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Davis, Cindy, Harris, Nonie, Englebrecht, Lambert, and Lum, Terry (2019)
Teaching international social work in a global classroom. **Journal of Social Work Education, 55 (2) pp. 327-337.**

Access to this file is available from:

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Please refer to the original source for the final version of this work:

https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2018.1526731

Abstract

Social work educators are challenged with preparing students for international social work and/or work with immigrant/refugee populations. This pilot project aimed to develop an online "global classroom" to teach an international social work course to social work students from five different countries participating from their home countries: USA (N=25), South Africa (N=4), Mexico (N=11), Hong Kong (N=6), and Australia (N=2). Qualitative data were collected from students regarding their experiences in this global classroom. Thematic analysis revealed the development of rich authentic learning, where their interactions with international classmates led to a transformative learning experience and a beginning sense of social work in a global context. Implications for future leaning and teaching of social work content across global borders was discussed.

Keywords: International Social Work; Global Online Teaching; Social Work Education, Cultural Competency

Increased global communication elucidates the similarities of social challenges faced by nations throughout the world and improves access, literacy, empathy, and responsibility internationally. Social work professionals are expected to be literate in the global interconnectedness of oppression, social and economic injustices, social welfare policy, and social service delivery, specifically between social work practice, social development, and empowerment (Hawkins & Knox, 2014; Crisp, 2015). As social work and social welfare models used in mainstream western countries represent only a subset of the large number of possible intervention strategies available to respond to the diverse needs of communities and societies, online technology, facilitated by faculty members via a "global classroom," provided a platform for social work students to explore the historical, environmental, cultural, religious, political and economic factors that impact social welfare policies and the delivery of human services in different regions of the world. *International Social Work,* a course developed to prepare social work students for international social work and/or for work with immigrant and refugee populations, was taught online using a "global classroom" to enhance the learning environment with increased cultural diversity and to broaden cultural horizons. This global classroom afforded students the opportunity to learn about international issues while participating from their home countries of USA, Hong Kong, South Africa, Mexico, and Australia. The field of social work is prompted to provide online education in empirically-supported modes using the known best practices, which exhorted a pilot study, *International Social Work*, to provide empirical support for the efficacy of a global classroom.

It has been argued that "cultural competence is seen as essential to all aspects of international social work" and that international social work encourages the development and enhancement of cultural competence (Nadan, 2017, p. 3). The

International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work explain social work, stating:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IFSW, 2014).

As diversity has increased in Western societies and ethnic heterogeneity has become the norm, social workers, at minimum, are obligated to ensure that they are sufficiently prepared for working in their local communities in an increasingly multi-cultural society (Hokenstad, Khinduka, & Midgley, 1992). Several authors support international social work's ability to better prepare social workers for engaging and working with their culturally diverse client population through its endorsement of critical thinking and analysis of global social welfare issues and development of appropriate strategies for working with those whose worldviews are beyond the narrow cultural contexts of this country (Nadan, 2017; Wehbi, 2009). Further, Crisp (2015) argues there are "Increasing expectations that social work education incorporate international perspectives and prepare graduates to work in cross-national contexts … encourage[d] to do so by universalist thinking, which infers there are values and practices that transcend boarders" (p. 1).

Of note, the contentiousness of cultural competence due to its basis on the knowledge and ways of knowing has been inextricably embedded in dominant,

western, egocentric ways (Gopalkrishnan and Pulla, 2016; Webhi, 2009). Nadan (2017) argues that social workers adopt a constructive, reflective view of cultural competence, defining cultural competence as

> …the skills of professionals in exploring the diverse identities of the people they are working with. These identities are derived from the intersections between various categories of difference, including gender, social class, religion, spirituality, age, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, marital and residential status, etc. (p.4).

The cultural competence espoused by social workers is of paramount importance and, unsurprisingly, research evidence links improved skills for cross-cultural communication and enhancement of cultural competence with international social work education and placement (Nadan, 2017; Wehbi, 2009). International social work provides social workers the opportunity to broaden their "cultural horizons," and adoption of a constructivist view can lead to more ethical, anti-oppressive international social work (Wehbi, 2009; Crisp, 2015). Research data endorse necessity of, complexity of, and "global connections between social work practice, social development, and human empowerment," encouraging the adoption of a global citizenship framework and believing global issues are our problems here rather than their problems there (Hawkins & Knox, 2014, p.249). This global citizenship and leadership framework posits that attaining universal human rights literacy, developing universal human rights empathy, upholding universal human rights responsibility, and implementing universal human rights action can evoke global change and defend human rights; as social workers are called to be transformative, culturally competent leaders. However, it is worth noting that definitions of global citizenship are contested

and evolving with "social responsibility, global competence and global civic engagement" most recently seen as central to the global citizenship construct (Potts, 2016, p. 11).

Colleges and universities across the world are using educational technology to enrich teaching and learning modalities, improve access internationally, enhance cultural competence, and evoke global change. Online education also offers convenience, accessibility, and cost effectiveness through the use of educational technology (Coe Regan, 2016; Rovai & Downey, 2010) – with Maguth (2014) finding there is "great potential [for] digital technology in advancing global learning" (p. 55). A "global classroom" is a learning environment in which course instruction is provided online, and the Internet is used to "access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience" (Ally, 2004, p.5). Online courses are courses in which an expected 80 to 100 percent of course materials are distributed online, to which these types of courses generally do not have face-to-face meetings (Allen and Seamen, 2013). Online teaching can occur synchronously (i.e., when all students are simultaneously present) and asynchronously (i.e., when all students participate but not at the same time), can include email communication, conferencing, chat rooms, and discussion boards, and often takes place in a virtual learning environment (e.g., Blackboard) (Madoc-Jones & Parrott, 2005). This teaching modality's use of educational technology, as its primary mode of course delivery and communication, affords students the opportunity to participate in any online course around the globe (Rautenbach and Black-Hughes, 2012). This mode of teaching online also provides numerous challenges, benefits, and best practices, which are linked to improved

learning and access to learning, internationally (Twigg, 2013; Soria and Troisi, 2013).

Relevant research data reveal a number of barriers to the success of international social work education courses. Challenges associated with this teaching and learning method and educational program affect both faculty members and online students. Possible barriers to global online and international social work education include accommodating the expectations and interests of faculty and students, maintaining accreditation requirements, and managing financial concerns (Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011; Rautenbach and Black-Hughes, 2012). Still, a challenge that is unique to international social work education is problems of culture and environment, teaching style differences, and problems related to different educational values and cultures (e.g., Western egocentrism and it's incompatibility with collectivist cultures (Maidment; 2005, Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011). Without careful acknowledgment, consideration, and analysis of dominant western paradigms (e.g., concepts such objectivity, individualism, professional distance, self-determination), which may be a framework or "western ideological 'infrastructure'" within which many social workers practice, international social work education and practice is unethical (p.230). Research indicates that social workers must develop locally relevant knowledge in order to uphold social work values and ethics by avoiding the reinforcement of misconceptions and cultural stereotypes and reproduction of social injustice, inequality, and oppressive relationships (Das & Anand, 2014; Dominelli, 2005; Razack, 2002; Wehbi, 2009, Crisp, 2015). In order to practice ethically without western egocentrism, international social work educators should develop terminology, conceptual frameworks, and practice principles that support a mutual exchange of knowledge and a compatibility with eastern communal thinking (Alphonse et al., 2008; Gopalkrishan and Pulla, 2016).

Maidment (2005) reported that problems of language and semantics, disparity of access to online technology due to differences in income, age, geography, and ethnicity, and logistical and institutional challenges also present challenges in a global context. Rautenbach and Black-Hughes (2012) identify technological issues as a particular challenge for the online classroom with varying Internet access and speed, hardware availability and technological support. Each university in this study also faced distinctive logistical challenges throughout the approval and recruiting process that are discussed in the methodology section.

Historically, physical study abroad opportunities have been the primary mechanism for exposure of students to other cultures. However, this is not financially or logistically feasible for most student. Soria and Troisi (2013) examined 'at home' alternatives to studying abroad experiences, focusing on students' perceptions of a range of at home activities including in-class opportunities to interact with students cross-nationally. They acknowledged the challenges of study abroad programs, identifying barriers to student participation as cost and lack of resources, with student ethnic minorities less likely to travel abroad due to family obligations and fear of racism. Greenfield, Davis and Fedor (2012) specifically focused on study abroad barriers for social work students, noting the reluctance of some students to travel due to family and work responsibilities; with Crisp (2015) arguing "travel abroad opportunities are most likely to be taken up by students from more privileged backgrounds" (p. 3). At home experiences are often, therefore, more viable and attractive to a wider cohort of social work students. Rautenbach and Black-Hughes (2012) agree, noting that increased access to the Internet can mean the "learning environment is thus clearly no longer limited to a local context. Through the use of

inexpensive Internet-related technology, students can now be linked to learning opportunities that are truly global" (p. 813).

Research literature also denotes several advantages of online teaching, to which there are unique benefits associated with teaching in a global classroom. Evidenced benefits of online teaching and learning include its flexibility, increased accessibility, peer- and networked- learning, and fewer penalties for noncompliance (Ally, 2004). Maguth's (2014) study supported the positive potential of digital learning environments to increase global learning; with Carter-Anand and Clarke (2009) arguing that an "international electronic exchange has great potential to make global social work real to students by allowing them to cross boarders through cyberspace, however it requires careful planning and attention to cultural and educational system differences" (p. 583).

A number of other advantages of online courses include its learner-centered instructional paradigm, innumerable local and global sources of learning (e.g., resources, support, and networks), cross-teaching among 'experts' around the world, and its ability to reach and train the global community. Online teaching methods are less reliant on personal expertise of faculty and more reliant on global expertise available online, which could support greater learning (Cheng, 2001). Additionally, development of model modules, which is often the primary mode of online course delivery, serves to offer a comparable learning experience to face-to-face sessions by providing online students organization, guidance, context, and lectures (e.g., narrated PowerPoints, online video lectures via Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, Skype). The teaching team actualized these benefits by developing five modules to deliver course materials for *International Social Work.*

Digital learning also facilitates the use of cooperative groups and student participation focused on application rather than knowledge acquisition (Hopson, Simms & Knezek, 2001). In addition to an emphasis on application of knowledge, online teaching accommodates student needs for flexible access, is feasible to reach particular students, offers pedagogical advantages, and incentivizes staying up-to-date with the new age of learning (Brown, 2000; Rautenbach and Black-Hughes, 2012; Maguth, 2014). Uniquely, a global classroom offers an enriched learning experience linked to allowing its students to "participate in a global conversation," "network with other social workers from countries all over the world," "maintain a global perspective and not focus only on [his/her] 'expertise' or local area," and "broaden my knowledge and perspective of the social work profession," according to reports from *International Social Work*'s students. This global classroom also provided the opportunity to "learn alongside and share/learn about the perspectives of others from various parts of the world," and be in "the presence of diversity in all its extension by the delicate and exquisite richness that it brought," reported these students, which can enhance cultural competence.

The global demand for effective online learning inexorably prompts social work educators to provide online instruction in empirically-supported modes using the known, best practices (Robbins, Coe Regan, Williams, Smyth & Bogo, 2016). The best practices are discussed in terms of student behaviors, faculty behaviors, faculty-student interactions, learning environment, technology support, and administrative support, using a culturally competent approach to international social work. All of which are associated with predicted positive learning attitudes, higher achievement, and a smoother online teaching and learning process (Sunal, Sunal, Odell, & Sundberg, 2003; Maguth, 2014).

A culturally competent, ethical, and effective approach to international social work education and practice integrates attainment of universal human rights literacy, development of universal human rights empathy, endorsement of universal human rights responsibility, and implementation of universal human rights action. Researchers endorse reflection on respective normative views, values, and beliefs and the recognition of a "different way of knowing" (Razack, 2009). Razack (2009) further notes the importance of understanding the ways in which each person is involved in the formation, construction, and experience of international issues. This reflection and consideration is integral to not only to careful conceptualization of international issues but also appropriate, ethical and effective social work intervention. For example, Bourassa (2009) examines traditional concerns and interventions for social work such as a focus on the individual, family, and small groups and adoption of psychotherapy, which may be ineffective and even "…damaging, since well-being in any context is linked to a specific culture and the ways in which individuals express, experience and develop meaning for their lives (p. 598).

Methods

The purpose of the project was to develop an online "global classroom" to teach a course titled, *International Social Work*, with social work students from around the globe participating from their home countries of USA, Hong Kong, South Africa, Mexico, and Australia. The course was developed and hosted at the University of Tennessee using Blackboard as the online **learning management system** for the course**. (NOTE: However, this course could be hosted on any learning management system being run within a university setting.)** The syllabus and course website were developed from June 2013 - January of 2014. The project team

communicated frequently during this time frame via email to get the course approved at their respective universities, recruit students, and provide input on course content.

Each university faced distinctive logistical challenges throughout the approval and recruiting process. For example, based on each university's requirements, the registration process to participate in the project was handled differently by each university that participated. Students were recruited into the course by their respective faculty and were not required to pay any additional cost to take this course; however, they were required to register and pay any fees required as part of their normal university studies.

The online course was implemented from January 2014 - December 2014 and included 48 students from five different countries around the world. Specifically, a total of 48 graduate social work students participated in the course: 25 from the USA, 4 from South Africa, 11 from Mexico, 6 from Hong Kong, and 2 from Australia. The course utilized the *Handbook of International Social Work* as the course textbook, and a copy of the textbook was sent to each faculty member so that students would have free access to the course textbook. In addition, various course materials were provided in the online course site, such as, peer- reviewed readings provided in pdf files, IFSW website and reports, videos, websites, podcasts, lecture notes, and recorded lectures by the lead professor and various international experts on issues related to international social work. The online course provided a wealth of resources on international social work to the students participating in the course.

Peer learning was a key component of the online course. The students participated in a "virtual coffee shop" to blog and chat with the lead professor on a regular basis. **The virtual coffee was used to simulated traditional office hours**

using a chat based platform which allowed students to ask the instructor questions or have open discussions with classmates. The students also participated in bi-weekly discussion boards to discuss topics, such as, human rights, women's issues, international policies, child welfare, poverty, trauma, conflict, health issues, refugees/immigrant issues, and the opportunities and challenges of international social work.

In addition, students were required to participate in an event that celebrated World Social Work Day 2014. Afterwards, the students blogged about the event he/she participated in on the online course site. This provided students with the opportunity to promote international social work at their universities and in their communities. Students were also required to take quizzes and exams as well as prepare a critical thinking paper. The lead professor graded all assignments, posted grades in the online course site, and submitted final course grades to all the respective faculty partners.

Qualitative data were collected from course participants regarding their experiences in this global classroom. **Data were collected via confidential student weekly blogs in the course website that were only visible to the instructor and anonymous course feedback provided through an online standard course survey.** Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the primary host institution, and all students signed an informed consent form that granted collection of qualitative data from their blogs and discussion boards in the online course site. Themes were independently identified by two of the researchers using a six-phased process of thematic analysis guided by an inductive approach and the principles of grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013). Any differences in themes were

discussed until agreement was reached. Validation of themes was sought by other members of the research team.

Results

Two broad themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of student reflections:

- Subject engagement and experience
- Learning about international social work.

The reflections are presented according to these themes and we have selected quotes from students that best exemplify their experiences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Within each of these themes students focused particularly on learning through connection with their fellow students, the facilitation of their learning through their engagement with the global classroom and their increased understanding of international social work practice.

Before exploring the students' reflections we think it is worth noting that the students that undertook this class were likely to be highly motivated to undertake and participate in the class **as it was an elective course and required more effort to enroll (e.g., fluency in English, instructor approval, taking a class on the USA academic calendar, etc)**. They were interested in international social work practice and they were comfortable with and willing to engage in an online learning environment – this was a subject that matched their area of interest and their learning style:

> *I really embraced this course because it appealed to my techno-savvy personality! (South African student)*

> *The course was perfect for me. (Mexican student)*

I did it just because I wanted to learn about it. It is a door that helps me to look at the world and myself. (Hong Kong student)

Greenfield et al. (2012) notes that students who voluntarily participate in international social work programs maybe more likely to report positive learning outcomes, as they evidence 'cultural desire' (Doring, Lahmar, Bouabdallah, Bouafia, Bouzid, Gobsch and Runge, 2010). In their reflections on teaching a cross-national online social work class Carter-Anand and Clarke (2009) also found students "were genuinely curious about developing new ways of making contact across borders and learning how social workers thought and practiced in different countries" (p. 595).

There were also students who investigated the possibility of participating in this international social work class, but for various reasons were not able to enroll. For example, for the students located in the southern hemisphere (the subject was administered from the northern hemisphere) the subject was offered outside of their standard academic year. These practicalities, although initially appearing minor, can have a negative impact on students' engagement (Crisp, 2015). Others found the level of engagement and assessment required beyond what was required in their own university's degree – at a postgraduate rather than at an undergraduate level. Some potential students also found that there was literally 'no room' in their degree to include an additional subject. Crisp (2015) also notes that subjects are often offered outside of "local accreditation of the various partners" (p. 5), which can be an additional burden for staff, but also offers opportunity to be creative. Although Rautenbach and Black-Hughes (2012) comment, "international collaboration[s] were dependent on the time and resources committed on the individual on both sides" (p. 799).

Theme 1: Subject Engagement and Experience

Online Learning Environment

Students reported that their experience was of a rich and authentic (Maguth, 2014) learning environment that promoted deep engagement with the subject content:

I cannot believe that over the past 4 months it (the course) has become such a large part of my academic life… I loved the concept of participating in an online classroom! I think for me there was such a thrill in being part of a multi-national class. I loved watching the lectures via the blackboard. (South African student)

I especially enjoyed the course materials, such as websites, videos, and even some of the readings and the book. I felt they were very relevant and clearly defined the issues of global social work. (USA student)

The discussion boards have been an excellent way of sharing resources, ideas, and knowledge. (USA student)

This course should be available to more students as it is a great way to learn about specific topics in International Social Work. (Australian student)

This positive learning environment not only relies on thoughtfully developed materials and technologies but also the consistent facilitative engagement of the lecturer (Rautenbach and Black-Hughes, 2012).

Connecting with Others

The rich online learning environment formed the foundation for students' learning, however it was the interaction with international classmates that all student respondents indicated had the greatest positive impact on their learning:

Having the opportunity to be a part of an international group of students was perhaps one of the most enriching experiences of this course - it was of such value to hear the opinions of people from different countries across the world. (South African student)

I absolutely love that I was able to learn alongside and share/learn about the perspectives of others from various parts of the world. (USA student)

I really appreciated for all classmates and teacher's encouragement. Freedom of speech could lead to the freedom of mind. (Hong Kong student)

I think one of the benefits of this class has been hearing from students who are from other countries. Without each of us knowing, it has provided some of the most honest dialogue on the current topics of social work. I know there have been times when I was surprised or enlightened upon hearing about the way things are in another country. I am sure they were sitting back and thinking some of the same things when reading ours from the U.S. If you were to tell us that people in a certain country think this way, or navigate through their systems this way, it would have less of an impact for me. (USA student)

What I liked about the course was the presence of diversity in all its extension by the delicate and exquisite richness that it brought. (Mexican student)

One student suggested that the connections between students could be enhanced further:

I would have loved more online sessions… Sometimes I find it difficult to find motivation to read through the articles or read through the discussion boards. It would be amazing if there were to be a way to have a virtual session with

everyone in the class. That way we could debate back and forth but also but a

face to the names. I know that would be challenging, but it would be a

memorable part of the class. (Country not known)

Carter-Anand and Clarke (2009) also found that: "There was great richness in the learning experience of comparing different cultural contexts and understandings of social work. The personal connections led to greater interest in cross-cultural understandings of social work" (p. 596).

However, it is wise not to assume that interaction with others in a virtual space necessarily fosters and develops a deeper learning (Volet & Wosnitza, 2004) – the role of the teacher (as previously mentioned) is crucial. In their examination of cross-national online learning experiences Volet and Wosnitza found the foundation of a successful cross-national online classroom is "creating and maintaining a sound social space for participants to be motivated and stay engaged" (p. 27).

I really enjoyed the Course Café and getting to know my fellow students a little better. This was a great way to connect with everyone. (Australian student)

Soria and Troisi (2013) found when students had opportunities to interact with students from a different cultural context they reported "statistically significant higher development of intercultural competencies" (p. 11). Interestingly Soria and Troisi (2013) also found that enrolling in global/international coursework was more positively associated with the acquisition of intercultural competencies than study abroad programs.

Tasks and Content

Students reported that both the tasks required and the content of the global classroom facilitated a learning connection:

I found the discussion boards were insightful and enjoyable. I liked that there wasn't a prerequisite for the amount/length of contribution. I enjoyed seeing the similarities and differences emerge throughout the discussions. It was evident that even in an online platform – there are still dominant members as in a regular group context! (South African student)

Another item I like is the discussion board. We know the point of view of my colleagues, this confirmed many of the theoretical aspects of each culture and values. (Mexican student)

Although having an opportunity for private reflection was also valued:

The journals were also helpful to me, as I like the opportunity to vent in that way, knowing that all would not see, but I could share my thoughts. (USA student)

Theme 2: Learning about International Social Work

Articulated Learning within the Subject

Some students were able to specifically articulate what they had learned in the global classroom – although, for most students, it was more difficult to identify concrete learning outcomes. This lack of articulation does not concern Lilley, Barker and Harris (2014) who argue, "understanding global complexity extends beyond practical representations of knowledge and skills" (p. 5).

One of the elements that I liked about this course was the textbook that was used in this area. I think this book is very interesting in the chapters describing the elements and experiences of international social work. In my case I can say

the subject information of older adults is invaluable to start now face another

sector of the population (children and youth) helped me to direct my research.

(Mexican student)

I found the academic articles incredibly interesting; my favourite was module 4

which included the sections about children and family life perspective. I also

appreciating watching the YouTube videos and utilising the websites as

learning aids. I found myself participating more and more on global online

agendas and forums! (South African student)

A Broader Understanding

Students were more easily able to describe a transformative learning experience. This is consistent with Volet and Wosnitza (2004) who found that students in their study reported, "their knowledge and understandings had been expanded and transformed by the online interactions" (p. 25).

This course has allowed me to increase my academic vision as well as the

international social work perspective. (Mexican student)

I feel like I walk away from this course with a greater knowledge, one that will

allow me to proudly participate in global conversation, a greater hunger for

more, and a greater drive to ensure that I become a social worker who is

making monumental strides in welfare work within every aspect of human

functioning and global society as a whole. (South African student)

I feel as though I am ending this course with a new perspective on life and

helping! As a result of this course I have found the stirring to apply for an

internship at the UN in America! So I wait in anticipation for what may be the

start of some interesting collaboration between an African social worker and the world! (South African student)

Not only did reading the textbook bring to light many issues that I have not given much thought to, but it opened my eyes to those same issues when they came up in the news. My mild-moderate interest in refugees and preventing violence against women became a passion when I began noticing the almost constant reports of violent crimes against women in refugee camps and surrounding countries. I hope that I do not lose this passion once I begin full-time in my career. It seems as though it would be easy to slip back into ignorance and/or blissful unawareness, but I do not think that will be the case for me. (USA student)

Volet and Wosnitza (2004) found an on-line classroom that enabled mutual support and mutual scaffolding provided opportunities for fellow class members to support each other's learning. Lilley, Barker and Harris (2015) in their study focusing on study abroad experiences also found "engaging in interpersonal encounters and interpersonal relationships with different others stimulates a global mindset" (p. 14). Listening to others acts as a catalyst for the students' own learning – which can of course occur in an online classroom as well as a study abroad experience.

Discussion

There are many challenges to engaging social work students in international learning opportunities/experiences as well as challenges with teaching social work content in the online learning environment (Robbins, Coe Regan, Williams, Smyth & Bogo, 2016). This project served as a pilot for the development of a new model for

teaching international social work curriculum content on a global scale as well as other international related social work courses. Compared to traditional study abroad experiences, it was a cost effective method for teaching across international borders and provided students with an opportunity to engage with students from around the world without leaving their host country.

This pilot project revealed unique challenges to teaching in a global classroom that are worth noting. Possible barriers to global online and international social work education include accommodating the expectations and interests of faculty and students, maintaining accreditation requirements, and managing financial concerns (Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011). Furthermore, a challenge that is unique to international social work education is problems of culture and environment, teaching style differences, and problems related to different educational values and cultures (e.g., Western egocentrism and it's incompatibility with collectivist cultures) (Maidment, 2005, Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011). This project allowed professors and students from around the global to interact, share, and learn from each other utilizing a variety of perspectives and cultural approaches. **Although the findings from the current study are not generalizable, they do provide significant value in developing a new model of teaching globally across international borders. This course provides evidence that teaching in this mode can be successfully implemented, given the willingness of universities and academics to work collaboratively. From the authors' perspective, the biggest challenge in this course was not the students or course content, but the logistics of organizing how to allow students across institutions to take a course delivered across multiple countries that was cost neutral for the students. This premise required the academics involved to be committed to contributing to the learning process and**

handle the final grade recording at their own institution. There was institutional

agreement that this course would be of value to their students at each institution.

Strategies to simplify this process would greatly increase the accessibility of this

type of course for more students.

This global classroom offered an enriched learning experience linked to allowing its students to "participate in a global conversation," "network with other social workers from countries all over the world," "maintain a global perspective and not focus only on [his/her] 'expertise' or local area," and "broaden my knowledge and perspective of the social work profession," based on the student data.

> *There are many valuable aspects of this course: the scope of information that was provided for us, the opportunity to network with other social workers from countries all over the world, the platform for critical thinking regarding the social work profession today, and so much more. However, I feel that the most valuable gift that this course has given me is a hunger to KNOW my profession. (South African student)*

Research data also endorse necessity of, complexity of, and "global connections between social work practice, social development, and human empowerment," encouraging the adoption of a global citizenship framework and believing global issues are our problems here rather than their problems there (Hawkins & Knox, 2014, p.249). This global citizenship and leadership framework posits that attaining universal human rights literacy, developing universal human rights empathy, upholding universal human rights responsibility, and implementing universal human rights action can evoke global change and defend human rights; as social worker are called to be transformative, culturally competent leaders. Further projects and

research is needed to establish international learning and teaching opportunities that

are accredited and accessible to students regardless of geographic location or specific

university affiliation. **This global teaching model is not limited to international**

social work, but could be adapted to other social work courses that would benefit

from an international cohort discussing and debated relevant issues. Current

strategies to expand course offerings with international partners are being

explored and developed.

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