

Supporting learning and teaching



Internationalisation in social policy and social work

Embedding in the curriculum

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In conversation with

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Nicola is editor of the journal *Global Social Policy* and *Understanding Global Policy* and the co-editor (with Chris Holden) of *The Global Social Policy Reader* (2008) as well as vice chair of the Social Policy Association. The teaching content of her current job is focused on writing course material and overseeing course presentation. Most recently she chaired the creation of Welfare, Crime and Society a level 2 social policy module.

SWAP: What does internationalisation mean to you and why do you think it is important to embed international comparative issues within the teaching of social policy?

NY: Research interests are the main driver. My research focuses on rethinking social policy and welfare provision in a global context. Most recently it has focused on issues of transnational migration and welfare as well as the involvement of transnational government and non governmental organisations like the UN, World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organisation in social policy formation. I'm interested in their connections, their social policy discourses and practices as well as what these mean for the welfare of populations. I have also had a remit within our faculty at the OU to think about what a curriculum

internationalisation strategy would entail. At one level it could mean extending the recruitment of overseas students. A more substantive version entails thinking about how to render the curriculum as a whole more intelligible, relevant and available to students whatever their national and cultural background and wherever they reside. It is not only about students who live overseas, it relates to all students.

This is important because the wider student populace is much more diverse than it used to be. Students have often travelled extensively around the world before they come to study and/or have experience or knowledge of particular issues due to their involvement in voluntary or community organisations and political campaigns. They have a heightened awareness of all things 'global'. They are used to looking beyond what happens in this particular island in this particular part of the world. Issues of global poverty and global health crises are good ways of engaging student interest. Such examples can put a new spin on the traditional social policy debates of who gets what, why, and how, and under what conditions.

SWAP: Could you describe some of the global perspectives you have embedded within distance learning courses offered by the Open University?

NY: The OU is increasingly using multimedia to engage students. It's a different means of attracting student attention and done well can be complimentary to text book formats and speak to different student learning styles. DVD film for use on the course helps students to develop the skills to 'read' different kinds of texts.

A potential pitfall when thinking about the international or the global is to simply extend the gaze to a few other countries beyond the UK, or more widely, the OECD. That's what I would call 'extended internationalisation' because the fundamental unit of analysis hasn't really changed. What I mean by this is that you simply line up different case studies of nation states around the world. The idea that the 'borders' of society (and welfare) are co-terminous with political (state) borders remains. An alternative would be to look for transnational connections around welfare formation, change and the policy process and this was the approach we tried to adopt when writing the Welfare, Crime and Society course.

Rather than foregrounding the term 'global' in the module title we embedded it throughout the course. Taking this approach changed the ways we approached the relationship between social policy provision and crime control policy. We wanted to show the interconnectedness of welfare systems, ideas about the best ways of responding to crime, and so-called 'national' policy formation.

To do this we selected case study examples which best illustrated the intersection of social policy and criminology; and of welfare policy with crime control strategies. We also focused on the actions and policies and discourses of international organisations with regard to urbanisation, poverty and social justice to show the relevance of those policy concerns to policy agendas and responses in different country contexts.

SWAP: From your point of view how have things progressed/changed since you wrote the article 'What can global perspectives contribute to curriculum development in Social Policy?' in *Social Policy and Society*.

NY: In the conclusion of the 2005 article we wrote 'the signs are that a meaningful engagement with globalisation is not only established but expanding'. I would still argue that both international and global approaches are being increasingly embedded in the social policy curriculum. It is very hard to be an analyst or researcher of social policy without a wider understanding of the international context and of what other countries are doing about the distribution of resources and access to services, for example. In addition, in terms of teaching and curriculum development it has become much harder to justify not having a broadly internationalist perspective on the social policy curriculum.

“... Internationalisation in terms of curriculum design refers to the processes of rendering the curriculum as a whole intelligible, relevant and available to students whatever their national and cultural background and wherever they reside.”

There has been a huge increase in migration studies in the past few years and this is another area where the tensions between internationalist and globalist approaches are sometimes evident. While there are courses that focus on transnational or global migrations and the ways in which those link populations and places and welfare systems around the world, I think there is still a tendency to look at migration only from the point of view of the receiving country. This approach tends to collapse into a focus on migrants and the way they are able to integrate into the 'host' society and the particular kinds of adaptations that are required. This often comes at the expense of a broader focus on the structural and policy determinants of migration and the contriving, often simultaneous, connections and attachments they maintain with their source country and the destination country – not to speak of other countries. It is this dynamic that transnational and global approaches seek to capture.

There is still also a tendency within international comparative social policy to look at similarly situated countries which are often OECD countries of similar levels of economics and development. Inviting students to look outside the Global North at the experiences of a much wider range of countries around the world is important for two reasons:

- a) students' attention is drawn to a much wider and more diverse range of policy responses to pressing problems of human and social need.
- b) a global focus offers the potential to develop robust theories of welfare development.

There is a strong argument to look to a wider range of countries to explain welfare development in order to create a more robust explanation of the conditions under which social policy formation occurs, the political and social forces and actors

involved and the impact of these on the nature of welfare provision.

There are more dedicated student resources available now to students of global social policy than there were 5 or so years ago. For example, the website www.globalwelfare.net was produced by the international comparative social policy group. *Understanding Global Social Policy* (2008) and *The Global Social Policy Reader* (2009) address the gap in student texts in this area. There are many other web sources also available.

SWAP: What advice would you give to others who want to embed international themes and global perspectives on their distance learning social policy courses?

NY: One of the dangers of introducing new international and global modules into existing courses is that you can end up with a plethora of modules which appear to compete with national or sectoral studies. International and global social policy can become just another thing you and the students have to deal with in an already crowded curriculum. To avoid this try to look for ways of enmeshing the two as a way into key social policy debates; case studies are useful here. I try to be selective otherwise it becomes overwhelming and I always start by thinking about learning outcomes and then selecting content.

Another danger of working in this area is that because you are seen as a globalist there is an expectation that you can cover the entirety of the world! Ultimately the best way forward is to combine an integrative approach whereby the global and international – whichever you go for – are integrated into the social policy curriculum with specialist or dedicated modules exploring particular issues, approaches and perspectives in greater depth.

If you conceptualise the international and global as something which goes on 'out



there' rather than having relevance and connections to policies that are enacted in Britain they will inevitably be confined to 'otherness' - other people living hundreds or thousands of miles away whose welfare appears to be unconnected with policies enacted here in the UK. A key challenge is to think about ways to incorporate international or global perspectives on British social policy.

The recent global financial crisis is a classic example of how to illustrate the connections between what goes on overseas and at home. The crisis started in the US and rapidly made its way over here due to the transnational nature of the financial system. It then moves from a banking crisis to a public expenditure crisis to a welfare cuts crisis to welfare cuts.

“Integrating global perspectives into the curriculum starts with effective teaching and learning strategies.”

There is a trade off between coverage and not overcrowding the curriculum. I would reiterate the importance of not over-crowding the curriculum, not least because you risk overwhelming the students with materials. I strongly believe in starting from effective teaching and learning strategies rather than starting with content. It is better to focus on a few examples in greater depth rather than going for maximum coverage, and of course global approaches and issues can be integrated across the curriculum as well as being delivered via stand alone modules. ■



Useful Resource
 Access to the International and Comparative Social Policy Group resources is via www.globalwelfare.net

The Teaching International Students (TIS) Project

Teaching International Students

The Teaching International Students (TIS) Project (www.heacademy.ac.uk/internationalstudents) is a joint initiative between the Higher Education Academy and the United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) with funding from the Prime Minister's Initiative 2 (PMI2). It is a two year project, hosted and co-funded by the Higher Education Academy.

The project focuses on the ways that lecturers and other teaching staff can maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning for international students. This is done through providing guidance and information about how to meet the diverse learning needs of these learners.

What is available?

The International Students Lifecycle Resources Bank

(www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/internationalisation/studentlifecycle).

This repository holds a host of resources for staff to help with teaching and learning in the classroom. These include: supervision, independent learning, group work, critical thinking and many more. There is a range of case stories from staff and students exploring issues and presenting tried and tested suggestions for practice. Perhaps you have your own case story to add? For further details on how to contribute a story or perhaps links to useful resources please contact internationalisation@heacademy.ac.uk

TIS International Conference 16-17 June 2011

'Internationalisation of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Education: Exploring New Frontiers'

Location: University of Warwick

Over 120 abstracts have been received from across the globe and it is shaping up to be a stimulating and engaging conference. You can find details of how to register on the TIS website. www.heacademy.ac.uk/internationalstudents

Events & Workshops

The HEA regularly run practical workshops for staff working in particular disciplines. Examples of past events include those for staff in engineering, education, psychology, economics and health sciences. Resources arising from these events along with dates for future workshops can be found on the TIS website.

If you have any comments and suggestions on the work that the HEA are doing on internationalisation please feel free to contact us on internationalisation@heacademy.ac.uk



Resources for developing international and global perspectives

Gateways

SWAP (Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work)

SWAP's internationalisation pages contain useful links to publications, casestudies, external digital learning resources.

www.swap.ac.uk/themes/int.html

Openlearn: free access to Open University course materials.

Topics freely available include sport media and culture who's calling the shots, the meaning of crime, reading visual images, does prison work?; learning from audio visual material: migrants and borders; nationalism, self determination and secession; retiring lives? Old age, work and welfare.

<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/course/category.php?id=11&perpage=15&page=1>

BBC

The BBC has developed a website which shows the globalisation and movement of people who were born abroad and are now resident in the UK. The data shows the impact of global forces at local level.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/born_abroad/economics/html/overview.stm

Innocenti Research Centre

Formally known as the International Child Development Centre, Innocenti aims to improve international understanding of the issues relating to children's rights in industrialized and developing countries. The site has several videos based on research report cards. www.unicef-irc.org/

CEIMH

The Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health has developed a wide range of high quality resources.

www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/tv/

HelpAge

The HelpAge India site has a good selection of videos about projects they are funding as well as other links

www.helpageindia.org/index.php

Red Cross and Red Crescent

International Red Cross and Red Crescent – the web magazine includes well written stories with maps and photographs.

www.redcross.int/EN/mag/magazine2010_3/index.html

Contributors recommended texts:

Deacon, B. (2007) *Global Social Policy and Governance*. London: Sage.

Gewirtz, S. and Cribb, A. (2009) 'Revisiting the first drafts of history – 30 years of UK HE Change' Paper presented to the School of Education, University of Leeds, 25 June 2009.

Irving, Z. Yeates, N and Young, P (2005) 'What can global perspective contribute to curriculum development in social policy?', *Social Policy and Society* 4: 4, 475-484.

Lloyd-Sherlock, P. (2010) *Population Ageing and International Development: From Generalisation to Evidence*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Yeates, N. and Holden, C. (eds) (2009) *The Global Social Policy Reader*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Powell, J. and Robison, J. (2007) 'The 'international dimension' in social work education: current developments in England', *European Journal of Social Work*, 10:3, 383-399.

Lawrence, S. Lyons, K. Simpson, G. Huegler, N. (2009) *Introducing International Social Work*. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Focus on

Globalising the Gerontology Curriculum

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About the author

Debora Price is Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the Institute of Gerontology, King's College London. She teaches on the Institute's multidisciplinary programmes in Ageing Studies. She specialises in how the welfare state structures family and gender relations particularly through the study of pension and social care systems and the poverty of older people.

Why globalise the curriculum?

Irving et al (2005) proposed an excellent set of sound pedagogic reasons for globalising the social policy curriculum, with some helpful and cohesive thoughts on academic practice and curriculum development. Our own path towards globalisation of our curriculum has been a response to other pressures, arising from what Gewirtz and Cribb (2009) have called 'fundamental policy and normative shifts' characterising changes in HE over the last three decades.

Whilst developing the curriculum for two new programmes, we made a strategic decision to internationalise our existing modules and develop a new Masters level module, Ageing in a Global Context. The strategy is one endorsed by Professor Alan Walker, whose birthday address to the Institute emphasised the need for an international dimension to ageing research

to understand the reach of globalisation and institutions that have the power directly or indirectly to influence the well being of older people.

Pressure for change came from four directions: increases in high fee paying international students to our Masters programmes; increasing formal connection between our university and universities around the world; the creation of new multidisciplinary research institutes at King's in the Brazil and China Institutes; and increasing pressure from students. The 'Ageing in a Global Context' module now draws students from programmes in Political Economy, Gerontology and Public Services Policy & Management, and our current class is filled with students from countries including China, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Peru, the Caribbean, the Middle East, EU, Canada, the USA and New Zealand.

Curriculum development has changed with the demographics of the classroom. Fewer than half of this year's class are health professionals. Most have ambitions for employment in policy and government.

Implementing changes to the curriculum

Curriculum development has been challenging. We have restructured our programmes significantly so that specialist modules 'Population Ageing', 'Ageing and Society', 'Social Policy in Gerontology', 'Health Services in Gerontology' and 'Experiencing Health and Ageing' have been subsumed into multidisciplinary modules 'Population Ageing and Policy', 'Health, Ageing and Society' and 'Ageing in a Global Context'. Each of these modules is 'team taught' with a mix of demography, sociology, health services and social policy as well as guest lectures. There is no longer space in the curriculum to focus solely on the core concepts of Social Policy, nor Global Social Policy.

We still need to service the needs of our gerontology students in health or social care, as well as the increasingly international policy students who have a different agenda. Even though this is a Masters programme, we need to assume no prior knowledge of our subject area, since students may have come from science, social science or humanities backgrounds.

Close collaboration with colleagues in the teaching team is essential to ensure a theoretically meaningful, coherent learning experience. In teaching the social policy aspects of these modules, I have sacrificed the 'whole subject' teaching that a specialist module allowed. I have done this by focussing on three or four key concepts, and using illustrative examples from ageing studies. For example, the tension between universalism and neo-liberalism in social welfare provision can be taught through contrasting social pensions in sub-Saharan Africa with the equity and market driven schemes of some of the accession countries in Europe or Chile, which also enables examination of the role of global

actors such as the World Bank, IMF, and HelpAge International. This works well, and students are learning a great deal and enjoying the course, but there are pedagogic limits. Students cannot emerge with a comprehensive understanding of social policy and welfare, and there is no space in the curriculum for reading seminal books in the subject area. It is much more of a pick and mix approach.

The search for materials is a challenge. We have developed a list of useful and reasonably quality assured websites for the programme. Recent useful text books in Global Social Policy such as Deacon (2007) and Yeates and Holden (2009) have been a great help, and Lloyd-Sherlock's (2010) *Population Ageing and International Development* is an excellent resource for us. We do make extensive use of journal articles, but this is difficult on a course where you need to give basic concepts, theoretical grounding, context and case study all in one or two lectures, before moving on to the next, and where it is completely unrealistic to expect students to read an entire undergraduate text book in social policy before beginning the module.

Globalising our curriculum has brought us tangible benefits. The students love it. We have developed academic networks within and outside our institution through teaching. As academics we are also now more focussed on global agendas and comparative research in our own work, which positions us more successfully as an Institute with international reach, and we are slowly developing an important network of international alumni. While we had different drivers to those described by Irving et al, students and academics alike are reaping the benefits. ■

Useful Resource

A video of Professor Walker's talk is available at www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/geront/news/anniversary.html

For consideration

The Use of Videos in Teaching about International Development National Government Organisations (NGOs) and their Role in Social Welfare

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About the author

Rana Jawad is Lecturer in Social Policy, School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Research (SSPSSR), University of Kent. She teaches on the Medway campus. Her areas of research interest are the role of religion in social policy and social policy in the Middle East.

What I did

The idea of using videos on international development NGOs came to me when a colleague asked me to guest lecture on 'international perspectives' for a third year undergraduate module on the voluntary sector. On this occasion, the lecture took the format of a workshop lasting two hours.

As part of my planning for the session, I decided to focus on the work of international development NGOs. I aimed to demonstrate international variations in the role of the voluntary sector, but also to introduce the students to some of the key debates in international development. I felt that videos would help give variety to the teaching, and also give the students a window into another world: people who look different, who have a different language and experience social welfare in a different way. This may seem simplistic, but the idea was to show the students what 'social welfare' and the 'voluntary sector' actually looked like in other countries, especially in non-OECD ones.

Where did I source my material?

In searching for development Non-Government Organisation (NGO) videos I was surprised at how little there is available online. I contacted my university library, I looked on Amazon, I also looked up the main development studies teaching departments in the UK. My search was unsuccessful. I resorted to Google and came across the Google videos website where I was able to insert links to several videos into my lecture slides. I was cautious about the kind of material I sourced, but in the end, three videoed interviews served my purpose well:

- Video resource 1: Local NGO worker in an African country discussing the advantages and disadvantages of foreign aid Retrieved January 2011 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-xI2U1sET4&feature=channel
- Video resource 2: Canadian development policy expert discussing the impact of international development policy Retrieved January 2011 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu70hpYykG4



- Video resource 3: Female Middle Eastern NGO worker discussing political constraints on NGOs in her country and the role of her NGO in improving the situation of women in her country. Retrieved January 2011 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG5hh0XtBuo

What the students did

The exercise I devised asked the students to make notes on what they considered to be the key issues illustrated by the interview excerpt they watched. (One of the interviews had subtitles for the dialogue which proved useful for some students). I then used their findings to highlight the main fault lines in the development studies debates. One of the videos also included shots of the local community that was in receipt of foreign aid. 'Seeing' what development looked like, also allowed the students to compare and contrast their UK experience with these other country contexts.

What the students thought

For many of the students this was the first time they had encountered such issues on the course and they were engrossed. In conversation, a few students commented that they had had "enough of Sweden" (i.e. as the main international example of social policy) and that they wanted to know more about other countries. Other comments included "we live in a global world" and "what happens abroad impacts on us".

Where next?

I intend to use the same videos (or better ones if I can find them), with the new group I will be teaching for this same lecture this year. It takes time to stimulate student awareness and appreciation of what happens beyond our national borders, or indeed beyond our continent. The use of videos is a very good way of portraying worlds which are in effect very different to those that our students might be used to. Helping students actually see beyond the 'usual suspects' of social policy, such as Sweden, is certainly the way to go for the future.

“it takes time to stimulate student awareness and appreciation of what happens beyond our national borders.”

Coming from an academic background entrenched in development studies, international social policy and overseas fieldwork, I consider it a natural development to bring an international perspective to the 30-credit social policy module that I teach. Colleagues who ask me to guest lecture for them on various criminal justice studies and social science programmes, remain eager to integrate the international dimension of social policy into their modules. ■

In conversation with

Sue Lawrence

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Sue qualified as a social worker in 1976 and has been a social work educator since 1991. She has been actively involved in European social work research, networks and exchanges throughout her career and is UK representative on the Executive Committee of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW). She is also on the editorial board of the *European Journal of Social Work* and co-edited *Introducing International Social Work* (2009) along with Karen Lyons, Graeme Simpson and Nathalie Hueger.

SWAP: What does internationalisation mean to you and how did you come to be interested in internationalisation and social work?

SL: I first got interested in the international context of social work whilst I was studying. I was really curious about how things were organised and practised elsewhere and read odds and ends about international social work while I was a student. When I became a researcher I was concerned with social gerontology and I got involved in a research project that was going on around residential care in France. Later, when I became a social work academic I wanted to continue to find out what was happening in other countries so I got involved in my university's ERASMUS programme and various networks



and projects particularly in Belgium France, Germany and Hungary. So that's how I became involved in internationalisation. What does it mean to me? I think it is the combination of what's happening elsewhere and the way that relates to how and why we do things the way we do here. I think it is really to do with globalisation and the fact that the global today is very much the 'local'. You can't really understand the local context of social work without having a wider picture of what's happening in the world.

SWAP: Why do you think embedding internationalisation in to the social work curriculum is important?

SL: The global village in which we live and the processes of globalisation mean that international social work gives you a lens through which to understand the local context and challenge some of our more established ideas and practices. It helps to improve anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. The more one understands the context from which people or their forebears may have come, the more we're going to be able to understand the cultural context which a lot of our population inhabit. I also think internationalisation is important because it gives us the opportunity to innovate and indigenise different approaches and methods that we encounter in other countries.

SWAP: In practice how do you embed internationalisation in your teaching?



SL: I try to internationalise some of the issues I speak to in order to give students a wider understanding of the context in which we're working. For example I give a lecture about poverty to first year students taking a sociology module. When I was at an international conference in Durban in South Africa I came across an inspiring user group called the Abahlali group (www.abahlali.org). They have made some remarkable YouTube films in co-operation with academics from Kwazulu Natal University in Durban and with practitioners. It is a really good example for students of how a user group and academic social worker practitioners in another country have worked together. It also illustrates the context of poverty in another country and what it actually means politically to people who are shack dwellers.

Another lecture I give in a module called social work and the lifecourse is around older people. Here I hand out information that Graeme Simpson and I have researched when we were writing *Introducing International Social Work* around different typologies of migration. Graeme and I produced a powerpoint slide that includes pictures with a little bit of text. The slide helps us to talk to students about what different types of migration means to different people. We talk about affluent migrants coming from Britain, Germany, Netherlands to European countries like Spain. We also talk about people who came to the UK in the 50's in response to a call for workers to plug the skills gap here at that time. We explore how those migrants were pioneers of their generation and how

they have aged in place and what that might mean.

I also talk about international organisations. For example International Social Service (now called Children and Families Across Borders) illustrates the way social workers can work cross-nationally in children's fostering and adoption. This organisation can also work internationally to address an older person needs. For example, if an older person wants to go home to die, or if they are very ill and they want to be put in contact with relatives or be able to visit relatives for a last time. These organisations help me to talk to students about social workers who work across borders as well as social workers who have an international perspective and work in the UK.

“...internationalisation is important because it gives us the opportunity to innovate and indigenise different approaches and methods that we encounter in other countries.”

ERASMUS schemes have been invaluable for staff. Unfortunately it is almost impossible for our students to undertake ERASMUS exchanges because of the way our curriculum is organised. I do have some students coming from other countries to London and I am going to look into possibilities of social work students undertaking an exchange but it really depends on the scope of the new curriculum for social work when the Reform Board gives us its outcomes. I know other colleagues do operate student exchange within their own social work curriculum so there are examples elsewhere. We're looking at virtual exchanges either via skype or email or utilising technology. An email exchange with students in South Africa worked well in the past.

The ERASMUS scheme for staff has helped bring the global to the local. I encourage staff to undertake ERASMUS exchange so that they bring back knowledge from elsewhere and also so that we have academics from other countries coming in to give lectures and seminars. A colleague of mine is a doctoral student herself but she's been engaged in a European network looking at the supervision context and she's now been to Spain and the Netherlands on ERASMUS exchanges and she's been able to utilise examples of different models of supervision when she's teaching practice teachers.

I find the students are very hungry for that type of information. We have a very diverse profile of students at London Met many of them are from different minority ethnic groups. I find that all of our student groups are very interested to hear about links, commonalities and differences in social work in other countries.

SWAP: From your point of view how have things progressed/changed since you published *Introducing International Social Work* (2009)?

SL: Jackie Powell's 2007 study was quite gloomy about international perspectives

in the social work curriculum. Her study prompted the setting up of the JUCSWEC International Committee and the publication of *Introducing International Social Work*. I think it is early days but the book sales have been encouraging and more academics are becoming actively involved in the work of the International Committee. We've set up a further curriculum development group and are working on developing more international materials for learning and teaching about international social work. The aim is to provide colleagues and students with more examples and activities to facilitate the discussion of international issues. We also have a joint forum every year with the JUCSWEC Learning and Teaching and Research Committees.

SWAP: What advice would you give to others who want to embed international themes and global perspectives into their social work courses?

SL: I would say it is wise to find interesting resources which will excite the students' curiosity. Don't use pages of dry statistics. Good quality YouTubes give students a flavour of the issues in people's own words so you don't have to speak for people abroad. I embed weblinks in my powerpoints to organisations so that students can click straight on to them (via virtual learning environments). Also give the students references to accessible information in books and academic journals. There are a number of journals such as the *European Journal of Social Work* and the *Journal of International Social Work* which have links to the European Association of the Schools of Social Work and the International Associations of Social Work. All of those websites also carry lots of additional information that people can access. ■

Focus on

‘Global issues in Social Work Practice’: embedding an international module into the social work curriculum

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About the author

Janet is Chair of JUCSWEC's (Joint Universities Council for Social Work Educators Committee) International Committee and a Board member on IASSW (International Association of Social Workers) representing UK universities.

Background

Social work lecturers at Sheffield Hallam University have long believed that students' capacity to critique UK social work would be greatly improved by an appreciation of international social work practices. We began with the introduction of placements, through our European networks, and then introduced our first international module in 2006 and our current one in 2010. Each module was designed in partnership with European colleagues using European funding for curriculum development (ERASMUS and TEMPUS).

Why a separate module for international perspectives?

Despite our collective interest and experiences we had a poor track record of including international perspectives before we designed the international module. Providing a complete module meant developing a systematic and theoretically

informed perspective. We wanted the international module to contribute to generic social work topics in the same way as any other.

The challenge was to make the social work content recognisable to even the most sceptical student. To achieve this our aim was to use the global to inform local practice, by connecting with students' personal experience and their emerging understanding of social work. We make the topics live, often painfully relevant, by inviting service users to talk to us about the services they receive. We also require students to interview an asylum seeker as part of their assessment.

In the latest version of the module we have extended our expectations of students. We ask them to reflect on causation in the opposite direction, namely to assess the impact of personal actions and national



policies on the less economically developed countries in the Global South. We are calling this global citizenship. So far, the content of the assignments, and feedback from students, gives us confidence that the module succeeds in making the global relevant to the local. A number of students have reported informally that the teaching has reconnected them to their reasons for wanting to be a social worker.

What we teach

The 20 credit module is located in the second year. One of its functions is to provide specialist teaching on social justice and social work values. A secondary

aim is to challenge myths about asylum seekers. We also look at structural power differences and mechanisms at the global level including discrepancies of influence in the arena of international social work. The practice topics selected for the module are those with an international context - human trafficking, illegal drugs, people seeking asylum, economic migrants, the spread and impact of HIV/AIDs and TB. We begin by showing the scope and nature of the issue in the UK and in relation to the international context. Teaching about the topic in relation to UK social work practice and policies follows. To critique UK practice we do a critical comparison of the philosophy, social work practices and policies of other countries. The current assessment, a 3000 word essay is based on this approach.

In addition we use comparative analysis to identify differing constructions of social problems and social policy responses. This raises questions about how and why we practice social work in the UK. In terms of law the module revisits, with different emphasis and new questions, law and practise with children (unaccompanied minors, international adoption) and topics not previously covered (immigration, human trafficking). Law and policy is always linked to international policy including human rights and UN conventions.

“...we use comparative analysis to identify differing constructions of social problems and social policy responses. This raises questions about how and why we practice social work in the UK.”

How we teach

We model some of the processes we want students to perfect and demonstrate in their assignment through our teaching. For example, we demonstrate how to select, apply and critique social and psychological theories, including Diaspora, acculturation, resilience, trauma and social paradigms in mental health in relation to asylum seekers. To encourage the use of international sources, we developed a range of independent learning tasks. In the new module these are completed by students in readiness for seminars and workshops. A special learning tool is a virtual community called 'Our Street'. This helps students to evaluate the benefits and pitfalls for topic households of being in a community. The tool is both a means to apply social theories and to develop student strategies for capacity building. Most importantly it exposes the students to a key social work method used extensively in other parts of the world.

For the future and what we have learnt

The module is dynamic and has involved the whole team in constant reviewing and reframing. We envisage that this will continue with the growing impact of globalisation. The field of international social work is developing and along with it new curriculum based materials and discourses.

The module requires a number of sophisticated academic skills which are suited to undergraduate students who have at least one year of the course and one placement behind them. The materials and approach also lend themselves to master's level teaching and this is where it has been located by some of our Tempus project partners.

The key learning outcome for students is to understand and demonstrate how the global is local. Future learning could include debate around whether social workers

“...A lasting legacy from our development of this global issues module has been the agreement across the team of a global approach.”

should extend their principles to become global citizens.

A lasting legacy from our development of this global issues module has been the agreement across the team of a global approach. A shared approach has made it easier to integrate global perspectives meaningfully in other parts of the course. In addition, our ongoing commitment to developing an international curriculum has enabled us to contribute, and learn from the field nationally, particularly through the International Committee's (JUCSWEC/SWAP) work on practice and curriculum materials. ■

If you are interested in finding out more about the work of the JUCSWEC International Committee or would like to join please contact Janet Williams
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For consideration

Learning African perspectives on social work

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About the author

Hellmuth's research interests include theoretical perspectives in social work; narrative family therapy and using narratives and antenarrative methods in research together with vulnerable children affected by HIV/Aids in Southern Africa.

Background context

Leicester is a cosmopolitan city and a large proportion of its current residents are from ethnic minorities. Of these, immigrants from Africa have become an important subgroup which is reflected in the student population of De Montfort University. This is important, not only because some service users are from Africa, but also because a growing number of social workers and care workers were born there.

different cultural and social perspectives can affect both those who receive and those who deliver services.

Professor Konje, a Ghanaian gynaecologist from Leicester Royal Infirmary, and myself, acted as facilitators for the morning session. Students explored various factors on a micro level (factors to consider about service users, the worker, and the interaction between them), meso level (for example the broader service users' family and other support structures) and macro level (history of the country, socio-economic factors, etc).

Discussions focused on the importance of language and the process of acculturation. Students looked at some of the jargon used as part of the work done by mental health social workers and child care workers. Common usage is made of terms such as depression or schizophrenia, attachment disorders. In many African languages, there is no word for schizophrenia and the translation of the term is unhelpful to social workers (a generic term basically meaning "crazy").

“It is important to consider the impact of arrival and settlement in the UK”

What we did

Students taking the second year Social Work Skills module spend a day learning about African perspectives to social work. The day enables students to engage with the experiences of a group of young people in South Africa via skype. The main aim of the session is to help students understand how



A second focus for discussion was acculturation or the process of adjustment when people move from one culture to another. The importance of culture is often underestimated. ‘Culture is to society what memory is to the individual’ (Transdis, 1989). It helps people deal with and provide “rules” for social situations. It is therefore important to consider the impact that arrival and settlement in the UK has on any one who has little understanding of the rules of engagement. Students were able to explore how the process of adjustment can affect individuals and families and some of the examples used showed how this could impact on mental health. The sessions had a powerful impact:

“I realise that I will need to increase my knowledge in order to offer best practice to all the people who will require my service as a social worker and this lecture was the beginning of my journey into social work.” (Samantha Bennett)

To raise student awareness of cross cultural working learners are also introduced to a working framework developed in South Africa, a country with nine official languages and great cultural variation. Students are divided into small groups and each group is led by a student born in Africa. Student feedback suggests that the group leaders performed a crucial role in scaffolding learning. Their contribution is vital in helping white British social workers to support people in an anti-discriminatory

role. It is important to support group leaders who can be sceptical of other students receptiveness to ‘the perspective’.

The afternoon session took place on skype and was led by a group of young

“...Culture is to society what memory is to the individual”

people from Bloemfontein in South Africa. The South Africans shared the research they were doing in collaboration with De Montfort University about orphaned and vulnerable children. This added a new perspective to the discussions of the morning. Several students found this the most challenging and humbling part of the day. Omoruyi Egharevba, who also acted as a group leader commented:

“...it was apparent that the political and economic constraints under which social workers have to work have severely impacted on the quality of services received by those in need. ...The session with the young people of South Africa has helped me to refocus on what should be the really important goal in social work. Yes, money or access to funding will always play a role in the provision of services that transform people’s lives. But I have learned that the last say in the helping process actually comes from the persons in receipt of services.” ■

Open Educational Resources (OER)



SWAP is currently running a JISC/HEA funded project to bring together open educational resources (OERs) in social work and social policy. Open educational resources are materials that are freely available to be used and repurposed.

As part of the project, SWAP is collaborating with six partners (Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE); Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS); the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary

Mental Health (CEIMH), University of Birmingham; the Centre for Human Service Technology (CHST), University of Southampton; School of Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) and University of Southampton Library) to create the sector's first collective online repository, SWAPBox.

SWAPBox offers a wide range of social work and social policy resources for learning, uploaded by project partners and individual SWAPBox members. These resources are subject to online peer review.

Another key objective of the project is to stimulate a genuine cultural shift encouraging educators not currently engaged in technology enhanced learning and teaching, to use OERs on a regular basis. The interactive elements of SWAPBox will foster engagement between novice and expert OER users to create a supportive online community. A dedicated help and support section provides guidelines including how to modify existing OERs and how turn your teaching materials into shareable resources to be uploaded onto SWAPBox.

SWAP is currently organising opportunities to share examples and experiences of using OERs, and to introduce SWAPBox to the social policy and social work community.

To sign up and start using SWAPBox, please go to:

www.swapbox.ac.uk

To receive 'in focus' and be kept up to date with the latest news, publications, events and funding opportunities register with SWAP at www.swap.ac.uk/register



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