An Analysis of Social Work Education and Practice in Vietnam and Canada

Douglas Durst
Nguyen Thi Thai Lan
Le Hong Loan

Translated by Tran Thi Hang and Nguyen Le Trang

Social Policy Research Unit (SPR)
Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina

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<td>Social Services Clients &amp; Their Food Bank Use in Regina: An Exploration</td>
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<td>The Evolution of Third Sector Home Care Services in Saskatchewan: A Historical Perspective</td>
<td>Lawson, G.S. and L. Thériault</td>
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<td>Career Versus Family: A Longitudinal Study in Two Canadian Cities</td>
<td>Geller, G., Dilemmas Women Face in the 1990s</td>
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<td>Social Housing with Community Support: An Examination of the FOHM Experience in Montreal</td>
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<td>The Informal Economy, Work and Social Welfare: History and Prospects</td>
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<td>Foster, L. and D. Broad</td>
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<td>Human Rights &amp; the Situation of Third Sector Mental Health NGOs in Sask</td>
<td>Kly, Y. and L. Thériault</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>The Canada Child Tax Benefit and Social Assistance in Saskatchewan: Horizontal Transfer of Benefits from the Poor to the Working Poor</td>
<td>Hunter, G.</td>
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<td>Non-Financial Barriers to Employment Faced by Welfare Recipients: A Review of Recent American Literature</td>
<td>Thériault, L.</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>The Development of Women and Women's Studies in China Since 1949: An Introduction</td>
<td>Zhuang, P.</td>
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<td>Food Banks in Canada: A Review of the Literature</td>
<td>Yadlowski, L. and L. Thériault</td>
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<td>Social Assistance Caseload Impact of the Building Independence Program in Saskatchewan</td>
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<td>Changing Labour Markets and Family Income Security in Canada and Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Ternowetsky, G. and G. Riches</td>
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<td>Hunter, G. &amp; K. Donovan</td>
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<td>Leski, A. and L. Thériault</td>
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<td>Foster, L. and D. Broad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eighteen.</td>
<td>Kly, Y. and L. Thériault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen.</td>
<td>Maslany, G., A Critical Analysis of the HSURC Study, the Impact of Preventive Home Care and Seniors Housing on Health Outcomes</td>
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<td>Thirteen.</td>
<td>Yadlowski, L. and L. Thériault</td>
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<td>Jeffery, B. and W. Isbister</td>
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<td>Ternowetsky, G. and G. Riches</td>
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<td>Seven.</td>
<td>Riches, G., Policy Research and Community Action: The Regina Child Hunger Coalition</td>
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<th>Title</th>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>A Focus on Vulnerable Youth, Saskatchewan Youth Services Model, Phase Two Evaluation Report</td>
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<td>Supportive Housing Needs of Women with Mental Health Issues.</td>
<td>Geller, G. and J. Kowalchuk</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Blending Child Care and Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Friendly, M., History and Vision:</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Poverty &amp; Corporate Welfare.</td>
<td>Ternowetsky, G.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>At the Loose End of the Continuum.</td>
<td>Thériault, L.</td>
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<td>Flexible Child Care for Flexible Workers.</td>
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June 2006
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Fiona Douglas
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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract...................................................................................................................................1

Introduction.............................................................................................................................1

The Context of Social Work in Canada and Vietnam.............................................................2
  History and Context of Social Work in Canada (1914-2004)..............................................2
  The Rebirth of Professional Social Work and Social Work Education..............................6

Comparative Analysis of Social Work Practice in Vietnam and Canada...............................7
  Definition of Social Work...................................................................................................7

Canada.....................................................................................................................................8
  Social Work with Individuals, Families and Groups..........................................................8
  Community Development...................................................................................................9
  Social Policy .....................................................................................................................10
  Social Research.................................................................................................................10
  Administration and Management......................................................................................11
  Linkage between Theory and Practice..............................................................................12

Vietnam...................................................................................................................................13
  Background........................................................................................................................13
  Social Work with Individuals, Families and Groups........................................................15
  Community Development.................................................................................................16
  Social Policy .....................................................................................................................17
  Social Research.................................................................................................................17
  Administration and Management......................................................................................18
  Linkage between Theory and Practice..............................................................................18

Conclusions and Recommendations .....................................................................................19

Bibliography .........................................................................................................................22
Abstract

Social work education is rapidly developing in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and it is facing new challenges as it blends the historical, political and cultural influences. This paper reviews the historical and recent developments of social work in both Canada and Vietnam under the generalist practice model. This model includes five domains of practice: Individuals, Families and Groups; Community Development; Social Policy, Social Research; and Administration and Management. The link from theory to practice is often where differences between the two countries emerge. The paper concludes with a discussion on the professionalization of social work and its future contribution to the emerging “new” Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews the historical development of social work, and conceptualizes a comparative analysis of the culturally appropriate social work practice applied in Canada and Socialist Republic of Vietnam. There are basic values and ethical principles that are common in both countries, which include the respect for the worth and dignity of all people, concerns for vulnerable groups and efforts to end discrimination. However, political ideology, cultures and traditions are impacting on the practice and value of social work practice between the communally oriented society of Vietnam and the individualistic-oriented Western society of Canada. In Canada social work has been shaped by, and is a reflection of the diverse, pluralistic, and ever changing society that encompasses many values, beliefs and perspectives of human well-being. Since the 1980s, with the election of the neo-liberal government federally, Canada has promoted the concept of privatization and sought an end to universal social programs. Social workers are facing the pervasiveness of neo-liberal ideology. Social workers increasingly find their work reflecting responsibility for social control rather than for social change. In Vietnam social work has gone through different stages in its development process, from the French-colonial period (1862-1945) to the post-French colonial period (1945-1954), and the neo-colonial period of USA (1954-1975). During the socialist period (1975-1990), there was an absence of the professional social work in Vietnam. Today, in the face of newly emerging social problems caused by the transition to a market-oriented economy, professional social work and social work education are being reintroduced. Vietnamese culture, the political ideology, and social and economic influences are shaping the rebirth and development of social work practice and education. There are many challenges in the way, but in the present context there are many factors supportive of the development of the profession social work in Vietnam.
Under the five domains of social work practice (Social Work with Individuals, Families and Groups, Community Development, Social Policy, Social Research and Administration and Management), relevant values, knowledge and skills appropriate for Canada and Vietnam are identified and discussed.

The first part of the paper will review the context of social work in Canada and Vietnam. Readers will be provided an overview of the historical development of social work and social work education in both countries. The second part focuses on a comparative analysis of social work practice in the two countries. All the contents will be presented with respect to the difference and diversity of cultures. Conclusions and recommendations will end the paper. Lessons will be drawn out for the very young social work profession in Vietnam.

The research draws on the literature review of social work practice in Canada and Vietnam. In Vietnam, social work education at university level has just been recognized as a discipline in May 2004. With respect to the social work education models in Vietnam and in Canada, the researchers based their analysis mainly on the review of the newly approved core curriculum of social work education at university level in Vietnam and the BSW curriculum of the University of Regina. The researchers also make use of other relevant exiting documents and publications on social work education in Canada and Vietnam.

THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK IN CANADA AND VIETNAM

History and Context of Social Work in Canada (1914-2004)

Social work practice in Canada has been shaped by, and is a reflection of, the culture of the country (Johnson, McClelland, & Austin, 1998). Canada is a diverse, pluralistic, and ever changing society that encompasses many values, beliefs and perspectives of human well being.

Social work education at the university level has existed in Canada since 1914 with the establishment of the Department of Social Services at the University of Toronto (Irving, 1992). In 2001, there were 34 schools at the university level, offering 31 BSW programs and 23 MSW programs. At the college level, there are 46 schools, offering 69 programs (CASSW, 2001). In the 1996 Canada census, there were a total of 38,875 people, who identified themselves as social workers. Out of that total, 44% of them had training in related discipline like sociology, psychology or education. Among those identifying themselves as social worker, 4.6% were Aboriginal and 7.4% as visible minority; 5.0% reported having a disability, which impeded their ability to do their work (Westhues et al, 2001).

The Canadian Association of Social Workers was founded in 1926. It is mandated to provide national leadership for the profession, providing support to provincial territorial association, encouraging and assisting the development of professional standards, conducting research, and disseminating information about current social issues (Foley,
The Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work was founded in 1948. It is an association of social work educators, which is responsible for the accreditation of social work programs at the university level and dissemination of information about social work education in Canada.

Kendall (2000) asserted that the progress of social work in Canada in the present century has come through the steady work of educators and practitioners to foster values, build knowledge and develop skills fundamental to a profession that combines compassion with competence in multiple relationships with troubled individuals and constructive action on social problems. Taking this into consideration, social work practice in Canada is now striving to strengthen its professional competence.

A major threat to the social work profession in Canada has been the current wave of neoliberalism and its onslaught on human services. Global trends toward market-driven philosophies that promote a disregard for the weaker members of society can only conflict with social work principles that promote notions of dignity and respect for individuals as fundamental societal values (Teeple, 1995). Historically, Canadian public social service agencies have addressed the various economic and social concerns in society. Moreover, Canada’s social programs and policies are typically characterized by a federal vision of intervention. Since the 1980s, the federal government has promoted the concept of privatization and sought an end to universal social programs. Canada, like other welfare states, has experienced serious attacks on the principles of redistribution and the provision of health and social services. As the federal government’s role in the provision of human services declined, the provincial department and communities saw an increase in their responsibilities. In addition to changes in federal and provincial programs and funding arrangements, public attitudes and thinking about welfare have changed also (Pederson, 2003). “Welfare has shifted from being a program of “entitlement” designed to help fight poverty, to a temporary support intended to promote individual self-sufficiency through labour force attachment strategies” (Canada, 2000, p.2).

Social work has met rapidly increasing demands for services while faced with significant reductions in human and fiscal resources. Client needs have become increasingly complex as poverty and unemployment increased dramatically. Reports of family violence, child neglect and substance abuse continue to escalate. Deficit and debt reduction are the most urgent and critical policy objectives of the neo-liberal government, leading them to reduce public spending.

The neo-liberal assumption that community groups and churches should assume greater responsibility for needs previously met by government has seriously affected social services programs and those they serve. Food banks, for example, have become ubiquitous as public assistance program implemented restricted eligibility requirements and reduced benefit levels to discourage reliance on the public purse. Social housing programs have been eliminated, forcing low-income families to find adequate housing at market prices. These policies have lead to the further marginalization of families and enormous challenges to the social work profession.
Like Canada and other countries throughout the world, Vietnam’s social work profession began from a humanitarian motivation. However, during the colonial and neo-colonial periods, professional social work was strongly influenced by foreign models of charity.

Prior to 1945, Vietnam was exclusively a colony of France. Social Work in Vietnam had taken the form of a charity model that was most common in western countries at the time. It was basically the domain of religious institutions (Kelly, 2003). In the southern regions of the country, France maintained a firm colonial rule. As a result, the development of a social work profession and its practice and philosophy had a French orientation. During this period, social work served mainly the French clientele. In addition, it served the Vietnamese workers in large French companies and a number of orphans, widows and elderly in the towns. “The social work model introduced into former colonies stood apart from the national trends, and had no effect on millions of poor, illiterate and unemployed people” (UNICEF, 1972).

A number of writers criticized this French social work perspective as ineffective because it was not sustainable and had paternalistic overtones, which did not lead to client empowerment (Kelly, 2003). Catholic missionaries imported institutional care models, such as orphanages and care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Researchers often questioned the appropriateness of such imported models when the traditional extended family and the community were still resourceful. In terms of profession, there were a few two-year-trained female social workers at that time (Nguyen, 2002).

At the end of the nine-year resistance war against France, Vietnam was divided into two parts in 1954. The country was divided into the North and the South until reunified in 1975. From 1945 to 1975, North Vietnam was governed under the socialist regime and did not develop social work.

From 1945-1954, “professional social work was introduced with, on one hand, the creation of a government directorate for social welfare and, on the other, the establishment of the Caritas School of Social Work (1947) organized by the French Red Cross and handed over

During this time, in South Vietnam, social work was used to serve the war. It focused on problems related to the war such as relief for Northern refugees who had moved in the South or people who were affected by the “force urbanization” to facilitate the American’s search for Communist Guerrillas to stop the revolutionary movement (Nguyen, 2002).

With the support of the United Nations, the National School of Social Work was created in the South in 1968 (Nguyen, 2002). Other social work training was available, in the South, at the Army School of Social Work, Da Lat University and Van Hanh University in Sai Gon. The Vietnam Association of Social Work was set up in the South in 1970. South Vietnam was member of the International Federation of Social Work (Kelly, 2003). Although social welfare and social work developed rapidly during this period of the war, they were regarded as tools of the invading forces. They were not seen as serving the poor at the grassroots level (Nguyen, 2002).

After 1975, a period of socialism in the united Vietnam saw the cessation of social work education. It was believed that once socialism was built up, society would no longer have social problems. Social work and social workers were, in theory, not needed. At that time, there were about 500 social workers with short-term training; 300 diploma workers with two year of training, 10 university graduates from abroad including seven with masters degrees of social work and masters of community development (Nguyen, 2002).

By the mid-1980s, the weakness of the socialist centrally planned economy in Vietnam had become apparent. The country entered a socio-economic crisis. In response to this situation, Vietnam launched the Renovation, known as Doi Moi in 1986. Doi Moi reform aimed at re-orienting the Vietnamese economy to a “socialist-oriented market economy under the State management” (Resolution of the Sixth Congress of Vietnam Communist Party in 1986). Preserving the socialist ideology, the two major thrusts of Doi Moi in Vietnam to date have been a considerable degree of market liberalization and the "open door" policy aimed at the gradual integration of Vietnam into the regional and global economy. Doi Moi has enabled a process of rapid social and economic reform that has opened up tremendous opportunities for the Vietnamese population but also posed new challenges and problems for the society. Many new issues have emerged in connection with the social and economic transition process, affecting the well being of Vietnamese families and children. Social problems that had disappeared for a time quickly reappeared. Nguyen described, “Vietnam is confronted with the whole range of problems connected with modernization, and they are developing faster than expected:

Rural and urban poverty;
Rural-urban migration leading to problems of children living and/or working on the street
Migration workers and slums;
Prostitution – women trafficking inside and outside the country;
Drugs;
HIV/AIDS; and

Vietnam has declared that it has adopted the market economy but with a continued adhesion
to the socialist orientation, which means strengthening economic and cultural independence
and promoting social justice and the welfare of the people. It is known that this is not an
easy path and, ideologically, there is no precedent (Nguyen, 2002). The Vietnamese
government is also aware of its limitations in dealing with new problems.

Social workers who had been trained in scientific theories and who had sufficient practice in
social work were clearly needed, but there were few available. It took some time for the
Vietnamese Government to understand the needs for social workers and the specific skills of
qualified social workers.

**The Rebirth of Professional Social Work and Social Work Education**

By the late 1980s, social work training was seen as an essential and urgent need by some
foreign development expatriates. The Vietnamese social workers who had been trained prior
to 1975 and many others realized that they were working in the social sphere without
sufficient theory or skills to produce expected and necessary outcomes. From 1986, social
workers and community development personnel had worked where they were accepted and
campaigned to have permission to have training workshops for those who were working in
the government structures.

Throughout the 1990s, a core of experienced professionals in the South of Vietnam lobbied
the political structures for social development based on theory and supported by
professionals. Child rights, child welfare, community-based prevention of child abuse and
exploitation and community development issues have been instrumental to the rebirth of
social work training and profession in Vietnam. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social
Affairs (MOLISA) and the Committee for Protection and Care of Children, are government
bodies responsible for overall social affairs such as social policies, providing social services
for the vulnerable people in Vietnam, including children. These developments led the move
towards social work being accepted and promoted as a profession. Local NGOs such as the
Social Development Research and Consultancy in Ho Chi Minh City, the Child Welfare
Foundation, Ho Chi Minh City Youth Association, the Social Worker Training Group in the
North and local government departments contributed to the recognition and rebirth of social
work in the new context of the Vietnamese society.

International organizations, including United Nation Volunteers (UNV) UNICEF and
INGOs such as Save Children UK, Save Children Sweden, World Concern, Holt
International and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) were also aware of these needs
and began communicating with the Vietnamese professional workers and government
departments. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA, Canada) was also
actively involved.
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN VIETNAM AND CANADA

Definition of Social Work

Country definitions of social work are both time and culture bound. Issues change the emphases of social work. The international definitions of social work have thus also changed over time. The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) currently defines:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (International Federation of Social Work).

Linderman (1992) described the social worker as “liaison between the privileged and the underprivileged people: as a helper in human relations and in working with community forces; as the equalizer of opportunities; as the rescue of the maladjusted, educator in values, and idealizer of life”. (p.36) Social workers work in numerous sectors and domains of health, education, and social services programs.

Social work education provides a comprehensive approach to understanding human behavior, teaching social work practice, conducting social work research, analyzing and developing social welfare policy, and guiding the field practicum.

The following sections present an analysis of the values, knowledge and skills which are culturally appropriate for the five domains of social work practice in Canada and Vietnam, namely: Social Work with Individual, Family and Group, Community Development, Social Policy, Social Research and Administration and Management.
Social work practice in Canada is generalist in nature and covers all five areas of practice. Social workers are seen to have a wide range of knowledge and skills. Problem solving skills, conflict resolution skills, mediation skills, family therapy skills, communication skills, relationship skills, understanding of process, knowledge of inter-disciplinary, knowledge of poverty, advocacy skills, recognition of the societal origins of personal problems, and self-awareness are all part of a generalist practice orientation. The capacity to communicate effectively in a way that brings people together is central to social work, as is an understanding of issues related to poverty and oppression.

Like in many other countries, a lack of professional definition has been frequently mentioned as a fundamental problem of social work in Canada.

*Social Work Education:* Social work education in Canada is of high quality. The knowledge and skills of graduates generally meet the expectations of employers. Rigorous accreditation standards are in place for both Bachelors and Masters degrees in social work. There has been an increase in the number of Ph.D. programs offered by Canadian schools of social work. New opportunities for doctoral studies have developed within the past 10 years at the University of Calgary, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the University of Manitoba and in an interdisciplinary program at the University of McGill. In some provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, linkages have been created between community college diploma programs and university degree programs that allow students to move from diplomas to degrees (Westhues et al, 2001).

*Social Work with Individuals, Families and Groups*

Professional development is the process by which clinical social workers increase their knowledge and interventions skill through experience and practice. This process builds upon a fundamental orientation to and acceptance of the values and methods of social work. Developing clinical social workers are required to expand this knowledge through learned application of clinical social work theories and skills—initially in mandatory supervised practice and later through self-study and participation in voluntary consultation as needed (Garrett, 1995; Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 1997). Based on this point of view, clinical social work in Canada is emphasized with on-going education and searching for a better and effective social work theoretical and practice models.

It is identified, as the purpose of the Social Work Practice with Families course is to prepare students for clinical social work practice with diverse families who present in a variety of service settings. Providing a thorough understanding of how one works with family systems
to optimize family strengths while collaboratively attempting to alleviate barriers, personal and environmental, which prevent the family from meeting the needs of its members. Accordingly, students are to be exposed to specific family therapy theories and skills that to understand and experience the complexity of work with families as they engage, assess and intervene to overcome barriers and promote optimal functioning. Social work studies provide opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking and practice that will prepare them for competent practice as they enter the workforce.

The commitment to principles of appreciating diversity while securing social justice in social work in Canada entails helping students develop an appreciation for difference in families and an awareness of how oppression limits human and community development. Focus will include fostering economic and social justice that enables all families to access resources to pursue their chosen goals.

Therefore, social work education and practice in Canada emphasizes the empowerment of families as they struggle to meet the needs of their members in various social contexts. Emphasis should be on appreciation of the strengths that diverse groups of families bring to the experience of parenting and use of collaborative practice to work toward mutually decided upon goals. Students should examine assessment and interventions family practice models to insure their fit with collaborative, strength-based work with families. Studies should teach students to identify and develop strategies for situations where personal and professional values conflict with those of the client and other service providers within the system. These are important lessons for the rebirth social work education like in Vietnam.

Social workers are often faced with the stress of the work environment. This stress relates not only to the amount of work, but also the value conflict of social control and social action in social work that social workers may experience. The question of how well social work education prepares graduates for the stress of the work environment deserves attention in the development of social work education in Canada.

**Community Development**

Social work is a community-based profession; and this is an important feature of the overall practice orientation of social work in Canada. Social workers are seen to have strong links with the community across a diverse range of work environments. Social workers are perceived to be sensitive to community as a result of their community-based Canadian social work education approach. This is congruent with a diversified cultural society like Canada.

There is an increased cultural relevance of social work education in Canada. Across the country there are 34 social work programs, which reflect diverse interests and populations. A number of programs have a particular focus on Aboriginal people and northern issues, while others emphasize cultural diversity and services to immigrants and refugees, responding to the needs of the particular community they serve. Gender issues have been taken into all aspects of social work. Several Canadian schools of social work have adopted the feminist social work perspective as the dominant framework. The accreditation requirements of the CASSW attempt to enhance ethnic and cultural diversity within the
schools and promote the development of anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice. All university programs in Canada are offering courses with a primary focus on anti-racism or cultural sensitivity, and most now have courses on Aboriginal issues (Westhues et al, 2001). While good advances have been made to improve cultural relevance of social work education in the multi-cultural nature of Canadian society, more efforts need to be invested to meet the need of providing services to the growing numbers of Aboriginal people and people from visible minorities in Canada.

Social Policy

Social work value in Canada is its commitment to social justice, fairness, and appreciation of people’s strengths and their ability to change. Social work is also described as a vocation, a description that which fits with notions or ideas of caring, sharing, and self-sacrifice (Westhues et al, 2001). Within the social work practice in Canada, there has been a value conflict between social control and social action in social work. Unfortunately, some social workers describe themselves as ‘social services police’ who monitor the activities of their clients.

Social work is increasingly being constrained within narrowly defined functions that have more to do with market considerations than the development of quality services that achieve solid outcomes. Caragata (1997) suggests that "the current environment demand that we rethink our practice to better achieve the goals of those who are at the margin of society" (cited by Westhues et al, 2001). She exhorts social workers not to accept the changes that are imposed upon the profession.

Social workers are not always seen to be the advocates for oppressed groups or for social change. Westhues et al (2001) presents the view of groups of Aboriginal people whose worldview differs from mainstream groups. The Aboriginal perspective views Canadian social work as a residual effect of colonization, and is, therefore, associated with an experience of oppression and domination. It is infused with a dominant perspective that is seen as oppressive by Aboriginal people and other minority groups.

Social Research

Quality research is critical in narrowing the gap between the theories and practice. There is a pressure for empirical selection of therapies and interventions because, to be effective, workers need to know what is effective. As the community of practitioners, scholars and students interested in applying scientific methods of analysis to social work problems continues to grow, the need for a publication dedicated to social work practice outcomes has never been greater. Research is an important area of practice. This is said very clearly in the course outline in the under-graduated report of Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina (2002): “Social work graduates need research skills to keep up-to-date with practice and to evaluate their own practice. Research skills provide a foundation that can lead to social action and various forms of community development. It is also important that students understand how research can be used to either empower or oppress people” (p.45)
One of the concerns of the current policy and its impact on the vulnerable and the whole society in both Vietnam and Canada is providing a basic understanding of methods of social research and application of these methods to the practice of social work. Social work students should discuss research methods within the context of the logic and theory of both quantitative and qualitative social research. Improvements in practice are gained through the application of research principle and techniques via in class exercises and case examples and through the assignments. A variety of research approaches are discussed and specific attention is paid to the consideration of the role of research in determining the impacts of social policies and programs.

In general, social work students in Canada are equipped with adequate and appropriate knowledge and skills on research. In social research course, students learn how to select a research problem, formulate hypotheses, design studies, collect data, analyze data, and interpret results. Qualitative and quantitative research techniques are examined. In addition, to gaining theoretical knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to conduct social research, students gain practical knowledge on “how to do’ research through classroom exercises and projects. Students have chance to demonstrate basic skills and knowledge of the SPSS software for data analysis, develop an awareness of the political and ethical issues involved in social research, and are provided opportunities to discuss and evaluate the relationship between social research and social policy. Students develop the ability to evaluate their own practice through the use of a single subject design and learn to appreciate the importance of practice evaluation.

Social work is seen to be a diverse profession, but the wide range of workplace settings and fields of practice creates a lack of certainty and a lack of unifying knowledge. Social workers in Canada are increasingly asked to work with people who have highly complex needs such as children and youth with fetal alcohol syndrome. Social workers also need specialized research and computer skills to prepare proposals and evaluation to support or promote programs and services.

**Administration and Management**

The word ‘administrator’ comes from the root ‘ministrate’ that means to serve, to tender to another, to aid to minister to. This definition provides a clear and appropriate understanding about the administration roles. The real meaning of administration relates to the actual practice of social work through serving the client. In social work, administration is understood as to serve the practitioner by providing the resources, structures and ambience which make possible the practice and art of helping (Rosenberg, 1984).

Social work practice in Canada is moving toward regulation through certification and registration. All Canadian provinces now have some form of legislation pertaining to regulation of the profession (Westhues et al, 2001). The nature of regulation varies considerably across provinces, but this development is generally seen as a strength in that it means that social work practitioners are now more accountable to the public they serve.
The National Sector Study of Social Work (1999) indicated that between 1991 and 1996 there was a 22.9% increase in the number of social work positions across the country. This increase, however, was not uniform in all provinces. Quebec, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia experienced large increases while Newfoundland, Ontario and Nova Scotia saw small reduction in the total number of social work positions. In 1996 the national unemployment rate for social work stood at 3.6% compared to a national rate for all occupations of 10.1%. Data from the Canada census showed a shift from government employment to employment in quasi-governmental organizations or community-based agencies or associations between 1991 and 1996. For those identifying themselves as social workers, there was a 19% reduction in government positions during this time (Westhues et al., 2001).

The social workers are said to be caught up in meeting the needs of bureaucracy as opposed to striving for social justice. The social work profession has become increasingly identified with bureaucratic systems and technocracy and this erodes professional autonomy and social work values. Although there are now fewer employment situations for social workers in government services a greater proportion of social workers work in situations where legislation, regulations, policy, procedures and standards govern their activities. Many social workers felt that their role has shifted to one of social control. The devolution of services by the provinces to communities and municipalities has resulted in the creation of large agencies which are becoming more bureaucratic and less focused on client needs.

The trend in some jurisdictions in Canada has been to replace social work leaders with ‘business’ oriented managers who are more comfortable with a market place emphasis. This application of business principles to develop and deliver human services has not created an environment supportive of social work leadership.

Social workers in Canada have recently reported their concerns about the increased fragmentation, dilution of social worker roles and de-professionalization in interdisciplinary social work context. Social work is becoming an interchangeable profession, as other professions begin to assume traditional social work roles. In some interdisciplinary settings, professionals such as nurses and occupational therapists have assumed case management roles that have normally carried out by social workers, for instance. In many hospitals, the number of social supervisors has been reduced.

Another theme of weakness that emerged is that social workers and social work organization seem unable to promote and market the profession. Social work is seen to have poor skills in public relationships when it comes to self-promotion (Westhues et al, 2001).

**Linkage between Theory and Practice**

One of the strengths, which characterize social work in Canada, is the profession’s practice orientation. Practice orientation is described as a holistic and systemic approach to understanding people and social structures. This approach is broadly applied through various practice settings and jurisdictions. Canadian social work education links theory and practice, particularly in the field component of education. Accreditation requirements of the
Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW, 1998) set minimum standards of 700 hours of field education for the Bachelor of Social Work degree, 900 hours for a 2-year MSW degree (post BA), and 450 hours for a 1-year MSW degree (post-BSA). It requires students to spend time in an organization or agency applying their knowledge and skills under the tutelage of an approved field instructor. The same accreditation requirements also construct specific mechanisms for linkage between the practice community and the educational institution, such as training for agency based field instructors and input of the professional associations in accreditation reviews.

VIETNAM

Background

*Definitions* of Social Work: The Vietnamese term for ‘social work’ is a general term that includes all good and charitable works that anyone can do (Nguyen, 2002). For those in academic settings, social work is understood as a purely a theoretical body of knowledge imparted through lectures. Vietnam’s social work definition will most probably develop and change as did the international definition over the twentieth century. Emphasis will move and philosophy will reflect changing values, attitudes and beliefs that will be translated into changed policies over time. It will not remain static, rooted in the 1990s where it had re-birthed and began the process of maturing. The key issue is the direction of social work to better meet the needs of the changing post- “Doi Moi” Vietnamese society.

*Direction of Social Work Practice:* Provided with new social issues from the Renovation process, a two-prong social work development process has been taking place in Vietnam throughout the 1990s. These have been the development of formal education of social work at university level (academic and skills training) and the provision of short-term training courses on basic knowledge and skills of social work for grassroots field workers (skills training). The two approaches have been supporting each other. The short courses helped to create the awareness on the need of social work professional knowledge and skills, which had been absent in the North since 1954 and in the South since 1975.

*Social Work Education:* The North and the South were culturally and historically different in many ways including concepts of social welfare practice. Women’s Studies Department of the Open University in Ho Chi Minh City, which is a semi-private university, was the first to provide diploma training in social work in Vietnam in 1992. In 2001 the Women Studies Department extended its initial two-year diploma to a four-year degree course and introduced a practical “practice” component to what was intended as an applied community based social work course.

Social work development in the North was hastened when the Social Work Training Group (SWTG) was established in 1995, filling a gap in Hanoi system. Among the members of the SWTG were graduates from the two-year diploma program of the Women Studies Department in the Open University. The group contributed to the promotion of social work, especially in the North. It has taken only half a decade to move from “not knowing anything
about social work” in the North to embracing social work at university and mass organizations as a better way to address modern issues (Kelly, 2003).

The College of Labour and Social Affairs (COLSA) in Hanoi is currently offering training at college level on labour management, social work, accountancy and orthopaedic technology. COLSA has been offering a 3-year program on social work since 1997. In 2005, COLSA was granted university status and can offer degree-granting programs. It has a faculty of social work. A number of training institutions in the North such as the Women’s Union Training School and the Youth Union Training School have also incorporated social work and community work philosophy and methodology in their training programs.

The Hanoi National University began its own social work training in 1996, using an academic path through mandatory subjects in the Sociology curriculum of the Sociology Department with Bachelor of sociology resulting. From this beginning the lecturers and the field workers have moved rapidly, via training, cross visits and much enthusiasm, to a social work model suitable for the Vietnamese context.

Since the mid-90s, short-term in-service training has been provided for staff with the Child Protection and Care Committee (CPCC), the Vietnam Women’s Union and Youth Union, as well as Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). These workshops and courses have provided skills-based, hands-on knowledge to the level of required competence for thousands of grass-roots workers in the community.

Education and training in Vietnam reflects a combination of social policy, family, and community, ideological beliefs and context. It provides the overall framework for the development of responsible and productive peoples who reflect Vietnam’s political and ideological education and fosters the development of personality, family, and social development by providing citizens with knowledge and tools that they need to think creatively and develop practical capabilities that permit self-sufficiency. The following section analyses the current social work education in Vietnam.

In Vietnam, social work as a university discipline is only beginning to be recognized. The new social work education curriculum in Vietnam has equal status with other university program with a BA degree. It is a four-year course curriculum with 210 units: 84 credits for background knowledge such as politics, Marxism, and foreign language; 106 credits for professional knowledge and skills (of which only 52 credits is spent for specialized professional knowledge). The curriculum is constructed into consecutive levels: general studies under a common programme with some subjects stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) such as politics, Marxist, Ho Chi Minh Ideology and topics specific to professional training.

At the moment, it is recognized there is a significant gap between training demands and the availability of social work educators. In Vietnam there are more than 15 teachers with professional social work education and most of them are in the south of Vietnam. Thus, there is an urgent need for the development of social work educators. In recent
developments, the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina has collaborated with the college in Hanoi and is expected to graduate seven M.S.W. graduates by 2006.

**Social Work with Individuals, Families and Groups**

Social work education for work with individuals and families assists in the empowering process. It includes concepts and objectives of casework (social work with individuals), values, principles of activities in casework; processes of casework; and the tools of tools in casework (problem assessment and identification, interview, counselling, and recording skills).

The family is the primary social unit in our society. Its function is to nurture, protect and socialize children to society. Throughout history social workers have provided direct services to families with awareness that families function within a larger social, economic and political context. Services have been provided in a range of settings, both public and private, including schools, hospitals, prisons, mental health clinics, child welfare agencies, nursing homes, safe homes and shelters. Social workers have developed and modified specific frameworks and therapeutic skills to promote optimal functioning of all families. They have been guided by social work values and ethics supporting equitable service delivery to clients who present with diverse interests and needs and with respect for ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and/or sexual orientation of family members.

In working with groups, workers must have facilitating and group-work skills. It is important to know the roles and meanings of groups to people’s life. It includes the concepts, objective, and characteristics of group-work; types and stages of groups in social work; group processes and interactions; the role of facilitator (group leader) and necessary skills for implementing group-work.

According to the draft social work curriculum in Vietnam, this theme requires 22 credits of study. It is also divided into themes that include working with individuals; working with families; and working with groups. Additional time is spent on developing practice skills. It is clear that more emphases should be spent on group work.

As skilled practice in clinical social work is multidimensional, the curriculum should include a focus on interaction of individuals, families, couples and groups within their environmental contexts. It encompasses the functions of diagnosis and assessment; treatment planning; intervention; and outcome evaluation. It covers the range of short-term, intermittent and extended interventions and addresses highly specialized practice areas.

Briefly, the learning and mastery of new clinical skills - at all levels of professional development - require both the cognitive grasp of theory and an adequate experience of practicing the skills through self-review and by engaging in appropriate clinical supervision and/or consultation. In all cases beyond the minimum acceptable level for independent practice, the readiness of a worker to use and apply new clinical skills without supervision should be judged by demonstrated ability or mastery of those skills, and not solely as a function of time spent in the learning process (Goldstein, 1980).
Competent clinical social workers have achieved sufficient mastery of clinical core curriculum studies as well as completion of an adequate supervised practice experience to assure their ability to apply theory to practice.

**Community Development**

Social work is cultural. It is difficult to detect the underlying problems and their effects. An example is the orphanages introduced during early colonial times in Vietnam, when there were already extended families and even the village communities providing quality care of children who were without parents. But gradually, poor parents began to abandon their children to orphanages with a “good conscience” because they thought their children would be better off there. Still today, the Vietnamese people prefer institutional care, and it is difficult to persuade professionals to enter family social work, which is more arduous and less rewarding materially.

The first “community development” short-term courses in Vietnam were conducted in the early 1990s on issues such as program design, leadership, evaluation, working with children in need of special protection, prevention of child abuses, group work, deviancy counselling, community development and other topics. Most of the people trained in short-term social work courses were already working with children.

Though still facing massive obstacles, social work skills are used to address some of the problems and to produce acceptable changes, particularly in the field of open communication, grass-root participation, leadership skills and so on. Community development is now used as an approach to poverty alleviation and urban renewal. There is more clinical social work; and counselling is slowly being introduced and accepted as a solution for new problems like family breakdown, drug abuse and prostitution.

Traditionally, Vietnam has a strong community mobilization. Volunteers and local associations helped in various ways. Communities raised funds demonstrating a strong the sense of community. As Vietnam becomes more familiar with social work philosophy and methods, its application of these with their own constituency and in the community could lead Vietnam to a lesser degree of service delivery within a social welfare system, which is a burden in Canada and many other developed country as capacity building and empowerment are stressed.

Unlike Canada, Vietnam has a built-in system for grassroots promotion and reinforcement of social work professional and assistant program goals through its mass organization structures. However, the issue of cultural relevance of social work education in Vietnam has not been given adequate attention. The issues of gender in all aspects of social work require very basic but consistent attention as gender issues are new to Vietnam. The issues of ethnic minority people are not yet reflected in the social work education programs.
Social Policy

Hanoi National University and other training schools in Hanoi had little interest in social work until early 1990s. The concept of social policy focused instruction on implementing policy not critically thinking about it or analyzing policy. There was said to be no behavioural theory or social theory models available. There is a significant need for skilled social workers that could analyze, teach and work with individuals, families and communities and manage social interventions to augment government policy.

In its first stage of rebirth of social work in Vietnam during the 1985-2000, social work seemed to be developed in parallel with the national efforts such as the Poverty Alleviation Program and programs to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Gradually, social work is becoming an effective catalyst in some parts of the country.

Social Research

Empirical research on social work practice should be concerned about the assessment methods and outcomes of practice. Social work practice is broadly interpreted to refer to the application of intentionally designed social work intervention programs to problems of societal or interpersonal importance. Interventions include behaviour analysis and therapy, counselling with individuals, case management, education, supervision, practice involving couples, families or small groups, advocacy, community practice, organizational management, and the evaluation of social policies.

In Vietnam, the objectives of the curriculum state that the trained social workers should have the capacity to work in research. However, studies on research methods are not identified as a required subject in the social work curriculum.

In addition, only four credit hours are focused on the methods and skills in both quantitative and qualitative research. It depends on the orientation of sociological research methods. Moreover, it emphasizes heavily on the theories such as the role of research in sociology consciousness, the relationship between theoretical awareness and experimental awareness. The area of research skills and techniques, which focus on how to conduct social research, is not given much attention and what is given is primarily theoretical and not practices. Quantitative research methods are dominant, neglecting qualitative methods.

Unlike Canada, another limitation to the development of social research study in Vietnam is poor access to computers. It is difficult for students to master statistical computer skills used in research.

Official documents identify social research as a priority in the education and training institutions in Vietnam. The importance of social research is not fully understood; therefore, it is not included or emphasized in many curricula.
Administration and Management

Like in Canada, social work administration and management in Vietnam aims to provide basic knowledge about administration in human service organizations. The content includes definition of administration, management, administrator, and financial management in office, case management documentation, and administrative forms. It is important to distinguish the differences between business administration and management and human service work. Some would think that “management” does not exist in social work and fail to grasp its importance.

Trecker (1971) defines that “social work administration is a method in social work practice and that social work agencies should be administered by the social work administrator” (p.17). He also emphasizes that social work administrators are to enable all people involved in the agency’s work to fulfill their responsibilities as their functions and to maximize resource use in order to provide the best possible service to the people of the community. This philosophy and values of social work administration and management need to be applied. Unfortunately, it is a challenge to change the thinking of social work students about administration. Students tend to think that they will not be involved in administration and management and believe that they will work exclusively in direct practice.

The aim of the social work education program in Vietnam is to train workers who will work at administrative agencies, institutes and organizations, and centres (counselling centres, social protection centres for children in needs of protection, lonely elderly people, and people with disabilities, drug abusers and prostitution). Government bodies in need of social workers such as the MOLISA and Committee for Population, Family and Children (used to be CPCC) need to develop a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of a social worker. Social Work needs to be recognized as an academic discipline and as a profession alongside others, to build an improved Vietnam.

In May 2004, the Ministry of Education and Training has provided a training code for social work. The professional status of social workers is pending. Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Interior and General Department of Statistics with the professional social workers need to develop a professional code. Ideally, a professional association needs to develop and guide this initiative. These government ministries need to provide the financial resources for universities and colleges to develop professional social work education in Vietnam.

Linkage between Theory and Practice

‘Fieldwork’ is not well understood in Vietnam. In the existing program in Hanoi, very little time is allocated for practicum (only 10 credits). Social work is either regarded as a purely theoretical discipline or as “good work” that anybody could do. Both social work training institutions in the North and in the South expressed concerns about the difficulty of accessing social work placement for academic students. It is now widely believed that this activity is an essential element to developing students into professional social workers. With clarity of focus the essence of an applied science (as is social work) is being able to perform
the skills taught after graduation. Nguyen (2002) sees that the skills at graduation are not sufficient for professional status:

A social worker upon graduation does not immediately become a professional social worker. He/she can only take a test to get a national practice license after a few years working under the supervision of an experienced expert (Nguyen, 2002).

Yet, the value of concurrent learning is seen as absolutely essential, as expressed below:

Experience on placement if harnessed, linked to social work theory and analyzed, is a vibrant way of ensuring children’s and community-based reality informs and enriches academic learning, also ensuring student take responsibility for their own learning. (McArthur, 2003).

Placements are very expensive, especially if they have to be outside the main cities and there has not been a funding available to assist with this in social work training. All the institutions believe in the need for the practicum and all have similar problems with funding placements for students.

With the development of new social work programs, the need for skilled supervisors is urgent. Also it is believed that the experience of providing field education benefits the field instructor providing a “win-win” learning situation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As social work embarks on its second century of services, the profession must focus on how to use the considerable knowledge available, together with its long years of skilled helping experience, to contribute with all like-minded others to better solutions to the many social problems, old and new, that continue to plague the world (Kendall, 2000). The practice of social work in the world today is far more complex and challenging than it was in the past. The rapidly changing world continues to place tremendous stress on individuals and
families. To meet the increasing demand for services, the field of social work continues to evolve and change with the changing context and conditions.

In Canada, the pervasiveness of neo-liberal ideology has exacerbated the issue of a lack of social work identity within the profession. Social workers increasingly find their work reflecting responsibility for social control rather than for social change. It is now time for experienced social work professionals to put forth innovative and humane program options for consideration by policy makers. Social workers need to exercise their advocacy responsibility for social justice to deal with the negative outcomes of the changes and the results inflicted on the more vulnerable members of society. Social workers in Canada work in numerous sectors and domains of health, education, and social services programs. They are well positioned to translate private troubles into public issues.

Social work in Canada is characterized by a number of strengths such having as a holistic practice orientation, a generalist approach to practices, good linkage between theory and practice, a high cultural relevance and good quality of social work education. It also has certain weaknesses such as a lack of professional identity, diffuse knowledge base of the profession, conflict between the values of social action and social control, low ability to promote the profession and eroding leadership in social services in a number of settings. These features have important implications for the future of social work in Canada. The response requires a strategic approach, which include a clear statement of social work's mission in society, the creation of an improved public image and educational experience that better prepare social workers to work in a rapidly changing societal environment.

The schools of social work should rethink their curriculum with a view to ensuring that social workers have the skills necessary to adequately respond to the increasing requirement of practice, arising from the multiple problems encountered by the people with whom the workers work. Social work education should consider including training to develop managerial competence in social workers to stem the erosion of social workers’ leadership in the social services. It should better prepare graduates for social advocacy. Schools of social work should look into ways which attract greater number of Aboriginal, visible minority and multicultural social workers to the profession.

Social work is being introduced into a number of former and current socialist countries. There are issues to be addressed in the introduction of social work in these countries. In Vietnam, the development of the profession is seen as a positive among the new social workers and educators. Increasing social problems in need of prompt solutions have contributed to the complexity of the situation. Vietnamese social workers with their determination and commitment are considered to be the labouring mother in the rebirth of social work. International organizations such as UNICEF and Save Children Alliance have been instrumental in advocacy work for the recognition of social work in Vietnam.

The quality and extent of social work education and training is rapidly developing. It is important that any assistance to the development of social work in Vietnam takes account of traditional practices of caring and mobilizing support. Even if never traditionally called ‘social work’ such traditions grow out of the foundation of the Vietnamese society and are
required in the further development of culturally appropriate actions/models. The strength of the family and the traditional safety net of the extended family should be fully taken into full consideration in the development of a social work model for Vietnam.

Social work is taking root in Vietnamese society because it has proven its usefulness in helping to ameliorate human and social problems. Furthermore, its philosophy, values, principles and methods are increasingly accepted in many different aspects of development work. There is no contradiction between social work values and the present socialist orientation of Vietnam. In its socialist orientation, Vietnam stands for national independence, culture identity, social justice, and democracy. There are many challenges in the way, but in the present context there are many factors supportive of social work. Surely history will recognize the role of social work in building a modernized Vietnam.

Basically, value commitments and ethical principles are at the core of social work as a profession. And there is a global commonality of values. Social work in every country stands for respect for the worth and dignity of all people. Social work shares a concern for vulnerable groups with particular attention to the poor and identifies efforts to end discrimination and move toward equal treatment for all as professional goals. Therefore, the commitment to social reform and change is a universal value of the profession. Values differences are most likely found between communally oriented societies like Vietnam and the individualistic-oriented Western societies and Canada is among those.

“A curriculum is not built in the sense that a building is constructed and the task finished. A curriculum is developed but never finished” (Council on Social Work Education, 1960 p.1). Schools of social work should rethink their curriculum with a view to ensuring that social workers have the skills necessary to adequate responds to the increasing requirement of practice, arising form the multiple problems encountered by the people with whom they serve. They should strengthen their possibilities to provide continuing education opportunities to maintain the currency of social worker’s skills and knowledge after graduation.

Social work, in Vietnam, offers a significant contribution in re-building the country and facilitating its role in the international community. Social work in Vietnam will not be the same as its cousin in North America but have its own flavour shaped by history and culture. Those who participate in its growth and development are honoured to be a part of historic groundbreaking developments. The road is long and steep, but those challenged are worthy to the tasks ahead.
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