SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION UNDER GLOBALISATION: TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

EDUCACIÓN PARA EL TRABAJO SOCIAL BAJO UN SISTEMA DE GLOBALIZACIÓN: CORRIENTES Y CAMBIOS EN GRAN BRETAÑA

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ABSTRACT

British social work education has been shaped by the forces of globalisation, the 'new' managerialism, European harmonisation, devolution, and user empowerment. This has created a constantly changing curriculum which has been dominated by employer concerns with routine practice. These developments have subjected social work to the demands of international competition and commercial providers with the state losing provider status. Educators have been unable to exercise much influence in these shifting sands. Ironically, the international dimensions of social work and the need for a truly professionalised, highly paid and well-trained workforce able to deliver empowering practice, have been marginalised. The place of social work education in the academy remains suspect and social work's position as a research-led subject remains weak.

RESUMEN

La educación para el trabajo social en Gran Bretaña ha sido influenciada por las fuerzas de globalización, administración, harmonización y las demandas del consumidor. Esto ha resultado en un currículo que cambia constantemente y que esta muy influenciado por los deseos de los empleadores. El trabajo social esta sujeto a las demandas internacionales, a la competición, al modelo comercial en la provisión de servicios. Los educadores no han tenido mucha influencia en estas arenas movedizas. Irónicamente, las dimensiones internacionales, la necesidad de llegar a un grupo profesional bien pagado y bien entrenado han sido marginalizadas. El lugar académico y la posición del trabajo social como disciplina adelantada por las investigaciones continúan siendo dudosos.

KEYWORDS: UK Social work education, Contested areas, Employer needs, Professional standards, Liberal models, Structural inequalities, Oppression

PALABRAS CLAVES: Trabajo social en Gran Bretaña, Áreas de controversias, Necesidades de los empleadores, Estándares profesionales, Modelos liberales, Desigualdades estructurales

Introduction

Social work in Britain is changing considerably under the forces of globalisation, European harmonisation, 'new managerialism' and user empowerment. New forms of education and practice are evolving as a result. These engage with the rigours of market-discipline through the purchaser-provider split, commissioning agreements, 'contract' government and budget-led assessments for users of services. Meanwhile, practitioners have become demoralised; turnover in the profession is high; and the number of new entrants low, as those qualifying each year have been insufficiently numerous to meet demand. This has been the case for some time. Nationally, British social work education has 'undertrained' by about 500 each year for several decades. The shortage of personnel has recently compelled the British government to look overseas for qualified practitioners to cover the gap between the number of practitioners required in the workforce and those graduating from training.

In this paper, I consider recent developments in social work education in the United Kingdom, particularly the introduction of the new degree in qualifying social work. Using a perspective that examines the shifting terrain in which social work is currently located, I reflect upon how the forces of change have impacted on it. I look at the professionalisation of social work, the links between theory and practice, service delivery and 'client' empowerment (1). I conclude that social work education and training have become commodities that are redefining the meanings of both a liberal education and a vocational one. In this environment, practitioners and educators are struggling to develop forms of anti-oppressive practice that meet the demands of social work in the 21st century.

Changing British social work education

Social work education in the UK has undergone considerable changes since the 1970s. Legislation created the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in 1970 to control social work education following the reorganisation of social work practice into huge bureaucracies under the stewardship of local authorities (Jaques, 1977). CCETSW was a quango – a quasi-governmental organisation, subject to legislation which dictated to a considerable degree what subject matter should be covered in the two year Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) and ensured a roughly 50-50 division in the time students spent in the academy and on placement. CCETSW was then governed by a Council that had a reasonable balance of academic, practitioner, employer and other interests, and was chaired by an academic.

During the early days of reorganisation, social workers exuded confidence and felt that they could end poverty and help people regain their self-esteem through expert interventions that would be delivered in local communities. This ambition was articulated in the Seebohm (1968) reorganisation and years later the Barclay (1982) Report. Training was based in universities by linking the CQSW to either a Batchelor or Master's degree. The CQSW was provided by CCETSW; the academic award by the relevant university. CCETSW accredited courses for a maximum of five years, subject to regular review.

Universities were responsible for ensuring that courses met their teaching obligations between CCETSW visits. Neither service users nor practitioners played a significant role in this system. CCETSW held no duty for either registering or licensing social workers;

nor did social workers have a protected title. The lack of sufficient personnel to meet the rapid expansion in services meant that employers could appoint anyone to undertake social work tasks.

The CQSW was a product of its time, and by the mid-1970s, employers were concerned that it was too 'academic' and engaged with critical theory which dealt with issues that were outside the remit of the profession, namely, the emancipation of 'clients' in and through practice. The course at the University of Warwick was seen as a leader in this direction and came under constant attack, even though no evidence was produced to show that its graduates (at Master's level) were underperforming in the jobs to which they were appointed. Indeed, a number of them have risen to the top ranks of the profession. But the employers were determined to begin the process of wresting back control of the curriculum. With the help of CCETSW they introduced the Certificate in Social Services (CSS) which was a shorter qualification focusing primarily on practice skills. It was often taught in the then polytechnics and not associated with a degree qualification.

The universities were simultaneously complaining about the lack of time to adequately train students for practice. During the mid-1980s, they lobbied for a three year qualification – the qualifying diploma for social work (QDSW). This was paralleled by demands from the European Union (EU) for harmonisation and recognition within its borders of professional qualifications of three-year duration which meant that the CQSW was excluded. The QDSW was rejected by government as too costly to run. CCETSW offered the two-year Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) programme instead. Its introduction coincided with the polytechnics becoming universities shortly afterwards in 1992.

Aside from its commitment to addressing structural inequalities and oppression, the DipSW followed fairly traditional pedagogic approaches to teaching and learning. But it also emphasised competence-based approaches to social work using functional analyses which divided complex professional tasks into simple, discrete components that focused on outcomes and ignored the links between input, process and outputs (see Dominelli, 1996 for a critique of this). This orientation was underpinned through the use of workplace-based training routes and non-tertiary level national vocational qualifications (NVQ) as the structure within which competences were located to facilitate the rapid training of large numbers of workers lacking any form of professional training or qualification. Together, these developments supplemented the managerialist control of professional labour. They gave managers greater freedom to redeploy practitioners and employ less qualified and lower paid women (mainly) to undertake work formerly done by professionally qualified workers.

The DipSW retained the weaknesses of the CQSW in terms of the inadequate period of training, the optional integration with a university degree and not meeting EU directives on harmonisation. Additionally it aborted the concern with course content in favour of a focus on outcomes and an exceedingly bureaucratic approach to education and training, turning the bureau-professional (Parry, Rustin & Satyamurti, 1980) into the bureau-technocrat (Dominelli, 2004). Although the DipSW incorporated some best practices initiated voluntarily by courses teaching the CQSW, e.g., requiring academics and practitioners to work together in delivering social work education, it did so through time-consuming and complex partnership arrangements. It also introduced some worthwhile innovations, namely, the accreditation of agencies and practice teachers, the second opinion procedures

to re-assess students who 'failed' placement work as a guarantee against discriminatory practices, and a requirement that students demonstrated anti-oppressive skills, particularly in anti-racist social work (CCETSW, 1989). CCETSW's governing structure was changed by reducing the number of academic representatives on its Board to two and creating the Black Perspectives Committee to reverse racist practices within the profession. The lack of registration and licensing procedures and protected title for practitioners continued.

The DipSW was reviewed again shortly after its implementation in 1991 and came under sustained attack for its anti-racist content in the summer of 1993. As a result, CCETSW's governance mechanisms were restructured again in 1994 to eliminate the Black Perspectives Committee and reduce its concern with anti-racist social work. At the same time, the role of employers on the governing body was increased, and the government began to pull probation training out of social work. The split between them was implemented in 1998 when the Diploma in Probation Studies (DPS) commenced. The Home Office and probation service assumed control of the process of delivering probation training. Universities became involved in the DPS through contractual measures or by being part of a consortium delivering the programme.

By this time, many academics had lost faith in CCETSW's capacity to defend social work education, and criticisms of its operations increased. Its emphasis on functional analysis as the basis for the core competences of practice was found wanting on many levels – deskilling the profession, not encapsulating the complexities of practice, diminishing professional accountability for the judgements social workers made, ignoring process in both education and practice, and failing to deliver on anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1996).

CCETSW was replaced by the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2000 and the days of the DipSW were numbered. It gave way to the three year degree qualification in September 2003 (GSCC, 2002a, 2002b). This reaffirmed social work's place in the academy and integrated the professional qualification with an academic degree. It also became more compliant with EU regulations on harmonisation, an issue which does not yet weigh heavily on British social work educators, practitioners or policymakers. The GSCC also introduced registration for social workers in 2004. Licensing and a protected title remain as issues for future resolution.

The new degree has a 'prescribed curriculum' to cover certain set subjects including human growth and development; assessment, planning, intervention and review; communication skills especially with children and adults with particular communication needs; law, partnership working and information sharing across disciplines and agencies (GSCC, 2002b). These topics have a distinctly old-fashioned feel given new theoretical developments in the academy arising from insights derived from emancipatory social movements, social constructionism and postmodernism.

The period of training remains shorter than that required of doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists and other professionals who work alongside social workers, thus offering little in redressing professional status and power imbalances between social workers and the professionals they work alongside. The need for better interagency collaboration has been addressed recently by a central government funded experiment in interprofessional training, the New Generations Project, at Southampton University. In it, nine different professional groupings, including social workers, share some time being taught together

and learn about each other's values and ways of working. (Details of this project can be found under 'common learning' on website http://www.hciu.soton.ac.uk). Whilst helpful in addressing issues at the personal level, it does little in tackling the structural imbalances that prevent different professionals from working effectively together.

The GSCC's documentation continues to say little about the role of research in social work, although it demands the grounding of knowledge in evidence-based practice. Its presumption of evidence-based practice ignores the contested nature of knowledge and the various ontological and epistemological assumptions that allow for the differentiated valuing of knowledge and privileging of certain kinds of knowledge over others. The government has exacerbated this concern by giving the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) an applied research remit to improve practice. This is an important initiative, but not enough to raise the status of the profession in the broader research world where basic research counts, nor does it help to develop its weak theoretical base.

Some safeguards that accompanied the DipSW have been jettisoned under the new degree, e.g., failing students are no longer protected by a second opinion procedure which provided for the independent reassessment of their work. These arrangements are now voluntary. Moreover, a practice teacher is no longer required to hold a practice teaching certificate to formally supervise students (GSCC, 2002a). On the positive side, the new degree remains committed to the integration of theory and practice and devotes considerable periods of time to 'hands-on' practice. And, it requires that partnerships previously encompassing the academy and field are extended to include service users in designing courses, delivering and assessing them.

The new degree has been introduced within the political context of devolution. As a result, the 'national' framework present under the DipSW has fragmented somewhat, with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland following slightly different orientations and priorities than those evident in England. The commitment of the Scottish Assembly to abolishing tuition fees for students in higher education has been a major difference between Scotland and England. As devolution is fairly new, a greater commitment to welfare gives scope for more development in autonomous directions.

Policymakers and employers have dominated the agenda for social work education since the mid-1970s. But educators have used their collective power through the Joint Universities Council, Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC) to promote their concerns. JUC-SWEC represented their interests in discussions about the content and structure of the new degree with the GSCC and the Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services (TOPSS). Educators and practitioners had limited input through consultative groupings subject to Chatham House rules of confidentiality which constrained the soundings that they could take from their constituents. JUC-SWEC succeeded in having a significant input into the theoretical bearings of the new degree through the inclusion of the Benchmark Statement for social work.

Social work remains a divided profession, with separate bodies representing a range of stakeholders, each speaking with a different voice. This disparate collection of organisations empowers government in imposing its views on what constitutes an appropriate education for practitioners. Educators have tried to address the professions' fragmentation by developing the General Assembly for Social Work to bring under one umbrella the bodies representing the diverse interests held by employers, researchers, practitioners

and educators. This body is still in its infancy, but its progress has been slow.

The requirements of the new degree continue to be employer-led. This orientation is further confirmed by its having to meet occupational standards set by TOPSS, also dominated by employers. Devices such as occupational standards build upon an earlier government and employer critique of social work education, namely, that it did not prepare students for practice, i.e., going into the office ready to begin work on the Monday after completing the course without extra training. This is an unrealistic and short-sighted view that ignores the extensive diversity in employment sites and their varied requirements.

Despite these initiatives, social work educators have been unable to adequately grasp the complexity of the shifting context in which courses operate and develop alternative discourses that carry widespread support. Nor have they succeeded in producing a model of education for training the practitioners of the future that carries the support of all of the stakeholders wanting a say in social work education.

GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

As a social phenomenon, globalisation has involved the penetration of capitalist social relations into every aspect of life from the international level to the personal domain. In the process of establishing its hegemony as a profit-oriented system that places a price on everything, globalisation has spread into the arena of social work practice and education more generally. Both areas had formerly been deemed outside the market nexus. Practice had been conceptualised as more of a vocation or calling that drew upon altruistic motives in serving others. So, the profession was badly equipped to handle the commodifying impetus of globalisation on social relations.

Social work education had traditionally favoured a liberal model that included apprenticeship-based training in which a commitment to learning from students as well as teaching them by doing dominated the training experience. This aimed to produce experts who drew on a neutral and objective professional repertroire to achieve change at the individual level and integrate 'clients' more effectively into mainstream society. This has been called 'the maintenance school' (Davies, 1985; Dominelli, 1996). The 'maintenance' approach to social work has been challenged by those in 'the emancipatory school'. The latter sought to combine change at the individual level with structural changes in the social order, and dismantle oppressive social relations that perpetuate 'power over' dynamics that keep service users in their place (Dominelli, 1996, 2002a, 2004).

These two schools of thought provide the contested terrain in which the role and purpose of social work in society and that of social work education are being played out. As the matter being argued over is social work practice, the range of stakeholders involved in determining what should be done is extensive and includes service users, government, the lay public, policymakers, practitioners, academics and students. Each grouping has its own view of what is appropriate and it can often conflict with that of the others.

Globalisation has cut across these debates by imposing a market discipline on social workers, thereby changing the daily routines of practice, working relations, and service delivery. It has also led to the internationalisation of social problems, particularly in the areas of migration, the sex trade in children, prostitution, child abduction, drugs and crime. Yet, practice is predicated largely upon what happens on the ground in a particular locality, and social work educators have yet to engage with the implications of globalisation for their teaching.

The 'new' managerialism goes hand-in-glove with globalisation. It tenets are popular amongst employers because these enable them to develop a corporate image and utilise techniques that give them greater control over professional labour. In this they use 'economics as ideology' rather than engaging in a political debate about the nature and purpose of social work (Dominelli & Hoogvelt, 1996). And so, budget-led practice is promoted through the purchaser-provider split whereby social workers employed in the statutory sector *commission* services from others rather than provide them directly themselves. In addition, performance-related pay, competence-based approaches to practice and the new information technologies are brought into play to encourage certain types of professional behaviour rather than others. These include providing 'value for money', 'quality services' and shifting the balance of power in worker-client relationships more towards service users. Used as instruments of control, these have reduced professional power and hold practitioners accountable for the decisions they make.

Globalisation has internationalised social problems, their tentacles spreading into many countries giving nation-states more problems in common. Internationalisation has changed the local and incorporated it into the global. For example, migration has meant that many families are now transnational, i.e., family members live in many different countries and link up with each other through extensive networks which are often invisible to the practitioner who operates on the basis of dealing with the people whom they can directly access in a particular geographical site. Social work education has not dealt effectively with this complex and complicating dimension of globalisation in practice and the new degree does not require social workers to either understand or become familiar with the international elements of their work.

Globalisation has also contributed to the internationalisation of the nation-state. In this, the state assumes responsibility for ensuring that the domestic economy can compete in the international arena. As a key feature of globalising societies, this internationalisation of the state involves policymakers and politicians in supporting processes that open-up social services to market forces. For social work this means subjecting the profession to market discipline and using it as a site for capital accumulation as global corporations take advantage of investment opportunities in overseas locations. These trends have encouraged the state's withdrawal as a service provider and engaged private providers in service provision in the hopes of making a profit. These developments have commodified practice by reducing its relational aspects and turned it into a budget-led activity in which social workers are held accountable for what they do via managerial techniques that include performance-related pay, the proceduralisation of practice and the empowerment of users through bureaucratic instruments such as complaints procedures and the Citizen's Charter.

Case management became employers' favoured form of intervention. Its working methodologies have enabled private entrepreneurs to exploit the personal social services to accumulate capital, promote corporate identities and the 'new' managerialism and challenge professional power. Case management undermined social work's professional base by not requiring case managers to have social work qualifications. Many people coming into social work now, particularly at the higher echelons, hold MBAs rather than social work qualifications. Thus, there is no commitment to a common value base as different disciplines have varying priorities. This exacerbates value differentials between front-line workers and their managers. Additionally, case management has diminished the relationship basis of the profession while competence-based approaches have locked women into a low-paid ghetto.

So by 2000, the changes in the welfare state, particularly its commitment to opening up a quasi-market in health and social care services were raising different kinds of demands. The emphasis on budget or resource-led rather than needs-led assessments has relegated relational skills to a lesser importance than knowing how to manage budgets and resources – or where to find these if they were not readily available within one's own agency. The shift away from the provider state onto the commissioning one also reinforced the valuing of economic and managerialist skills over those linked to relationship building.

The development of 'contract' government (Greer, 1994) and opening up service delivery to private providers has not improved social work's responses to the problems that 'clients' face. The 'contract' state has failed to recognise the uncertain and constantly changing nature of these problems, treating them instead as fixed and immutable. Its preference for the 'one-size fits all' needs intensifies these inadequacies in a climate demanding recognition of diversity.

Meanwhile, service users, particularly those attached to the new social movements are demanding a greater say in the types of services offered to them. They want these to be empowering and more responsive to their needs. Thus, the expectations they hold about greater accountability for practitioner actions converge with those of managers.

These changes in practice carry implications for social work education, which despite constant revision has failed to provide students with the knowledge and skills that they require in meeting the new challenges of practice. Practitioners claim that in hard-pressed, under-resourced local authorities, they are unable to live up to the values that they have been taught in empowering practice (Lawrence, Dustin, Kasiram, & Partab, 2003). Additionally, they complain that they are not adequately trained to handle diversity and the issues that arise from increasing human migration and its attendant social problems (Dominelli & Khan, 2000).

Professionalising social work

Social work has had to struggle for its place in the academy (Parton, 1996), particularly as a social science-led, research-based discipline and for recognition as a profession (Heraud, 1976). Its desire to be admitted as a fully fledged member of the academy has been a longstanding one made more difficult by the fact that the qualification for social work has long been divorced from the award of a degree, a position that the new three year qualification seeks to redress. Social work's location in the academy remains problematic. It is seen as having an overly vocational bias, i.e., dominated by teaching considerations that are extremely time-consuming, especially in terms of servicing placements and maintaining an array of networks with service providers, agencies and organisations representing service users.

This creates a tension between teaching and research which is more than a time management one. The practicalities of heavy teaching loads squeeze research time for social work educators. This has been recognised a little by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in granting social work education higher levels of funding than those allocated to other social sciences to which it is related, e.g., sociology and social policy, to purchase teaching support to free time for research. However, not all of this money reaches social work staff. Universities usually choose to divert some of this money to provide central services that benefit the entire student population or academic

community.

Other obstacles to professionalising practice and its place in the academy are linked to an enduring shortage of placements. Under-funding has bedevilled placement provision and strains the apprenticeship model. Heavy workloads have hindered local authority placement providers' capacity to release enough practitioners to meet demands for placements, thus putting a brake on the numbers of students that could be trained. The government claims that it has allocated sufficient funds for the 'on-the-job' part of social work students' education through the rate support grant – money central government allocates to local authorities, the bodies responsible for municipal services of which social services departments are a part. However, this has usually been lost in general funding and unavailable for this specific purpose.

Moreover, teams have become so stretched by onerous caseloads that it has been difficult to find staff within an existing complement of practitioners with sufficient time to invest in training students. The time required is considerable. Research by Claytor, Dominelli and Sibanda (1994) found that to provide a high quality teaching and learning experience, practitioners would need to allocate about 50 per cent of their working time to student supervision and related activities such as teaching, attending meetings with university staff, updating their own training, assessing and documenting student progress and writing reports. Some partnerships enjoyed these arrangements in the early days of the DipSW partnerships, but protected workloads for practice teachers have been discarded by many placement providers as resources have become tighter since then.

Some voluntary organisations and private agencies have come in to take up the slack in placement provision. These are paid a nominal sum per day for having students (currently £20 daily). This does not cover actual costs, but as it is integrated into normal working regimes at marginal costs it is seen as providing extra income. And so, more students are being placed in these sectors. However, the quality is variable, depending on the skills of the individual practitioner and the opportunities that the placement provides. Often, one organisation cannot provide the range of work necessary to assess all the core competences and so the practice teacher has to find learning opportunities for the student in other agencies. These have been called brokerage placements and require skilful co-ordination to ensure that the student's learning experience is not jeopardised by being fragmented and patchy in comparison to being based in a statutory sector offering greater continuity, a broader range of work possibilities and one practice teacher. Thus, a market-place in placement provision has been established.

Students on brokerage placements currently are increasingly likely to be supervised in 'long-arm' supervision arrangements. Long-arm supervisors often work free-lance and are contracted to support a particular placement. They are accredited practice teachers who do not work on the site where the students are located, but formally supervise them by making regular visits on a weekly or fortnightly basis. They take responsibility for assessing the student and writing the assessment reports that are submitted to the university. In these situations, daily supervision is provided by unaccredited on-site supervisors who are expected to provide the work the student would undertake during their placement and which forms the basis for the assessment of competence to practice.

The worthy goals of broadening access and augmenting the number of students that qualify in any given year have encouraged the use of workplace pathways. Students on

these programmes may remain in their place of employment for their placement and may end up being supervised by line managers. These situations can engender conflicts of interests in which students are deterred from engaging in critical reflective practice that places their own agency under the microscope. Sensitive criticism of practice may carry negative repercussions for promotion prospects later on if students become labelled 'troublemakers'. Another danger for students on placement in their place of employment is that of being used as an extra pair of hands to cover staffing shortages. Thus, their role as students and the time required for reflective practice are not fully respected.

Social work has engaged in a longstanding struggle over its professional identity. Its lack of professional status is intensified by poor socialisation into the profession, symbolised by inadequate periods of training, lack of control over entry into its ranks and the absence of a restricted field of knowledge (Flexner, 1915). It has also been hampered by poor pay for the responsibilities practitioners carry, particularly in child protection and mental health work. Lower levels of training to those enjoyed by other caring professionals such as doctors also downgrade its status. As does social work's association with women and 'women's work' (Dominelli, 2002b). Another key factor is the under-representation of men in front-line work. Men tend to seek better paid employment opportunities and dominate the managerial echelons. The cases of abuse by men carers (whether as individuals or in residential settings) have caused men to being considered unsuitable for some areas of practice, e.g., those involving children who have been sexually abused by men perpetrators (Pringle, 1995), a view that has been questioned (Christie, 2001).

Meanwhile, men who enter the profession intensify gender inequalities in the workforce by disproportionately dominating the senior management ranks; and progressing up the labour hierarchy more quickly than women (Howe, 1986; Dominelli 2002b). Gender relations favouring men's contributions reinforce structural inequalities between men and women. This structural shortcoming needs to be addressed to improve the status of women workers, provide equality of opportunities, and increase men's participation at the lower levels of the profession. Social work education can only tackle part of this problem, e.g., by helping students to understand how gender relations operate in social work and ensuring that men are included on courses in equal numbers to women.

However, educational inputs in this direction have to be supplemented by other changes. Wage levels have to rise to make social work attractive to men, and the profession has to develop a career ladder that provides high levels of pay for skilled practitioners. Moreover, women's work particularly that involved in caring for others has to be socially valued, and the nature of management and the organisational culture have to be changed to make management attractive to women and increase the likelihood of their wanting to join its ranks (Grimwood & Popplestone, 1993).

To promote the greater professionalisation of social work, social work educators have to contribute to addressing the real weaknesses of social work in the academy and the field. The demand for capable practitioners with expertise in their areas of work is appropriate and one to which social work educators must respond. No one wants assistance in their hour of need from an incompetent professional. The current framing of competences assumes that there is only one way of ensuring that service users get the best possible service - the employer-prescribed one which is highly bureaucratic and often misses genuine issues that have to be tackled. This position also fails to engage with forces external to the profession that impact upon social

work practice alongside those internal to it and exacerbates the inadequate preparation of practitioners. These influences range from macro-level economic and political forces to meso-level national considerations and micro-level demands from service users. The employers' view also assumes a static view of practice and gives them the upperhand in determining its future direction. Social work educators have a responsibility to a wider array of stakeholders than the employers. Lecturers espousing the liberal model of education have also argued that 'academic freedom' is the most important value for them to uphold. Their inability to do so has caused them to withdraw from social work education. This opinion is also inadequate because it fails to recognise the contested nature of knowledge.

Educators should advocate more strongly for a reduced employer voice because the services that social workers provide are not for the employer, but for those receiving them and ultimately funded by public monies. In this, the relationship between the worker and the end user is different from that presumed by corporate management which treats services, its end product and 'clients', as passive commodities - objects that are 'done to'. But, people are not units on balance sheets, and treating them as lacking agency exposes them to inappropriate models of management and care. Service provision is interactive and involves negotiation between subjects who are each trying to get out of the interaction what they think is best for them. 'Clients' have the capacity to engage in creating their own life circumstances. And so, practice should be reconceptualised as a negotiated outcome between agents who each have expertise that contributes to determining the outcome (Dominelli, 2004).

The corporate management approaches to practice that underpin the new degree continue to deskill practitioners by favouring functional analysis as the basis for identifying the component tasks that go into any activity. The practitioner is constrained to operate within employer approved tramlines to deploy resources according to set budgets and rigid standards and procedures. These may be inappropriate for the task at hand, but ensure that resources and demand are managed and rationed in predictable ways. Social work educators should form alliances with practitioners and service users while knowing where to draw social work's own borders and how to defend them from appropriation by others. There is a terrain called social work which is worth defending when appropriately 'client' centred. In Britain, service users, educators and practitioners could begin by reclaiming the term 'social work' and being clearer about the limited remit that goes with 'social care'.

Social work educators and practitioners are integrated into the structures of the modern nation-state. They depend on external sources for funding their activities and legitimating particular forms of practice. This means that they cannot control the profession themselves. Additionally, the vulnerability of many of the 'clients' who use their services requires curbs on practitioners' powers and their potential for abusing and exploiting them. Thus, the wide range of stakeholders to whom social workers are accountable create a wide ranging and often contradictory set of demands that they have to balance when delivering high quality services in an ethically appropriate manner. So, controls on their potential to abuse their powers are necessary; professional accountability is a must in ensuring 'client' protection.

Educators and trainers have struggled to engage with these contradictions including expectations that practitioners have reliable and proven ways of responding to need. These demand that practitioners deliver certainty in a constantly shifting professional environment and in a context over which they have only limited control. Given the uncertainties and

ambiguities in the job, it is surprising not that social workers make mistakes, but that they make so few. This is because they are trained to weigh up situations and make judgements that draw upon an extensive repertoire of knowledge and skills. This argues for longer training periods, the judicious use of discretion and user involvement in the decision-making processes of the helping relationship.

Managers expect higher levels of productivity from a professional workforce. But undertaking assessments is time-consuming. Corporate management's attempts to increase productivity by raising the throughput of work impacts badly on social workers' capacity to complete detailed and complicated assessments. The bureaucratic requirements of corporate management have risen dramatically to reduce the length of time that social workers spend in doing work other than form-filling. Meeting these demands is problematic in that the amount of time that social workers have to spend with people is limited and inadequate for the purpose.

CONTESTED DOMAINS: MANAGERIALISM AND EMPOWERING PRACTICE

Managers criticised practitioners in the late 1960s for not making good use of the resources that they expended on 'clients'. At the same time, a group of practitioners and service users formed a group that launched a magazine called *Case Con*. It sought to identify the weaknesses of practice and articulate service users' concerns. Their critique was aimed primarily at psychodynamic casework which had failed to address structural inequalities, especially those linked to class. Meanwhile, 'clients' represented in the 'new' social movements critiqued practitioners for not responding to their needs as they saw them.

Practitioners' inability to satisfy their critics led employers to curtail professional autonomy and the amount of resources they could use in a given case. Guidelines for practice, time-limited working based on a contract agreed by practitioners and 'clients', systems theory and task-centred social work were the key methods devised to allay managerial concerns.

Radical social work arose simultaneously as a grass-roots inspired response to the demands being made by the 'new' social movements involving claimants, women, 'black' people. Initially, it focused on 'class' inequalities as they were expressed in and through practice. More recently, gays and lesbians, disabled people and older people have moved it in new directions as anti-oppressive practice. Their endeavours have produced alternative theories and forms of practice that social workers can and do use. Social work educators have been expected to teach these as new course materials despite being unprepared for doing so because most had limited knowledge of the topics covered.

Anti-oppressive practice rooted in social divisions such as gender and 'race' emerged in the late-1970s, thus extending the terrain occupied by radical social work. It continued with the desire to eradicate structural inequalities, but unlike radical social work which assumed that class inequalities were paramount, those promoting anti-oppressive practice argued that there should be no hierarchy of oppression and sought to find commonalities as well as differences in the dynamics between various forms of oppression and the interaction between and within them. Academics, practitioners and service user groups began to put pressure on CCETSW as the body responsible for the content of the then CQSW, to make addressing oppression a requirement in social work education. The success of this campaign

featured briefly in Appendix 5 of *Paper 30*, the document that specified the requirements for the DipSW. Published in 1989, *Paper 30* was revised in 1991 and 1994, when much of its focus on oppression was deleted.

Under the DipSW, educators were expected to teach anti-oppressive practice with little prior training or qualifications in the subject and with a limited literature at their disposal. CCETSW sought to respond to their needs with the production of the materials prepared by the Northern Curriculum Project. But, it was too little, too late. Before the first cohort of DipSW students had graduated, the state and employers had formed an alliance that set about terminating the spread of anti-oppressive practice in social work including probation. They also sought to eliminate the committee that spearheaded much of this work within CCETSW, the Black Perspectives Committee.

The struggle hit the press in the summer of 1993 when key figures in the Thatcher government and the media accused those teaching anti-oppressive social work, but particularly anti-racist social work, of being political ideologues who were destroying practitioners' capacity to respond sensitively to people's needs (Appleyard, 1993; Pinker, 1993; Phillips, 1993, 1994). This view was challenged by both educators and practitioners. Most of them came out in support of social work's desire to address structural inequalities and promote social justice. The government's view won the day, and the dismantling of the DipSW followed. It resulted in revising *Paper 30*, restructuring CCETSW and eventually removing probation from the remit of social work education. The concern with empowering practice, particularly the involvement of service users continues. The new degree draws them into course structures. Anti-oppressive practice itself has branched into new arenas (Dominelli, 2002a), for example, sexual orientation, disability, ageism. It has also begun to retheorise its concern with social justice, human rights and citizenship as major driving forces in contemporary practice.

User Empowerment

The users of social work education consist of students, and at one remove, the 'clients' with whom they work. Social work students have tended to be older than other students in universities, with mature students making up a sizeable proportion of the entrants into the profession. They have been given small grants to make it easier for them to attend courses on a full-time basis. These amounts are insufficient, and students have struggled to make ends meet. Many have had to take up part-time jobs to assist them financially. Their financial penury has been exacerbated by the changes in the funding of higher education as the state insists that students pay more and more of their tuition and maintenance. There are a number of opponents to this position who argue that higher education should be free. Yet, the government is determined to individualise the benefits of educational work and not see the contributions to society that a well-educated workforce makes. Nor does it recognise the interdependent nature of social relations in complex societies where no one person is self-sufficient.

Student involvement in course decision-making structures is limited, usually to a few seats on staff-student liaison committees and Senate, a body that deliberates on academic matters. Students are excluded from the assessment process except for occasionally becoming involved in peer assessment of a course assignment. They are encouraged to evaluate the teaching that they receive, but this occurs after they have taken a course (or

unit within it) and are rarely engaged in determining its content. They also have access to complaints procedures to safeguard their interests.

Service users have begun to make demands of both practitioners and educators. Increasingly, they have worked with other professionals, policymakers and academics to call for changes to how courses are designed and students taught and assessed to enable them to play a greater role in these activities. The new degree has included their involvement as a requirement at a number of levels. Thus, they have become involved in selecting students for courses, making suggestions around curriculum content, teaching in particular sessions related to their areas of knowledge and expertise, and assessing students' work. To facilitate this, the state has made small sums of development money available for them to be trained in the relevant areas.

The danger here is one of tokenism, of having an isolated user sitting on various committees – course planning, teaching programmes, assessment, where many other competing voices mute that of the user. There is also the issue of paying them for the time they spend on course related activities. Users who sit on various boards may be offered an honorarium, but there is not sufficient funding to pay them for the whole of the time they expend in doing this work. Thus, the system may exclude people who need to earn their living through paid work from participating.

CONCLUSIONS

The complex and complicated demands of globalisation require highly skilled *people workers* with a wide range of skills – communication, advocacy and the enforcement of human rights and social justice. Practitioners need to be capable of putting empowering values into practice and responding to the contradictory sets of demands that impact upon them. They also require longer periods of training to cover new areas – economics for social workers, interactional negotiating skills, political skills, accessing resource and knowledge of the international domain and legislation relevant to it. Additionally, 'race' and gender inequalities in the profession have to be eradicated and higher rates of pay introduced to attract men into frontline social work. The suspicion with which men are held if they work in some aspects of social work also has to be allayed and procedures to safeguard vulnerable 'clients' devised. Social work educators have a large agenda to meet if they are to provide education that meets the challenges of the 21st century.

NOTES

1. I use the words 'clients', 'race', and 'black' or 'white' people in quotes to indicate their problematic usage and signal that these are socially constructed terms.

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