



Moulding the Change Makers : Memoir of a Social work Educator

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a memoir of a social work educator who has been active in academia for past three decades, teaching at PG and doctoral levels. The author narrates her long journey of how social work, as applied social science, provided her ample opportunity to actively engage in assuming social responsibility by helping others right from grass root (micro) level to policy making (macro) level. She, by roping in students through experiential learning methods could aptly demonstrate how higher academia can and should stay connected with the social needs of people. Documenting how she mobilized the learners as educated, well informed and sensitive youth force through this paper she aspires to share her experiences with fresh social work educators stepping in to higher education system.

KEYWORDS

Introduction:

The goal of education is no more restricted to prepare oneself for personal development and to enable one just to earn his / her livelihood. It goes much beyond these boundaries and essentially extends to 'better' the world around the learner. Hayward Keniston aptly describes the goal of education (at all levels) as "the development of an informed, responsible citizenry and the preparation of every boy and girl for a personally satisfying and SOCIALLY USEFUL career. In modern times, when democracy is almost a unanimously accepted form of polity, citizen's participation in social development process has become an important pre-requisite for both Human and Social Development, the onus of equipping all individual with the required skills and values to be able to 'better' self and 'better' the society rests majorly on the social institutions of family and that of education. Dewey (1897), hence, rightly emphasized that participation of the individual in the social consciousness of race becomes essential in the process of education. W. H. Kilpatrick (1871-1965) – a pupil of Dewey extended this notion of progressive education and added that students should be engaged and taught so that their knowledge may be directed to society for a socially useful need.

As the level of education progresses, so progresses the social responsibility of stakeholders in the higher academia who form the so called 'elite' class of the society and contribute towards the macro level decision making and policy laying process of the state.

The role of higher academia, thus, is engaging in the pursuits of higher education as well as to stay connected with the social needs of people. The higher academia is expected to inform and direct the macro-decision makers to formulate policies which can yield better results, and bring better quality of life for the masses.

Social work Education:

Social work profession lays heavy emphasis on the principles of Human Rights and Social Justice. The goals of social work profession include well being of people by promoting (desired) social change, solving problems in human relationships and empowering and liberalizing the needy.

Since society is the laboratory for social work learners, community service and service learning projects are inbuilt in social work curriculum. To a great extent, the Kilpatrick model of progressive education movement adopting 'project method' is in built and uniformly adopted by social work educators

world over. The social work educators' methods are based on theories of Human Behavior and Social Systems. Students are taught to intervene where people actually interact with their environment. This 'Here and Now' approach of social work training gives a unique opportunity to both, the teachers and the taught to fulfill their social responsibilities right during the teaching learning process.

While classroom learning equips a social work trainee with the required knowledge of basic theories of social and behavioral sciences, the social work methods equips one to learn 'How to Help' at individual, (small) group or community level. This is precisely why a social work educator is expected to play multiple roles as a trainer.

Roles and Onus of a Social work Educator :

Unlike other streams of social sciences at university level, social work education is not restricted to classroom learning or library – research. Besides sharpening the cognitive and analytical abilities of a learner, social work curriculum lays heavy emphasis on the 'skill' and 'values' (ethics) development of a trainee. Thus, over and above classroom learning and Research Dissertation; Field Practicum i.e. actual social work method application aiming at giving first hand exposure and supervised application opportunities are important components of socialwork education at Masters' level.

An educator in social work, thus, has following major roles:-

1. Imparting information and passing on existing knowledge contents to students i.e. teaching.
2. Create / generate / build new knowledge to add to the existing body of knowledge of the social work profession through social work i.e. Research.
3. Facilitate skill building of learners by attending practical concerns of people in real life situations i.e. Guiding / Supervising the MSW trainee's fieldwork. i.e. Action
4. Prepare the next generation change agents through modeling and mentoring i.e. provide inspiration to trainees to follow the code of the profession. –Ethics-Values
5. Partnering in the policy making, implementing and monitoring process with the State Administration. i.e. Advocacy/ Macro planning coupled with bringing systemic changes

Knowledge Transmission and Knowledge Generation:

The author, in her initial years of professional grooming was for-

tunate to begin as a post-graduate teacher in one of the premier institute of social work education under the mentorship of stalwarts of social work profession. This enabled her to perform all the above mentioned roles with optimum ease and efficiency. Her continuous contribution in working for women, children and persons in conflict with law has earned her a lot of recognition both by the civil society organizations as well as from Gujarat Government Administration. Thus, besides training the students in the fields of Correctional Administration, Women and Child Development, Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry and Juvenile Judiciary, she took initiative in policy /law formulation and actively participated in Boards and Advisory Committees protecting Childrens' rights and Womens' rights (e.g. participation in Gender Policy / Juvenile Justice Act- Rules Formulation, serving on Advisory Committees on Probation of Offenders Act, Dowry Prohibition Act... And so on). This in turn enriched her classroom / fieldwork teaching to a great extent.

Time and again, social work educators are criticized for not documenting their practice wisdom derived from working for indigenous issues, and thereby also for depriving the next generations of social workers of access to this knowledge. The postmodernism ideology gives equal – if not more – recognition to qualitative methods of knowledge creation and documentation derived by working with 'ordinary people' and it questions the supremacy of 'Empirical – Scientific Studies' in social work literature, e.g. while the State Administration denied the existence / prevalence of children living in difficult circumstances in sex market, the authors' research studies on Surat Red light Area became instrumental in changing the belief of the State Administrators and brought them in to action for protecting the rights of child Prostitutes and children of prostitutes. Soon, a committee was formed with the author as one of the members to look into the issue and suggest corrective measures.

Similarly, her academic studies, research papers and Micro researches activated the local probation and prison executives to implement the welfare schemes / P. O. Act which aimed at protecting the rights of children in conflict with law as well as children in contact with law e.g. children of Prisoner Parents. Some other documented case studies on Child Victims of Immoral Trafficking were presented in International Conference and even today are extensively being used as training material in sensitizing Government Functionaries like Police, Probation / Jail Officials, Officials in Labour and Social Justice and Empowerment Ministries of Government of Gujarat.

As an expert academician, the author frequently got the opportunity to proudly represent the State of Gujarat in the events at National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) Delhi, National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development (NIPCCD at Delhi-Indore), Bureau of Police research & Development (BPRD) with Delhi University and Academic Institution at Jamia Millia Islamia for Childrens' issues pertaining to Human Trafficking, Adoption, Prisoners' children and so on.

All these happened on the Academic platform / for a where in the stakeholders were educated, highly intellectual and from the empowered, elite class mainly enjoying decision making power and authority. In Sensitizing / influencing the systems and policy makers, these efforts helped. However, the author, as social work educator, was quite conscious that her focus primarily has to be not just 'to do things by herself' but 'to inspire and prepare the next generation change agents by positing them to the grave grass root realities'

The Action and the Inspiration :-

Fortunately, the social work curriculum provides several opportunities to the educators, which, if used sensitively, can really prove turning points in shaping the social work trainees' personalities, ethos as well as build skills that would enable them to successfully become helping professionals.

The UGC Model Curriculum (2001) lists eight sets of opportunities which social work educators have been using for several

decades to help the learner acquire required skills such as -

- Orientation Programme for the beginners.
- Field visits to provide field exposure.
- Structured experience laboratory e.g. games and practical exercises
- Rural / Tribal camps to experience & understand rural life.
- Study Tours to appreciate innovative efforts in the field.
- Skill Development Workshops
- Concurrent Practice learning throughout the academic terms – usually 3 days a week.
- Summer Placements to experience the day to day work exposure to the different service delivery systems through direct practice.
- Block placements to link learning with practice and vice versa.

Of all these above listed teaching learning 'practice' opportunities, Field work and Rural / Urban Camps provide excellent skill learning opportunities to students. Unlike conventional classroom learning where teaching is mainly done through lecture method, Fieldwork and Camping is largely taught through participatory methods. Individualized learning needs of student trainees, 'learning by doing' and 'doing by learning' and learning not only from teachers but learning through peers and also through community members on 'here and now' basis bring trainees face-to-face with real life situations. These valuable exposures to real life problems enable students to interact with the help seekers and help social work trainees to understand the social – economic – political as well as emotional complexities which pose hurdles in the process of problem solving.

In Camps and on field, under the well planned supervised and guided experiences, the human force of Forty to Fifty Youth – boys and Girls – learn how to intervene, how to influence stakeholders in the community, how to be aware of and assert one's own rights and how to bring desired social change through self help.

The miracles that occur through mobilizing this youth force and the local community's human resource go way beyond our expected targets!! For past few years, the author, as a socially responsible academician from Gujarat's leading university and from the premier social work faculty has consciously devoted all such practice opportunities for protection of children's rights and has yielded wonderful results through roping in youth from Higher Academia-Doctoral and Master's level trainees in the micro and mezzo level strategic action from the Academia. e.g. Her PhD student has studied the complex issue of 'Missing Children' and her current research students are working on CICL-Children in conflict with Law. In September 2012, a group of 40 students camped at Thara near Palanpur to raise awareness against the social evil of Child Marriage in the Gujarat state's most 'High Prevalence area.

In the urban areas of Vadodara, the fieldwork trainees were encouraged to prepare e-material for raising community awareness for child safety and preventing the incidence of children/ juveniles' indulgence into the world of crime.

Now that Gujarat has several institutions and departments of social work education, by adapting these pretested community based Action models, the concerted and well coordinated joint efforts of academia can surely make a difference in creating a safer social environment.

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