

EASSW Conference 27 June – 29 June 2017

Social Work Education in Europe: Challenging Boundaries, Promoting A Sustainable Future

Topic 2 : Development of curriculum and course contents in social work

Title of the symposium : Teaching and Learning international social work in european countries : teachers, researchers and students perspectives about the Erasmus Mundus programme ADVANCES (MA Advanced Development in Social Work).

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Language of présentation : English

Abstract : This proposal is based on a unique experience conducted by five European universities who have long practice in teaching social work or education : the development of a two-year Erasmus Mundus Master Programme in Social Work. Research on existing training in international social work revealed a number of trends. Firstly, there are only a limited number of international Master-level programmes in the field of social work, largely run by individual European universities and often focused on a particular geographic region. Secondly, national master programmes often have low international content, at best including a module on ‘comparative’ or ‘international’ perspectives, which runs the risk of compartmentalising the skills and knowledge needed for transnational practice. Finally, global demand for Advanced-training in social work is increasing as the profession is establishing in parts of the Middle East, Russia and CIS countries, China and parts of South East Asia. The ADVANCES programme (MA Advanced Development in Social Work) has been developed to give experienced social workers the opportunity to develop outstanding levels of practice skills so that they can confidently respond to the vulnerabilities and uncertainties facing societies across the world. The scope and allocation of scholarships within the Erasmus Mundus programme has focused our attention on teaching globally diverse cohorts. Thanks to scholarship funding from European Commission, we have been able to support cohorts of between 12 and 17 students from all continents of the globe since 2013. This is a challenging

experience for teachers and students, and it also raises questions about our way of teaching, learning and thinking international social work. This symposium will include four communications based on that experience, involving teachers, who are also researchers in the field of social work, and social workers who are studying in different cohorts in the program. These communications highlight the perspective of teachers, students and researchers about the possibility to imagine an international social work training, despite the sensitivity to context of social work intervention. Some key issues will be discussed : the process of development of a coherent pedagogical team across borders, the conceptual challenges when teaching international social work regarding to the scientific literature, the understanding by students of the global and indigenous nature of social work knowledge.

Communication 1

Title : The development of the Erasmus Mundus Advances Master

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Abstract : The first communication will give the framework and the design process of the MA in Advanced Development in Social Work (ADVANCES). The ADVANCES MA in Social Work course has been designed in line with key international documents on social work : Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession (IFSW and IASSW), the Global Agenda on Social Work and Social Development being developed by IFSW and partners, statements on social work education from national and international professional organisations, Charter of Rights for Social Workers (IFSW Europe). The ADVANCES course runs for 22 months and involves study periods in five different European countries in order to benefit from knowledge about different welfare models and approaches to practice, from teaching strengths and the experience of living in different cultures and societies. The first three semesters of the ADVANCES course are spent in Lincoln, UK, Aalborg, Denmark, and Lisbon, Portugal, respectively with teaching focusing on key areas of learning. A two-week Summer School takes place alternatively in Paris, France, or Warsaw, Poland, at the end of Semester 2. Students spend Semester 4 in different locations, and celebrate the end of their studies as an entire group at a final Student Research Conference during the Summer school alternatively in Warsaw or Paris. The course structure and contents of this curriculum have been designed by a consortium of teachers representing the five

member universities. Teaching and learning in the ADVANCES programme is designed to support key professional skills and competences in social work. In particular, the curriculum is based on the concept of “problem-based learning” in which students are encouraged to become independent, creative and reflective learners, just as in the research project towards which they work throughout the second year of the curriculum. ADVANCES modules have been organised around competences rather than thematic topics or bodies of knowledge. This is to encourage the development of skills that are relevant and transferable to the social sector.

Communication 2

Title Designing globally relevant social work education : diversity, identity and critical dialogue

Presenter Lars Uggerhøj, Full Professor of Social Work at the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Denmark

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Language of presentation : English

Abstract : Internationalisation is a key theme in social work as the profession both responds to sources of marginalisation and needs that defy borders and seeks global credentials to affirm its status and undoubted relevance in many spheres. The evolution of international associations and Global Standards help to promote interaction between practitioners and researchers. Increasing uncertainty, social change, financial pressures, natural disaster and new vulnerabilities have raised the salience of discussions about the international nature of social work. The existence of transnational, international or global dimensions in social work is hardly in question given increasing mobility and connectedness. This has direct implications for education with a growing need for the internationalisation of social work curricula. At the same time, discussions are emerging how to strike a balance between universal and local principles and approaches. Fears of professional imperialism from well-resourced western countries lead to reflection about the cultural specificity of training programmes, especially over individualistic models, theories and concepts. Dynamics to globalise the profession through shared standards, aims, definitions and organisations raise questions about the extent of sameness and commonality in social work across the globe or whether a focus on local distinctiveness is more appropriate. Finally, debates about the universality of human rights versus possible risks of cultural relativism present another

challenge in the design and content of social work training. By summarising experiences of designing and delivering the Advances programme, we suggest that much strength can come from emphasizing diversity rather than asserting a single approach. The main concern is how a single educational programme can be relevant to a wide range of different contexts and understandings of social work. In so doing, we extend the reflection on international social work education, which generally focuses on how curricula in particular localities, often western contexts, can incorporate global and international themes.

Communication 3

Title: Universal and Indigenous social work knowledge: A lived student experience.

Presenters: Dr. Janet Walker (University of Lincoln, England) and Students from fourth cohort MA Advanced Development in Social Work (ADVANCES)

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Abstract : Universal social work knowledge can be viewed as offering an explanation for professional social work. However it can also be seen as potentially providing an ethnocentric (specifically westernised and colonial) perception of social work. Indigenous knowledge offers competing epistemologies and efforts to decolonise perspectives. Conversely it has been suggested to rely solely on local context can narrow the focus of practice and preclude the opportunity to examine practice from different perspectives. This presentation explores the lived experiences of social workers undertaking the two-year Erasmus Mundus MA Advanced Development in Social Work (ADVANCES). Drawing on the experiences of four cohorts of students representing 50 different countries of the world, current students will examine former and current ADVANCES students understanding of the global and indigenous nature of social work knowledge. Recognising that we are embedded in the rituals and practices of our culture, students will reflect on their experiences of indigenous knowledge and practices, and the interrelationship of national and local contexts of social work practice. They will highlight how intercultural interaction and dialogues has influenced their understanding of social work. They will consider how this has impacted on their own practice as social workers. Further they will highlight how learning can create new arenas for social work knowledge and social work practice. It is proposed that the practice of social work has to be grounded in the social reality of the everyday. Connecting as a social work

global community can support local and indigenous practice in informing and influencing the knowledge and practice base of social work.

Communication 4

Title : International perspective on social work training : Students' inputs on Advances MA

Presenters : Meghan Gaillard (ADVANCES student from third cohort), Emmanuelle Boudaud (French student involved in ADVANCES Summer School) and other students from the third cohort

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Language of Presentation : English

Abstract : This communication will present the students' perspective at the end of the curriculum. The Advances program work has a great impact on students, at a personal, pedagogical or professional level. On the personal level, it gives them the opportunity to experience and discover local cultures, ways of living and to travel, an enriching experience. On the pedagogical level, they are exposed to different teaching styles in each country and therefore cross-cultural learning : group work participates in building their own team work capacities, reflective practice and critical perspective give them an empowering perspective and train them to critically reflect on our own practices, ways of thinking, cultures. Meeting and exchanging with others (students in and out of Advances, teachers, guests...) seems to be one of the main thought-provoking and enriching experience in Advances. Moreover, they come upon the differences in the power relationships in different countries, and how the economic development is related to the social and political level. The curriculum seems contemporary and relevant, also applicable for practice in the Global South. However, some practices cannot be brought back to their home countries as the culture differences can be very important. Therefore, aligning the learning process from home countries with European learning standards is challenging. Moreover, a key issue for teaching international social work is to take into account the perspective from the Global South, to avoid the risk of perpetuating a Western way of thinking. However, it reminds and heightens the importance of the context in social work, to deliver social work methods that are able to function, locally relevant and culturally sensitive in the context of that specific society. The student perspective also highlights the need to consider addressing new issues in order to match the training with

contemporary challenges and crisis (eg: refugee crisis, environmental justice) when teaching international social work.