Diversity, dialogue, and identity in designing globally relevant social work education

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Abstract

This article reflects on how to design social work education for internationally diverse cohorts of students. It draws on insights from a Master program for social work practitioners from around the world that has been delivered by a partnership of five European universities since 2013. Three particular issues are explored: developing curricula that achieve a local-global balance and emphasize the significance of context sensitivity in social work; the need for teaching approaches that promote dialogue, critical analysis and student well-being; the importance of providing students with a strong identity, value base and connection to the global social work profession. The article is targeted at social work educators involved in international and cross-country teaching as well as scholars interested in debates about the balance of local-global dimensions in social work.

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Internationalization is a key theme in social work as the profession responds to sources of marginalization that defy borders and seeks global credentials to affirm its status and undoubted relevance in many spheres (Dominelli, 2010; Hugman, Moosa-Mitha & Moyo, 2010; Healy, 2008; Lyons, Hokenstad, Pawar & Huegler, 2012). The evolution of international social work associations, a Global Agenda and Global Standards for Social Work help to promote this interaction and exchange between practitioners, educators and researchers (IFSW, IASSW & ICSW, 2012a, 2012b). At the same time, discussions are emerging about the appropriate balance between universal and local principles, approaches and ideas, especially in light of concerns that a 'one size fits all' approach could be irrelevant

and unethical due to possibly 'Western' or colonizing undertones (Hugman, 2008; Gray & Coates, 2010).

This article engages with these debates in relation to social work education by asking how a single educational program can be relevant to a wide range of contexts and understandings of social work around the world. It draws on our pedagogical and curriculum design experiences in establishing a Master program for an internationally diverse cohort of social workers. The article is targeted at social work educators involved in international and cross-country teaching as well as scholars interested in debates about the balance of local-global dimensions in social work practice and education. We share our experience with the aim of informing other educational and training schemes with an international dimension, including full degrees, short courses, exchanges and even accreditation. In exploring education for very diverse groups of practitioners, we extend the literature on international social work education, which generally focuses on how curricula in individual countries, often Western contexts, can incorporate global and international themes.

Our interest in the design of social work education with international focus has been prompted by the experience of running a Master program in social work as part of the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus scheme, which supports Master degrees delivered by consortia of European and worldwide universities along with non-academic partner organizations. The two-year Master 'Advanced Development in Social Work' (ADVANCES) was designed in 2011-12 and launched in September 2013 for qualified social workers who wish to develop their knowledge, analytical skills and practice competences with an emphasis on international perspectives. It is delivered by a partnership of five universities with a jointly designed curriculum and teaching approach (University of Lincoln, United Kingdom; University of Aalborg, Denmark; University of Lisbon, Portugal; University of Paris Nanterre, France and University of Warsaw, Poland). The nature of the

Erasmus Mundus scheme means that our Master program involves high mobility: students spend one semester in each of three universities (Lincoln, Aalborg, Lisbon), take part in two summer schools (Nanterre and Warsaw) and are based in one of the five consortium universities during the final semester to complete a primary research project on an aspect of social work practice that interests them. The Master is coordinated by a team of one to two staff from each university with face-to-face meetings three times each year – including joint teaching activities for students – along with group video calls each month. Detailed information on the program and study experience is available at https://www.socialworkadvances.aau.dk/.

The ADVANCES program was created for social work professionals to develop their careers as senior practitioners, consultants, researchers, trainers or managers. Participants must therefore have a social work degree and license where available in their countries; related subjects are accepted for students who did not have an opportunity for formal social work training. There is a minimum requirement to have one year of professional experience in social work following the undergraduate degree, although many of our students far exceed this by having several years in practice, which gives them a strong experience base upon which they can draw in their application. The selection of candidates takes place by evaluating professional experience, academic results and written statements on motivation and a personal definition of social work, with shortlisted candidates offered a telephone or video interview. Financial support from the Erasmus Mundus scheme provided full scholarships for annual intakes of between twelve and seventeen students from 2013-2017, which will expand to approximately twenty-one students for cohorts in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 thanks to a successful reapplication for funding in 2018. The program is also open to students with their own funding from personal resources, employers or national schemes: two students have been recruited to date on a self-funding basis.

A very diverse range of students have participated in the program with forty different countries represented in the five intakes from 2013-2017. There has been an approximate balance of three-quarters students from the Global South and one-quarter from the Global North, which is in line with the global orientation of the Erasmus Mundus scheme. To date, 27% students have been from countries in Africa with a further 27% from Asia with no dominance of a single country from either continent. 7% students came from Latin American and Caribbean countries, 4% from the Middle East and 6% from Ukraine and the South Caucasus. Finally, 22% students have come from European Union member or candidate countries with a further 6% from Canada and Australia (none so far from the USA). Two-thirds of students have been women and one-third men whilst the requirement for professional experience means that students are generally in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. All candidates need to demonstrate English proficiency at IELTS 6.5 (approximate to a TOEFL score of 88) two months before enrolment, but can apply for a place and scholarship without official English-language test results. English is rarely a native language for students, but the diverse nationalities in the program mean that English is the main medium for student interaction. The first semester in the United Kingdom helps students' spoken and written language skills through immersion in a fully English-speaking environment.

The article uses the experience of delivering the Master and educating this group of students to engage with three key issues in educating social workers from different countries. It first considers the balance of 'local and 'global' content in curricula, arguing that international education programs should emphasize the importance of context-sensitive analysis and practice interventions. It then turns to pedagogical questions by suggesting that dialogue and exchange are important tools for promoting the critical analysis of social work interventions. Finally, the importance of supporting students' professional identity as social workers is

considered, including critical discussion about the meaning and application of social work values in different contexts.

The local-global synthesis in social work education

The existence of 'transnational', 'international' or 'global' dimensions in social work is hardly in question given the mobility and connectedness of citizens and practitioners. This has direct implications for social work education with a growing need to internationalize curricula. Yet, there are conceptual and practical challenges when teaching international social work and groups of social work students from different countries. Dynamics to globalize the profession through shared standards, aims, definitions and organizations raise questions about the extent of universality, 'sameness' and commonality in social work across the globe and whether a focus on local distinctiveness is more appropriate (for example, Lyons, 2006; Young Hong & Song, 2010). Related to this, fears of 'professional imperialism' from well-resourced 'Western' countries correctly lead to reflection about the cultural specificity of models, theories and training programs with an origin in the Global North that may ignore indigenous knowledge, perspectives and practice and not be locally relevant (Midgley, 1981; Midgley, 2008; Gray & Coates, 2010).

Our approach to globalized social work education is rooted in skepticism that 'international social work' can be regarded as a distinct sub-branch of social work with a specific set of knowledge and skills. A major reason for our hesitation is that social work remains initiated and delivered *locally* in terms of 'the raw stuff of interactions, plans, interventions and ethics' (Webb, 2003, p. 191). Research highlights that standardized approaches applied across the world, for example those often used in international aid and health programs, broadly fail to consider how local realities shape the accessibility, effectiveness and acceptance of particular programs (e.g. Seckinelgin, 2012; Koch, 2013). Practitioners working in varied international

settings will be confronted by very different contexts and issues, but their approach must be the same as any form of social intervention in sensitively analyzing local needs and developing responses based on the strengths of service users, available resources and socio-cultural factors. We thus agree with Dominelli (2014, p. 259) that social work educators and practitioners must 'interrogate their internationalism to ensure that they do not further endanger the people they seek to help'.

As educators, we see it as relevant to focus on how professionals can apply tools of analysis and action in different contexts and feel confident in working in unfamiliar locations, including those where they may not speak relevant languages or possess deep knowledge of cultural contexts. Yet, these features are not exclusive to international contexts, adding to our feeling that the 'local' and the 'global' or 'international' should be presented as interrelated, entwined aspects of social work. Our Master program therefore deliberately eschews the phrase 'international social work' in its title and module names in order to emphasize the importance of balancing global and local viewpoints. We seek to avoid a process whereby social work in other countries is constructed as the 'other' in contrast to local social work practice. As accurately analyzed by Moosa-Mitha (2014, p. 203), the term 'international social work' creates 'a binary that assumes international social work to exist out "there" as opposed to "here."' Indeed, sometimes applicants to our program suggest that they want training in relevant methods and knowledge for international social work as if they are distinct and separate from their own practice to date. Despite its delivery in the Global North, we hope that our program's focus on local and global influences in social work will support graduates in employment, whether in their home country or elsewhere, especially if they are cast in the role of a 'reluctant expert' with international experience in social work who is expected to advise and guide on the development of local practice and research (cf. Wehbi, Parada, George & Lessa, 2016, p. 287).

The importance of emphasizing local context and perspectives was highlighted during the two years of meetings to design the Master program. We unexpectedly had long yet very valuable debates about the meaning of terms such as community, marginalization, empowerment and especially the types of activities undertaken by social workers in our countries. This helped us to grasp that teaching internationally is not a simple matter of translating words between languages, but requires a strong understanding that local context shapes social work practice and knowledge. This core theme runs throughout the program, initially in discussions guided by lecturers and then increasingly moving towards analysis by students. In particular, the research project completed in the program's fourth semester requires students to consider the international relevance of their study, which is usually based on data from one single location. This is a complex analytical task since it requires a solid awareness of how social issues and practice challenges may vary around the world. To support this, the program organized peer learning groups in which students conducting research in various countries provide feedback on each other's ideas about their research's international relevance; these take place by video call with facilitation by a member of the core teaching team. The organization of a research conference at the end of the program in which students present the practice implications of their research to each other, lecturers and wider audiences is similarly designed to encourage skills in making findings and knowledge relevant to different contexts.

Promoting international perspectives during teaching has proved challenging given the complexity of accurately, sensitively and analytically discussing issues in different contexts. On the ADVANCES program, we have had to confront our position as a group of European academics and universities grounded in 'western' or Global North experiences. Regardless of their national backgrounds and mobility, many students have suggested the need to increase Global South perspectives in our program and we agree that the Master feels rooted

in European approaches because it is delivered in Europe and does not offer direct access to practice or education in the Global South. We are conscious that 'by and large, the ISW agenda appears to have originated from the West' (Pawar, 2010, p. 905) and 'is dominated by voices of academics from the global North' (Wehbi et al., 2016, p. 285). This is worrying because Southern theory and practice experiences offer unique and crucially important knowledge and understandings of society (Connell, 2007). Looking at the evolution and contribution of indigenous social work is an important part of exploring the 'local-global' dimensions of social work and discussing the accurate criticisms that Western social work methods and theories do not have global or 'universal' relevance and devalue other forms of knowledge and intervention (Gray, Coates & Yellow Bird, 2008).

Yet, we find it crucial to avoid presenting the Global South and Global North views as crude and conflicting opposites, feeling that more value can come from encouraging students to explore the extent to which approaches from different contexts can complement each other and stimulate the transformative changes that 'glocal' problems demand (Lyons & May-Chahal, 2017). The concepts of 'Global South' and 'Global North' are extremely useful, but they require unpacking, for example to consider diversity within countries, regions and the global placing of areas like the Middle East and former Soviet Union. Sewpaul has drawn attention to the dangers of essentialising cultural contexts and reinforcing dichotomies like the 'East' and 'West' by presenting them as monolithic, arguing that 'just as there is no single Chinese culture or identity, or Western culture or identity, there is no single Western social work' (Sewpaul, 2007, p. 402). There is still much to research about ensuring more reciprocal and balanced North-South relations in social work because it is still very clear that there is a strong dominance of Global North knowledge and priorities. Greater reciprocity, collaboration and being mutually influenced are important ways forward in social work education (Zuchowski, Gopalkrishnan, King & Francis, 2017).

Having a suitable knowledge and practice base for teaching in an internationally relevant way can be difficult since 'resources in terms of time, money, material and trained personnel are needed more than usual' in order to teach international social work (Pawar, 2010, p. 904). Several partial solutions have been applied in our Master program to try to answer student and staff concerns about international content. Firstly, examples from our own local or national contexts can be used, but these must not be presented as models or good practice, but rather as a basis for discussing wider issues, for example analyzing risk in child protection or ensuring that community approaches benefit discriminated or marginalized groups. Teaching is then not so much about practice or systems in a particular country – a 'how to' approach that inevitably forms part of teaching on national programs – but rather about how social work interventions evolve and can be analyzed. Secondly, students are an invaluable source of knowledge on social issues and interventions in different countries, especially when they already have practice experience. Asking students to share knowledge from their own contexts has resulted in rich discussions and analysis that help to achieve what Webb (2003) calls 'local cultural orders of reflexivity' about how social work practice is situated and embedded in particular contexts. As we discuss in the next section, classroom activities that encourage students to share and compare their knowledge are valuable to decenter teaching from one particular national context – and indeed a valuable learning opportunity for lecturers. Finally, inviting visiting scholars from Global South contexts to contribute to modules and specialist workshops provides direct access to voices and viewpoints from around the world, which is important because learning from first-hand experience and indigenous instructors can give more 'credibility to the delivery of content' (Ives et al 2007, p. 17, cited in Beecher, Reeves, Eggertsen and Furuto, 2010, p. 206). Recommendations from students and also colleagues in international organizations such as the IFSW, IASSW

and EASSW have proved useful in identifying educators and practitioners from beyond our European contexts to take part in teaching activities.

Pedagogical aspects: critical dialogue and student well-being

Our experience of delivering the Master program has highlighted that it is important to consider learning and teaching processes when working with internationally mixed groups of social workers. It admittedly took some time for the program team to recognize the importance of addressing pedagogical questions, which was mostly prompted by student feedback about different experiences across universities and highlighted how the international social work literature generally 'focuses on program content, strategies and procedures rather than on pedagogy' (Razack, 2009, p. 10). In particular, we suggest the value of pedagogical strategies for critical exchange as well as supporting students' well-being in the classroom and overall program with its high levels of cross-country mobility.

Critical dialogue and exchange

Critical analysis, dialogue and problem-based learning lie at the heart of our approach to supporting international cohorts to grasp that social work practice is locally embedded yet has a 'global gaze' (Sherman, 2016). For us, criticality is more than an analytical thought process because it is explicitly concerned with unequal power resources and disadvantage (Vandermensbrugghe, 2004, p. 419). The program draws greatly from critical theory as a frame for analyzing social work education and practice given its concerns with the socially constructed nature of exclusion and disempowerment (Tilbury, Osmond & Scott, 2010, p. 33). Within a critical framework, social work needs to analyze the situations, actors and contexts of marginalization rather than simply apply methods or skills in a technical or

functionalist manner. Citizen voices, rights and perspectives are central in this frame of analysis. Thinking about multiple inequalities, perspectives, agendas, needs and interpretations of well-being enables students to build more confident approaches to unknown situations. We therefore see critical analysis as vital for developing social work interventions that are grounded in core ethical values and relevant to a complex, heterogeneous and fast changing world with multiple challenges to social justice. Indeed, 'teaching any course, and more so international social work, calls for understanding hegemonic systems in order to resist dominant practice perspectives' (Razack, 2009, p. 19).

Dialogue and the exchange of ideas, information and interpretations are important in promoting this critical view and also because we work with a very diverse group of students who can offer firsthand insights into diverse contexts and deserve to have their experiences valued. Accounts from peers yield fascinating learning and help students to compare and critically analyze influences on their own practice, for example the evolution of discourses, systems and professional interventions around particular issues. Much of the first two semesters of our two-year program thus encourages students to exchange their own experiences of practice with the overall goal of analyzing dynamics of social work. Applying theories from critical social science helps to deepen understanding of realities and interrogate dynamics and inequalities within international social work, for example through the concepts of 'Global South,' 'indigenous social work', 'globalization' and 'power' (cf. Wehbi et al., 2016, p. 290).

It is therefore important to provide time in teaching for discussing students' views about the nature of social work and 'international' influences from their perspective. Building flexibility into curricula and assessments is also useful 'to allow students to focus on their home countries' (Beecher et al., 2010, p. 213) or others of interest rather than exclusively considering social work in the country in which they are studying. The experience of

learning in different locations further promotes reflection on multiple perspectives and the importance of context through exposure to a range of educators as well as different systems, cultural norms and countries, including events with practitioners and study visits to practice settings to provide direct exchange and first-hand experience. The resulting discussions of 'international' social work in the program then come not just from theoretical analysis, but also from interaction and mobility: working with new colleagues, travelling to different countries, studying in different universities, learning different modules and being exposed to different teaching styles. These aspects highlight to students and lecturers that the 'international' is a reality and not just an abstract concept, in line with Dewey's ideas about the strength of experiential learning as well as the concept of transformative learning (Mesirow, 2000).

Mindful that students inevitably have different learning styles due to individual preferences and diverse experiences of education and training, we have found that using a range of learning techniques is most effective at promoting discussion, critical dialogue and engagement with ideas. The small cohort size of twelve to seventeen students means that classes can blend whole-group discussion, pair work, group tasks and individual reflection. Use of problem-based learning approaches has proved very useful so that students can direct their own learning and reduce the risks of privileging one particular perspective or approach. A dedicated module on problem-based learning during the second semester at Aalborg University encourages students to develop criticality through collaboration and small-group work on a project. Delivered in co-operation with local practice settings, students work for several months on a major piece of open-ended practice analysis that combines theoretical concepts with field observations and material from interviews with practitioners. Project supervisors provide guidance, but crucially do not direct or lead students so that they develop

their own skills in independent work, self-reflection, collaboration and explaining their thinking to others.

The use of open-ended discussion activities has admittedly been challenging for students and colleagues who are more familiar with lecture-based styles of learning and teaching. We have sought to address this through direct discussions with students about the pedagogical approach on ADVANCES and a range of activities for staff, including exchanges to observe teaching in different institutions and briefings in each university to better understand the program, share experiences, reflect on classroom techniques and identify good practice. The regular video conference and face-to-face meetings of the core ADVANCES program team look at learning and teaching experiences when discussing the progress of cohorts. Both students and educators thus benefit from guidance on the design of learning and teaching activities.

Supporting student well-being on international programs

Teaching on the Master program has highlighted a second important aspect of teaching social work to internationally diverse cohorts: the need to consider well-being in the classroom and overall program. Processes of exposing, interrogating and possibly changing one's own or other people's ideas and values are inevitably emotional. Macias (2013, p. 322) has written that teaching critical social work can be akin to 'bursting bubbles' with 'students feeling deeply unsettled and destabilized by the realization that everything they had believed to be true and just could, in fact, not be so'. Indeed, pedagogy that promotes criticality in relation to international social work 'will stir up defenses, create anxieties and unsettle students' by challenging beliefs (Razack, 2009, p. 19). Interestingly, our classes have often been at their most emotionally charged over issues that confront lived experiences and deep, even unconscious, values rather than ones which are often assumed to be controversial in

international cohorts (e.g. gender, sexuality, drug use). Heated debates thus unexpectedly erupted in class about topics such as the role of families in street children's lives or the value of social enterprise, microfinance and other entrepreneurial solutions, which touched on previous practice or life events that were regarded as either transformational or else quite negative. Whilst being keenly aware of the need to ensure student well-being during classroom activities, we do not regard emotional reaction as automatically negative. Emotion is in fact an integral part of the learning experience and can be pedagogically beneficial (Boler, 1999). Fook (2006, p. 9) has written that 'emotion not only triggered learning … but acted as the impetus and motivation for finding meaning and continuing reflection', thus highlighting how analysis and learning are not just cognitive processes, but have affective, embodied dimensions. Explaining this to students is important to provide support and 'a climate which balances safety and challenge in order to maximize learning' (Fook, 2006, p. 5). Fook's list of principles for achieving this balance have been very instructive and a solid basis for learning in international groups: participatory, non-judgmental, openness to new and other perspectives; responsibility not blame; the right to draw limits; acceptance of multiple contradictory views; focus on 'story' not person; focus on 'why' not 'what to do; and, being non-directive. Classes thus need to place discussions of social work approaches and values in their specific contexts and to avoid problematic binary ideas around 'good/bad' or 'us/them' (Razack, 2009, p. 19). This can be done by considering different narratives, valuing each student's experiences and using open, exploratory discussion questions that do not make judgements about 'the best' or the 'correct answer' (Boler, 1999, p. 186).

More broadly, there are emotional, mental, logistical and physical challenges to international mobility in educational programs. It is undoubtedly exciting and rewarding to study in different countries, but moving between locations involves formidable practicalities in moving between countries, from navigating complex visa systems, enrolling in new

universities, engaging with new lecturers to considering whether to transport or abandon bulky items like cooking equipment and bedsheets acquired in each location. Whilst experience can help to improve skills in adapting, a constant feeling of being in new physical, linguistic, cultural and academic environments can be tiring on programs involving significant travel. The consequences of studying and living away from family and friends must also be considered: quite a few of our students do not return frequently to their home countries during their studies and have often had to leave partners, children and other important people in their lives. This distance becomes especially salient if issues arise in home countries, which can be personal (illness or bereavement) or else broader in terms of wider political and social events. Several of our students thus became parents whilst on the program, others experienced the loss of close family members and a number followed or participated at a distance in movements for political change. All of this has reinforced to us that study cannot be separated from wider aspects of life and that both are significantly affected by being mobile. This is a major reason why our program decided against increasing the amount of mobility during a curriculum review even though we could see great potential benefits for learning and broader experiences, for example from additional study periods in universities outside Europe. It is important to ask whether mobility in an educational program has a genuine pedagogical purpose that justifies the associated efforts and how organizers can support the processes of travelling and settling.

Creating a global professional identity

Although we have argued that social work training of international cohorts should emphasize local factors and context-sensitive responses, there is one crucial goal that is universal: establishing a shared professional identity that spans national borders. Developing a sense of

united purpose, collective skills and shared values provides reassurance for students and practitioners in their complicated work, thus contributing to better social work practice. A strong sense of connection to the social work profession – especially the focus on criticality and understanding social justice in context – 'can be used by social workers to adapt to various indigenous realities and cultural differences when opportunities arise to discover new practice contexts' (Pullen-Sansfacon, Spolander & Engelbrecht, 2012, p. 1042).

The identity-forming aspects of social work education seem especially valuable for students from backgrounds where social work may not be well established or regarded as a distinct profession. Social workers in many countries face poor recognition due to low wages and status as well as an absence of professional organizations, standards, research and even dedicated educational programs to orient practitioners (e.g. Pawar, 2010 on Asia; Iarskaia-Smirnova & Rasell, 2014 on Russia). We have therefore found that the shared identity developed by students during the program can serve to strengthen their position amidst other professionals and their confidence for working in the field once graduated. The task of education is then to give students the conviction to regard and defend social work as a skilled role and profession with specific techniques and values in promoting social change, albeit drawing on knowledge and ideas from a range of disciplines. As Pawar (2010, p. 899) writes about Asian countries, internationally informed social work should contribute to the 'capacity building of the social work profession, social work education and social work practice within a diverse context.' High levels of interaction with lecturers and students are an important part of forming professional identity. The influence of peers chimes with the findings of Barretti (2004, p. 277): 'Their common experiences generate collective problem-solving strategies and encourage mutual support – no less a part of professional socialization than value acquisition'. Interaction and collaboration also create an atmosphere where students feel a

sense of belonging that lasts after the end of the program and strengthens their individual positions once they are spread around the globe again.

While delivering the program, we have become increasingly conscious that developing strong, confident social work values and understanding about how these values can inform practice interventions are important components of students' professional identity. An explicit value base highlights that social work is a complex, contingent process rather than a functional activity (Barretti, 2004) and is important because 'the development of an identity founded on the recognition of professional ethics and values is essential for those engaged in social work' (Freund, Dehan & Cohen, 2017, p. 638). The importance of local context and different perspectives means that discussions of values must be approached sensitively and openly in light of debates about the risks of cultural relativism and universality of ethics and human rights (Hugman 2008; Hugman & Carter 2016). For these reasons our program seeks to promote ongoing discussion with students about the appropriateness of particular values and approaches in concrete situations. The goal of these interactions with lecturers, practitioners and students is not to transmit a rigid set of values, but rather to foster the ability of acting and reacting in unknown situations in ways that sensitively adapt and apply global social work values and standards to particular contexts.

The task is therefore to create a shared professional identity that will help students to defend social work values and develop the profession in the countries where they will work. We aim to strengthen this potential through discussions with local practitioners and visiting scholars, which can be extremely valuable in providing inspiration and practical guidance in shaping professional identity at individual and wider levels. For example, one of our 2014 Summer School speakers spoke passionately about establishing a national association of social

workers in the Caucasus country of Georgia. Her accounts of liaison with officials, universities, service users, practitioners and organizations highlighted many challenges, yet were highly motivational in describing efforts to become a voice for social workers and a frequently consulted body in policy and practice development. Giving students a sense of sharing knowledge and learning from others is another way to strengthen their professional identity, for example through presentations of their research results at an annual summer school as well as at international social work conferences. These events are significant occasions to meet academics and professionals from different settings and link to an overarching goal of contributing to the development of the profession.

Conclusions

This article has sought to highlight key issues facing social work educators seeking to work with internationally diverse cohorts and thus be relevant to multiple local contexts of practice. Our aim is to contribute practical experience relevant of developing a learning and teaching 'methodology to empower social work students and practitioners to understand and mediate with their world … especially when the policy context is altered due to a change in geographical context' (Pullen-Sansfacon et al., 2012, p. 1042). We propose that any social work program seeking global relevance must make a strong effort to represent different standpoints and perspectives in an equal and balanced way. The 'international' acts a frame of reference for studies rather than a particular body of knowledge and skills to be transmitted to students. As expressed in the article's title, we believe that education must value diversity in social work whilst promoting a common approach for analyzing issues, interventions, values and dilemmas. Critical dialogue can support such exchange and provide a platform for reflection on challenging inequalities, tackling marginalization and interrogating the bases

of one's own practice. Any moves to internationalize education thus need to be based on dialogue that values the local and helps all participants to analyze their own practice by engaging with other contexts. Such experiences can help graduates to develop a shared feeling of global professional identity and ensure that social work is constantly evolving and responsive in all contexts.

Disclaimer

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