that stage, the question arose: What is intervention in the language of the local population? How do they conduct interventions? How do you establish a helping relationship (in the host country)? In co-operation with the learning centre and the local social worker, it was decided to implement an intervention method that is practised in Israel but is less common in India. The intervention that was chosen involved provision of artistic tools to the local social worker, which were intended to help her connect with the children and become familiar with their internal and emotional world, and which she could use as an additional channel for communicating with the children. Concomitantly, the intervention was intended to provide the children with an outlet to express their feelings, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Each day of fieldwork training focused on another creative activity. The collaborative work included thinking about the intervention, improving the technique while it was being implemented, leading the activity and providing a rationale that justifies working with the children on emotional issues. For example, one of the activities included work on a large sheet of paper, where each of the children drew their shadow—an image of themselves without anything inside. Essentially, this was a space in which the child was in the centre—a space that belonged exclusively to the child. Inside the head of the figure, the children were asked to portray their dreams; in the belly, they were asked to portray what helps when things are difficult; and, in the hands, they were asked to portray what they like to do.

In the process of collaborative work, the children were asked: 'What helps you when you feel sad?' In Israel, this is considered an acceptable question for social workers to ask children and youth, who know how to take a moment to look into themselves and identify the things that make them feel good. They also know how to recognise the things that make them feel sad, to understand what sources they can rely on to give them comfort and strength. In India, neither the children nor the social worker could understand this question. There was a need to explain the logic and importance of the exercise which, as mentioned, was intended to get to know the children better while giving them an opportunity to learn and express themselves. After the social worker was persuaded about the merits of the exercise, it was easy for her to mobilise the children. They rose to the challenge and, in the end, they even 'got into' the activity. The results were awesome. It was amazing to see what the children wrote and drew.

To summarise, the Israeli students were excited to see how moved the social worker was. She sat with them, helped them write, laughed and listened. At the end of the day, she said that she really hadn't believed the children would express so many thoughts and feelings.

Summary 2: 'Can you hear my voice, and not just see my drawings?'

The fieldwork placement was at a centre sponsored by School House, a non-governmental organisation that runs various projects. The School House centre is in a slum, and it is an organised setting for most members of the community: children, adolescents and young women. In the community of the School House centre, most of the fathers are alcoholics, and the problem of tobacco chewing is highly prevalent among children and youth. The parents are at work most of the day. Most of the fathers are drivers, and most of the mothers are employed as domestic workers. The children are enrolled in government schools, where the level of education is inferior. As a result, there is a high dropout rate from school (mainly among girls). The parents have no awareness of the importance of education. Emphasis is placed on nutrition and education comes afterwards. Therefore, the School House centre makes efforts to encourage children to stay in educational settings. The staff members explain the importance of education and help the children with homework.

During the observation, the students saw that, in the middle of the School House centre, there is an imaginary line that separates the boys from the girls. The line is imaginary, because the social worker and the teacher train the children to immediately go back to their places so that they don't disrupt the courses attended by the girls. The staff of the centre includes one social worker and one teacher from the community, as well as another teacher who teaches professional courses for girls. We communicated with the boys and girls via another social worker, who translated our questions into the local language and was responsible for several centres sponsored by the School House organisation. Thus, the centre is, above all, a place where they receive support and where people listen to them. In addition, they receive assistance with homework and learn about their rights (with emphasis on their right to education, their right to survive and develop, and their right to health). The students in the ISW programme devoted most of their time with the girls at the centre to participation in various courses that were defined as life skills classes. When the girls complete these courses, they can work outside of the home and help support the family. For the most part, the girls were trained for 'feminine' vocations such as painting with henna or rangoli (colour made with rice powder, which is usually used to decorate the entrances of homes). The teenage girls came to the centre for a limited time, in which they participated in the life skills course. Afterwards, they had to go right back home in order to do regular household chores.

During the observation period, the students noted that the girls arrived at the centre to learn a vocation that would enable them to support the family, but there was no outlet for the girls to express themselves and share their emotions with the staff at the centre.

In the intervention stage, the Israeli students chose to participate in a rangoli exercise in an attempt to get closer to the girls. In that way, they could hear directly about what the girls do in their daily lives, and could feel how they were in a hurry to finish the course in order to help out in the home. In their conversations, the students learned which of the girls was about to get married, what the girls were learning in school and what they wanted to do with the rest of their lives. Concomitantly, the students shared things about themselves. Personal disclosure is not common in India, but the students felt that, by talking about themselves, they would gain the confidence of the girls and be able to serve as a role model for alternative thinking and perceptions, even within the limitations of the place and the context. The students told the girls about young women their age in Israel, about themselves, about their own marriages and families. At first, the girls asked for help with English. However, because teaching English was not the main goal of the social work intervention, a decision was reached together with the local social worker that the students should encourage the girls to express their feelings in English as well as in the local language. Accordingly, the students prepared therapeutic cards on which the girls described their emotions in Hindi and in English. Using these cards, the students engaged in therapeutic work with the girls. Although this intervention technique was unfamiliar to the girls, they were able to enter quickly into the world represented by the cards. In the group discussion, the girls talked about emotional issues such as family, love, matches, marriage, friends, longing, separation, education, dreams, aspirations and hopes. We were surprised to find that, despite life in a collective context, the topic of loneliness was raised on several occasions, and it appears that this was a painful issue for them. Particularly in the traditional, closed context of their society, any deviation from social norms can lead to ostracism.

The intervention was also new for the local social worker. The new space that was created in the intervention enabled her to hear things that she had never heard before, and provided her with another tool to reach the girls. During the intervention, the social worker documented the narratives of the girls who shared their feelings with the group. In our conversation with the social worker after the activity, we found that, although the themes they brought up were familiar to her as a woman in Indian society, she heard some new voices in the background. For various reasons, the social worker had never heard these stories before. In the activity, the Israeli students felt that they had succeeded in introducing something new, and that they had created a tool that was adapted to the local context in terms of the language as well as in terms of the culture. They felt that the tool helped the girls express themselves, and that it could be used by the social worker

in the future. It is especially noteworthy that the social worker had participated in designing and implementing it, and had found it to be effective.

Summary, conclusions and further thoughts

The article aimed to describe a reciprocal model for training in ISW, which allows fieldwork training in the sending country and the host country. The reciprocal approach to training students in ISW was adopted in an attempt to overcome the criticisms and problems identified in the above literature review. Through the reciprocal model, a helping relationship was formed between the local social workers and students and the visiting students, which helped the participants in both groups (Pettersen and Hem, 2011). Based on the understanding of professional relationship (Folgheraiter and Raineri, 2012), the encounter between students from Israel and India is essentially characterised by reciprocal aid, which is made possible through mutual reflectivity, professional growth and development, and broadening perspectives of situations such as inequality between groups.

The model provides a basis for expanding the perspectives of professionals, with emphasis on the approach to social work in the host country, which differs from the approach in the sending country.

Following Folgheraiter and Raineri's (2012) approach, these reciprocal relationships were reflected in a twofold sense: to undertake a shared task, operating for all intents and purposes as co-workers; and to improve their professional abilities through the liberating experience of mutual trust. The collaborative work creates mutual trust, which allows for exchange of knowledge, opinions and attitudes that enhance the professional skills of practitioners from northern (developed) countries and southern (developing) countries, and enable them to deal with ethical issues that derive from cultural biases while comparing knowledge obtained in their respective social and cultural environments.

In addition, emphasis is placed on the implications of global processes for social work at the local level. Notably, India and Israel are two completely different contexts. Israel is dealing with the consequences of immigration, mainly from Africa and from Eastern Europe. In contrast, India is dealing with rapid processes of urbanisation and with the migration of poor, uneducated and traditional populations from villages to large cities. These differences expand the domains of learning and, above all, pose a challenge for the students. In the literature, it has been argued that the main challenge is to cope with the tendency to use Western paradigms for ISW in developing countries (Midgley, 2001). For example, these paradigms focus on individualism and objectivism, with emphasis on self-definition and self-realisation. It is well known that these perspectives can elicit feelings of superiority and lack of understanding, which support the argument that this is a continuation of colonialism, oppression and inequality (Dominelli, 2004; Heron and

Pilkington, 2009; Wehbi, 2008). The Israeli students encountered a massive number of needy people in India, which is far greater than the number of needy people in their home country. They also saw dozens of children who come day after day to the centre, which is staffed by only one social worker. These experiences had a profound impact on the participants from Israel, who began to understand the meaning of cultural relativism—a concept that relates to the transition from a feeling of foreignness to acknowledgement of differences represented in the environment. Therefore, the students adapted their Western approaches to local paradigms, practice wisdom and intervention methods in order to integrate the local context with the global context. This was an important step towards reduction of patronising professionalism and ‘modern colonialism’. The students’ reports indicate that they were able to make these adjustments as a result of the structure of the learning model that they used, which included observation and learning as well as co-operation and consultation with the local social worker before the intervention was implemented.

Other difficulties resulting from the ‘Western domination of the south’ relate to elements of contemporary colonialism (Razack, 2009). These difficulties were manifested in the way that students cope during the stage of observation, and in their evaluations of the needs of the local population, as well as in the students’ decisions about the interventions that they wished to implement. In principle, these activities are based on an accepting, open approach which emphasises reciprocity and encourages collaborative activity. One example is the collaborative work that the social workers engaged in during the phase of preparing the interventions. Originally, the children’s task had been to draw an image of themselves while expressing their ‘thoughts, feelings, and actions’. This was a very Western approach to intervention. Following the observation stage, and after talking to the local social worker, the Israeli students understood that their attitude was unsuitable and patronising. Therefore, they adapted the intervention to the Indian culture together with the local social worker, and the children were asked to portray their ‘dreams and actions’. It is important to note that these interventions were implemented by the local social workers, and are still in use a year after the Israeli students left India. However, it is important to bear in mind that, at both stages of the training process, the Israeli students tended to propose emotion-focused interventions which were unfamiliar to the local social worker and were outside of her domain. Moreover, the model contributed to enhancing awareness of global social problems. The students’ reports indicate that the new model proposed for the programme enabled the students to learn a considerable amount about the essence of ISW through examination of similarities and differences between their country and the host country. For example, one student indicated that the experience in India clarified the essence of ISW, with particular emphasis on the universal dimension. ‘What I saw in my field work in the Nagpur slum I have also seen in my field work in southern Tel Aviv.’ Although there are no slums in Israel like the

ones in India, Israel does have disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Southern Tel Aviv has become like a disadvantaged country, which is populated by work immigrants and seekers of asylum in Israel. Thus, Israel and India face some of the same social problems: poverty, addiction, violence, racism, exploitation and dissolution of families. Therefore, the student wrote that:

... in the era of globalization, we are all international social workers. We simply need to remember that in order to see things from a perspective that will highlight the relationships between what we do here locally, and global aspects that influence us as individuals and as professionals.

This statement corresponds with the perspective of [Trygged \(2010\)](#), who wrote 'Although social work is contextual because needs, economies, cultures and societies are diversified, there are aspects that must be considered in a broad cross-border perspective' ([Trygged, 2010](#), p. 653).

In addition, the model shed light on the meaning of the encounter. Both of the students' summaries presented here indicate that 'in the process of implementing the intervention, we were not asked to make changes. Rather, we were asked to add something to the service'. Thus, their goal was to provide the local worker with new tools, which have been used among Israeli children but can be adapted to the context of India. Concomitantly, however, it was important to them to 'gain new perspectives from the local social worker, which can be taken back to Israel and applied to the context of social work there'. This reciprocity is one of the main contributions of ISW in the global era and is an integral aspect of any professional training programme.

The proposed working model and the Israeli students' descriptions reflect the learning process that the students experienced. The model and descriptions highlight the importance of combining observation and learning with 'being' and 'listening', which is different from local practice in Israel. In that process, the Israeli students had to abandon perspectives that they were used to and experience practice in the host country, where they encountered the field of social work and practitioners 'without memory and desire' ([Bion, 1961](#)). The students realised that, despite the brief period of training abroad, they need to invest considerable time in learning about the host country. As mentioned, this is a necessary condition for creating appropriate solutions that can be implemented. It goes beyond cultural sensitivity and reflects the type of cultural competence that is needed in ISW ([Johnson and Munch, 2009](#)). It is not only an experience for those who provide the solutions, but is also significant for the beneficiaries of those solutions, namely for professionals who live in the host country and need to continue providing responses to the growing needs of the population there ([Magnus, 2009](#)). Therefore, in the process of fieldwork abroad with a foreign population, it is necessary to make adjustments to the language, culture and local environment. This supports the argument that training in ISW, particularly through fieldwork in foreign countries, can provide social work graduates with better

tools for dealing with cultural differences. It also increases the students' awareness of the impact of globalisation on society and individual citizens, and emphasises the uniqueness of this difference as well as the ability to apply this knowledge in professional processes (Asamoah *et al.*, 1997; Panos *et al.*, 2004).

Before concluding, we would like to address the main question that arises from the students' summaries: was there a reciprocal relationship between the Israeli students and the local population, or was there an element of patronising professionalism? The answer is equivocal. As concluded from the results, on the one hand, the Israeli students seemed to understand cultural relativism and global social problems. They adapted interventions to the Indian culture and they were aware of the danger of replicating colonialism; this contributed to expanding their awareness of ethical and professional complexity in ISW. On the other hand, as noted, all of the interventions were emotion-focused and the Israeli students reported little about knowledge and theories that they could implement in Israel. Furthermore, it is unclear what local perspectives of social workers and social work the Israeli students took back with them to apply to the context of social work in Israel.

In light of these findings, the process of fieldwork training should be accompanied by a study that examines the significance of the professional encounter between the local social workers and their visiting colleagues. The proposed research should attempt to provide answers to questions deriving from the students' experiences, such as: how do the fieldwork experience and the encounter with local social workers in the field contribute to expanding the ethical and professional foundations of social workers, and to improving their skills for local intervention in developed (northern) countries and developing (southern) countries?

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