

International Social Work Practicum in Gerontology: An Example of a Taiwan-US Partnership

Pei-Shan Yang*

Professor, National Taiwan University, R.O.C.

Phyllis Erlbaum-Zur

Director, Jewish Home Lifecare, USA.

Lih-Rong Wang

Professor, National Taiwan University, R.O.C.



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* Corresponding Author, E-mail: peishan@ntu.edu.tw
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Abstract

A pioneer international practicum in gerontology offered to MSW students from Taiwan was initiated by a Taiwan-US partnership in 2006. This study examines the process and outcomes of this practicum. In depth interviews were conducted to two US field agency administrators, three field supervisors, and four MSW students in 2010. Data analysis applies grounded theory. Results indicate that integration is the core of international practicum. Immersion, detailed planning and liaison persons are key components to maximize students' learning. The authors assert that immersion in cross-cultural social work practice enables students to synthesize knowledge, values, and critical thinking. However, with the shortage of resources for international training, the authors suggest that budget allocation for international social work education be given increased priority.

Keywords: international social work, social work practicum, globalization, social work curriculum design, social work education

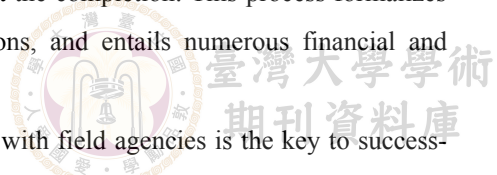


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Introduction

Since the founding of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Council for Social Workers (ICSW), mutual exchanges of ideas and experiences to enrich social work practice and social policy development have been a consistent focus of the profession (Healy, 2008). However, in recent years, globalization has intensified collaborations among professional entities, including schools of social work, and public and private organizations around the world. Under such worldwide globalization, internationalization has become an increasingly valued indicator for a successful university education (Ter Maten & Garcia-Maas, 2009). To respond to this trend, one of Taiwan's Master of Social Work (MSW) programs has made international practicum an important way to broaden students' horizons toward a multi-linguistic and multi-cultural context of professional practice. Panos, Pettys, Cox, and Jones-Hart (2004) pointed out that placing social work students in international field sites has to be an "ongoing commitment". It means that social work programs have to establish training agencies into which they may place students over time. Since 2006, this MSW program has actively engaged in establishing formal relationships with international social work schools and field agencies, and has committed to follow standardized practicum procedures in its practice hours and plans requirements, qualified supervision during the entire process, and final evaluation at the completion. This process formalizes many previously informal connections, and entails numerous financial and administrative efforts.

Developing stable relationships with field agencies is the key to successful social work field education. This study chooses to focus on an MSW prac-



ticum in gerontology because the New York agency specialized in a whole range of senior life care services has stood out as one of the most committed partners. The mutual relationship was started by the first and the second authors, who had been in a supervisee-supervisor relationship at this agency many years ago. When an international practicum developed, the former relationship was transformed into a formal agency-to-school relationship. Further endeavors to foster communication and mutual understanding were required to clarify the aims and procedures of formal collaboration, including mutual visits and countless e-mails. In particular, the school invited the social work director of the agency to hold a professional workshop in Taiwan in May, 2008. Students were offered the opportunity to see and to meet an international field supervisor in person, which significantly increased authenticity of the practicum design.

As professional practice and students' lives become more global, it seems inevitable that social work education needs to prove its efficacy in developing students' capacity to work globally or locally. On the one hand, field agencies expect MSW graduates to be competent soon after they are employed to provide services to heterogeneous clientele. On the other hand, students are challenged with the ever-increasing tuition for higher education. In other words, schools need to prove to both the professional organizations and to students the curricula's high quality. Adding an international component to the curricula seems to have been an attractive and fashionable choice to respond to these needs.

However, a reviewing of the literature shows that placing students in international field sites can be problematic (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007; Panos, Pettys, Cox, & Jones-Hart, 2004; Rai, 2004). Little interest among students, financial and administrative difficulties, lack of qualified field instructors, inadequate student preparation, and socioeconomic and political conditions in

the host countries are among several major obstacles to international field education. How will these difficulties be managed if internationalization is unstoppable? Increased demands for accountability require established international field education programs to provide sufficient documentation of their process and outcomes. Without solid research, it will be hard to understand what the fancy term “international practicum” entails. What will students, field agencies, field supervisors, and school advisers actually experience? What will be the intended and unintended outcomes?

When the field placements are completed and students return home, these efforts must be analyzed. It is important to sufficiently study and document an international practicum program to benefit the international social work profession, as well as social work schools and future students. This article will use Taiwan’s pioneer international social work practicum in gerontology as an example to explore its essential features. Also, through detailed researching and understanding of students’ perspectives and experiences, this article will make suggestions for future international social work practicum designs.

Literature Review

International Social Work

As our world shrinks, social work practice faces globalization’s increasingly complex economic, political, social, and cultural ramifications. Asamoah, Healy, and Mayadas (1997) pointed out that the social work environment has been “reshaped” by increasing global interdependence. Internationally shared social and demographic trends demanded new social work know-

ledge and competences. Development of new technologies made international exchange and sharing easier and faster. Healy (2008: 5-6) emphasized the importance of preparing social workers to think globally while practicing locally, to contribute to mutual problem solving on global social problems, and to monitor the impact of their own nation's policies on other countries' and peoples' well-being.

To meet real practice needs and better prepared students, schools of social work must redesign their programs to strengthen students' core competencies and develop their capacity both to benefit from, and contribute to international dialogue and exchange. Nevertheless, the task of how to integrate European and North American social work history and tradition with international local practice remains a challenge (Cheng, 2008; Hugman, 2010; Sewpaul, 2006; Tsang, Yan, & Shera, 2000). Dominelli (2004) advocated for a change in social work curriculum that might adequately equip students with attitudes, knowledge, and skills to resolve individual and social problems in an ever more interconnected and interdependent world. Field practicum, an integral part of social work training, may provide a good opportunity to facilitate such change. Placing social work student interns in international agencies may offer them a chance for true immersion, thereby helping them acquire a more "sophisticated understanding of the similarities and differences" among various nations and cultures (Healy, 2008: 14).

Though seemingly well-intended, operationalizing an international social work curriculum may face tremendous challenges and opposition. First, as a profession committed to human rights and social justice, social work faces the challenge of distancing itself from colonialist or elitist attitudes and discourses to focus on equality and reciprocity. A review of the past shows that interna-

tional exchanges or social work education without such reciprocity could detrimentally affect less developed countries, local practitioners, and lay people, who may be suspicious, resist, and even resent further communication and exchange (Dominelli, 2004; Healy, 2008; Sewpaul, 2006). Second, a new social work paradigm to integrate various cultures and social systems must be developed (Cheng, 2008; Sewpaul, 2006; Yip, 2004). All parties to international exchange must be sensitive to various cultures' or ethnicities' unique contexts and values. Moreover, the language barrier, though a major obstacle for international exchange, could be ameliorated by translation services. It was the lack of understanding Chinese culture that prevented the English only Western experts from engaging in international exchange (Cheng, 2008). Third, issues of contextualization continue to dwarf the interest in international exchange. Developing a meaningful international social work exchange program requires a sophisticated understanding of, and identification with, the culture, international and local practice context, services, policy, and, most important, a belief that all parties contribute to, and benefit from, each other.

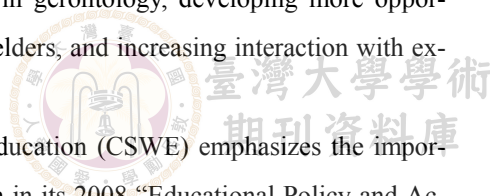
Gerontological and Geriatric Training in Social Work

Lawrence and Simpson (2009) presented the workforce in elder care as “gendered and international”. Social workers need to know how to work with family members, informal caregivers, and paid social-care or home-care workers, who may come from many diverse national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. As developed and developing nations worldwide face the graying of their populations, examining elder-care social policies, laws, programs, and

services abroad may strengthen local social work students' and practitioners' commitment and creativity in addressing their clients' needs.

There is a growing demand for geriatric/gerontological social workers. US labor statistics, Hooyman and Unutzer (2010) anticipated 45% increase in need for geriatric/gerontological social workers. Unfortunately, students tend to shy away from geriatrics/gerontology due to negative stereotypes about older adults. The authors reviewed experiential opportunities to interact positively with older adults outside academic settings, considering committed and highly-trained educators as key to future staff recruitment, training, and retention. The Ministry of Interior, R.O.C. (Republic of China) (2007) predicted an increase in demand of 126% for gerontological social workers from 2007 to 2015, and an additional 152% increase from 2015 to 2020. The Council for Economic Planning and Development, R.O.C. (2009) noted to the serious shortage of manpower-case managers in particular-serving older adults and physically and mentally impaired individuals. Wu and Lu (2010) found similar shortage of adequately-trained social workers in the older adult protective services system. Though close to a quarter of enrolled social work students had taken at least one aging-related course, fewer students were interested in geriatric/gerontological field practicums. Lack of qualified supervisors was another obstacle in gerontological student internships. The Ministry of Interior, R.O.C. (2007) suggested facing the challenge of the social worker shortage by encouraging multidisciplinary courses in gerontology, developing more opportunities for students to interact with elders, and increasing interaction with experienced practitioners in the field.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) emphasizes the importance of competency-based education in its 2008 "Educational Policy and Ac-



creditation Standards” (CSWE, 2008). To strengthen gerontological social work education for all social workers to achieve competency in providing services to the increasingly aging population, CSWE started the ‘Strengthening Aging and Gerontology Education for Social Work’ initiative in 1998, which led to the founding of the Gero-Ed Center. Field work, a crucial component of social work training, provides experiential opportunities for students to gain the knowledge, values, and skills to work with older adults. In Taiwan, though many social work schools and programs offer aging-related courses, gerontological education has not been infused into the required generalist social work curriculum. By initiating this international field-work opportunity, the MSW program hopes to attract more students to gerontology.

International Student Exchange Programs

The Ministry of Education, R.O.C. (2004) announced that a key vision for higher education in Taiwan was to help students develop a sense of global citizenship and community concerns. International exchange was proposed as the key strategy to achieve this educational goal. The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (2011) has myriad programs sponsoring international student and professional exchange and training, whose goals are, “to bring people together in order to exchange information, share ideas, and to foster mutual understanding.” Comparing international exchange programs in both countries, one cannot help but notice the huge differences in government intention and attention toward such programs, and the consequent amount of funding and resources designated for them. Long-term foreign policy interests are a key factor in all US government-sponsored international

exchange programs, as clearly stated in the Interagency Work Group for US Government-sponsored International Exchanges and Training mandates. It is important to note that since 1971, when Taiwan withdrew from the United Nations, it has been excluded from most international organizations. There is no national relationship between the US and Taiwan. Consequently, much former support for two-way exchange and collaboration has ceased and funding cut. Thus, Taiwanese students and professionals interested in international exchange and training face a tremendous financial burden with minimal international support and sponsorship.

With increasing globalization, universities face further marketing challenges. An international practicum program may increase the schools' international social capital. In other words, student-exchange programs help to promote higher education institutes' international competitiveness (Cheng, 2008; De Wit, 2002). Especially for top-ranked universities or professional schools, student-exchange programs have become a high priority in maintaining their leadership role (Cheng, 2008).

Johnson (2004) noted the common lack of resources to internationalize the social work curriculum, namely, few international students, and faculty members taking an ad hoc and voluntary approach to curriculum development. Despite limitations, schools of social work were encouraged to apply Healy's Continuum of Internationalization as a strategic guide to plan an international program. In the continuum, schools may incrementally foster an international program, from merely tolerating student or individual faculty interests, to responding to occasional coursework and placement initiatives, and finally to committing the institution to the effort. Having an international field-placement program with adequate preparation is listed as evidence of a school's organiza-

tional commitment. Schools of social work should build upon such commitment and further formalize the institutional structures for international programs.

As indicated above, internationalization of social work is recognized as an essential component in preparing MSW candidates to better understand the issues and the contexts that potential clients may face in an increasingly interconnected world. Despite ongoing debates on the definition or contents of international social work, schools of social work face challenges from both field agencies and students to deliver high-quality education and help students develop valid professional competence. Developing an adequate international program is an ongoing and difficult process. However, incremental and collaborative efforts among schools, faculty members, partner field agencies, and the students can result in a successful international program. This article will demonstrate such efforts made by the Taiwan-US collaboration in a gerontological social work practicum.

Research Methodology

From 2006 to 2012, a total of 12 students from the MSW program has chosen practicum placement in New York, including 4 males and 8 females. Among them, 4 chose the field of aging and were placed in the agency of this study, which is the only one in gerontology among the total of 5 placement agencies within the study period. Students in international practicum follow the same guidelines as their counterparts in domestic agencies. A minimum of 6 weeks, i.e., 240 practice hours at the site is required. The field agency must provide qualified supervisors to conduct individual as well as group supervi-

sion at least once a week and as needed. The field agency of the study also assigned one senior social work administrator to monitor the entire practicum to ensure the smoothness and effectiveness of placement.

A small-scale exploratory study on the effectiveness of the Taiwan-US international social work practicum in gerontology was conducted. Participants include two agency administrators (one in her fifties and one in her sixties), three field supervisors (two females in their fifties and one male in his forties), and four Taiwanese MSW students placed internationally at the US agency (3 females and 1 male all in their early twenties). These four MSW students all graduated from Taiwanese Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs and had experienced two times of BSW practicum and one time of MSW practicum before they chose the international practicum, hoping for a different experience. It is worthy to note that one female MSW student is Korean. All the participants gave formal consent to join the study. Face-to-face in depth interviews were conducted by the first author of this article. Based on the long-term relationship between the school and the agency, no additional fees were paid to any of the interviewees. Due to the time limitation of research visit to the US, all the administrator and supervisor interviews were about half an hour each, while student interviews done in Taiwan were about 2 hours each.

In the texts below, the students are referred to as TF1 (Taiwanese female 1), TF2, KF (Korean female), and TM (Taiwanese male), while administrators as A and supervisors as S. The interviews were conducted in September, 2010 in New York and then in Taiwan. Interview questions covered pedagogical, cultural, and experiential aspects of this international field education, focusing particularly on participants' preparation, execution, and evaluation of this program as it impacted their personal and professional development. Three sets

of semi-structured interview guides were used to help focus the three groups of interviews.

All the interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Interview texts were analyzed based on grounded theory. Main concepts were drawn from the text data and field notes, through multiple analyses. Double review was done by both the Taiwanese and US research partners to validate the process of concept development.

Findings

Integration as the core value of the international social work practicum

First, by training in the United States, Taiwanese MSW candidates had the opportunity to see and experience first-hand the social work practice context to which they had been introduced through texts. International field work facilitates the integration of textbook, experiential, and professional learning. Thus, in a mere six weeks' intensive practicum, their understanding of gerontological social work was advanced. The first student in this Taiwan-US practicum program said that "the practicum was for professional growth and it had a different purpose from mere cultural sight-seeing or day visits to professional agencies. ...One or two months of practice was not really long enough to go really deep. What I could do was really basic. But such involvement in real practice and elderly service programs made me get hold of the 'spirit' which is quite different from my original learning in Taiwan," (TF1) she said, "To see is to believe." Another student also said, "I think the most important is the

cross-cultural perspective, which broadens our horizons and our boundaries. For example, in the agency I saw the market (i.e., commercialization) in the American health care system and its pros and cons, their health insurance programs, their way of taking care of elderly people, the elders' life styles, which were quite different from Taiwanese counterparts." (TM)

Second, students were intrigued by the similarities and differences between international practice and local practice, and were able to integrate them to enhance their own commitment to the profession. Seeing that the originally-considered "American" practice actually included working with a multi-linguistic and multiethnic clientele, i.e., Russian, Spanish, African-American, and Asian, helped students reflect on their "local" Taiwanese practice experience working with international clients, such as the so-called "immigrant brides" or foreign care-workers for seniors and the disabled. Students were amazed that to better serve its diverse clientele, the field agency has developed a staff "language bank" to help with translation and/or interpretation. The two students in 2010 even met an old Jewish lady who was quite familiar with Taiwan because she had a Taiwanese daughter-in-law. Another man once visited Taiwan during his army years. He was thrilled to meet the students and showed them the Taiwan national anthem on Youtube! One interviewee pointed out a particular example when she observed the social worker discussing the issues of Advanced Directives with her client in quite a peaceful way. She wondered why they could go over death and dying issues so calmly but in Taiwan it would be very difficult to do so even among family members. Later she raised this question at supervision and was told by the supervisor that it was only because the social worker had had a long term relationship with the client so she could break the common taboo. The interviewee said, "my super-

visor also knew more about Taiwanese cultural context which tends to avoid any discussions about death and dying and we had an exchange of opinions.” (TW3) In short, the international/local boundary became blurred.

Third, educators and students were able to learn from each other. Regarding the benefits of time spent supervising international students, almost all the supervisors felt they gained a lot. Students always bring a fresh perspective to the routine work. One supervisor said that “the students’ enthusiasm reminded me of my original commitment to social work.” (S1) One administrator said that “Asian students look so young. I used to worry when XX (i.e., the first student) came whether she could make it or not because she looked like a little girl. Then I learned that they were all superb.” (A1) Students also acknowledged that “we bring some assets to them, too.” (TM) TM stated that “our enthusiastic learning probably made the task supervisors feel rewarded and meaningful.” He also mentioned that “the Creative Director in the senior housing told me that the elders were very happy this summer to have the company of two youngsters. We answered their curiosity. ...I have maintained contacts with a few elders in the senior housing and their family because they were really fond of us.” In a well-designed pedagogical program, adult educators, clients, and students all are eager learners. International exchanges help all participants enjoy learning and feel more connected to the modern world.

Fourth, students took up the challenge of the international practicum as both a personal and professional break through. While leaving behind familiar social supports, they were highly motivated to explore and learn. In the interviews the students displayed a strong sense of meaning in comparison with their peers. Speaking of both personal and professional terms, one student said that “the world is getting smaller, and that is a fact. In economics or politics,

people are talking about internationalization and cooperation. If we social workers don't internationalize, we cannot keep up.” (TM) Another student said that “I saw myself able to solve many problems in New York, and that really enhanced my self confidence. I had some tough time during my teenage years, so I was always not quite confident. This experience really helps me grow.” (TF1) The other student said that “I felt almost like switched on.” (TF2) Their living and working experiences in New York significantly broadened their perspectives, providing confidence and strength. They grew a lot and were ready to “move around without fear” (KF) as one student said.

Fifth, students who had many varied contacts with seniors, i.e., along the continuum of senior life care services and in their daily lives in America, experienced the integration of different ages. The students who celebrated a resident's 100th birthday showed the researcher a decorative napkin inscribing “100 years young”. (TF2) They celebrated with many people of all age groups. Age simultaneously can be both insignificant and highly significant. When people dare to break through traditional age barriers, they face unlimited potential.

The above mentioned five integrative dimensions loosened up the students' original perspectives and offered new possibilities. As one student said, “The program really gave me a world view. Though I will remain to work in Taiwan, I think this experience opened up my personal possibilities. Or it may even benefit the next generation through me, the next generation of mine. I think this has an effect of legacy in education. It may be hard to measure exactly how much more international perspectives I acquire; or how much more flexible and creative my thoughts become; or if my thinking is more reflexive; or if I can present more substantial ideas; or I am more active, etc.. But I think these aspects made the program very important.” (TM)

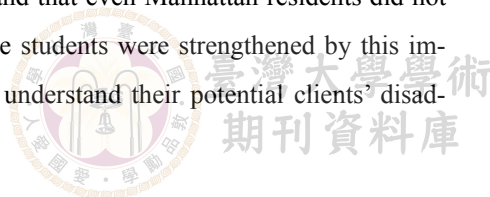
Immersion Fosters Integration, and Produces Maximum Learning

Immersion may signify “being part of a whole”, occurring when educators and students all feel free to interact and learn. One of the four students, a Korean, said “I felt less like a foreigner in New York than in Taiwan. In America, there are people who speak all kinds of languages. Maybe that is why they made me feel I was part of them. The supervisors let me try things. It seems that I had more language limitations in Taiwan and the supervisors seemed concerned about my practice. I had always felt a bit inferior professionally.” (KF) Some Taiwanese supervisors may be more restrictive while training interns. In contrast, students expressed that their individual learning needs were given high priority at the field agency and that they were allowed the freedom to participate in agency activities, to observe, and to share ideas on any issues. One interviewee said that “compared to my previous practicum experiences, I think the efficiency and the respect to individual student’s learning needs were the most impressive to me. The supervisors all showed an attitude that while I am responding to students’ questions, I am learning, too. It was really a type of reciprocal learning.” (TM)

The Taiwan-US practicum program students lived on the agency campus, one in the staff dormitory, the other three in a lovely independent housing building for middle-income seniors. They enjoyed many opportunities to interact with staff, seniors, and family members. One administrator emphasized that during the orientation and welcome it is important to give the students both work-related information and general life information that might help them “settle down.” (A2) One student often joined senior tenants for evening

snack time when everyone was in pajamas. The administrator explicitly showed her appreciation for a student's initiative for alerting the staff when she found a resident wandering around at very late hours. The students also joined the seniors for many summer outdoor activities or were invited by staff from various countries to understand their lives through sharing food and drink of their native countries and learning about their values and experiences in America. The students enjoyed an exceptionally rich experience during their practicum, communicating and interacting with people both in their professional and personal environment. Interestingly, one student interviewed used the term "roam about" (TF2) to describe their lives. "Roaming" implies no intended plan or purpose. That is when and how integration occurred naturally and holistically. As Confucius said, "there exists a teacher of mine among the three of us walking together." No one purposefully is learning, but real learning is observable and observed by all.

While immersed in a different culture, students experienced themselves as both social work interns and minority students. They spoke a different language and tried to grasp highly-professional contents in a limited time. The climate and food were different. They needed to learn many intricacies of dealing with people around them. One student detailed her experience of being harassed by two teenagers the day she arrived in New York and how she gradually learned to be street-smart. Another explained how she came to realize her prior misconceptions about the US, and that even Manhattan residents did not understand the Bronx. In the end, the students were strengthened by this immersion. They increasingly came to understand their potential clients' disadvantaged sociocultural status.



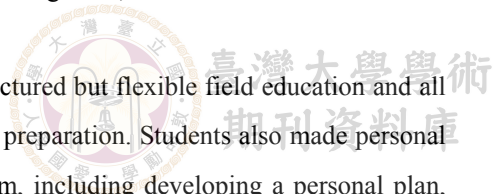
Detailed Planning and Liaison Persons are Key Components

The Taiwan-US partnership started with an informal relationship and later was formalized upon request for an international social work practicum. The field agency has a clearly stated commitment to education, which offers a solid foundation for welcoming international social work students from Taiwan. Purposes and procedures of student internships are clearly specified. The Taiwanese MSW program also has specific guidelines for an international practicum. One student said, "I adapted quite well there. What matters is the preparation in advance." (TF1)

Advance planning and preparation notwithstanding each student's individual needs and circumstances necessitated attention and alteration during the practicum's course. Personality, sex, alone or with partner in practicum, availability of local informal social support, language skills, personal educational interests besides gerontology, and unexpected adjustment difficulties or illnesses are specific conditions supervisors or students mentioned at their interviews to require additional attention. For example, as the first student described:

"The first weekend after my arrival was Independence Day. I went to visit my friend in Rhode Island, and unfortunately hurt my cornea. For three days I could not see anything, and my friend took care of me. But I had to return to New York to start the practicum. Thinking back, I don't even know how I did it." (TF1)

Overall, students received a structured but flexible field education and all four thought highly of its design and preparation. Students also made personal efforts to plan for a fruitful practicum, including developing a personal plan,

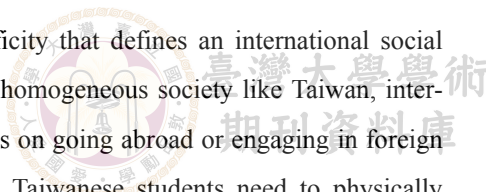


making travel arrangements, applying for financial aid, practicing English, reading and getting field-related knowledge, and connecting with local friends and associates to ensure a safe and pleasant visit.

With formal plans and guidelines in place, supplemental attention was provided by liaisons from the two partner organizations. These individuals maintained frequent contact with the students and each other, to assess program and students' progress. Students received ongoing encouragement from the faculty liaison. When they started the practicum, the fact of having an agency liaison guaranteed the quality of the students' education. One student said, "The agency and supervisors offered us a very friendly environment which allowed us to take initiatives and to ask questions." (TM) Another student noted, "Besides shadowing social work supervisors on different units, she (the agency liaison) spent a lot of time discussing with us about practice issues, our observation, our reflexive thoughts, and directions for further thinking. I feel that it is she who helped enhance the quality of our learning in such limited time of the practicum." (TF2) Overall, the deep trust between American and Taiwanese social work educators offered a warm and supportive environment that facilitated a structured yet flexible field education for each student.

Discussions and Conclusion

This study highlights the specificity that defines an international social work practicum in gerontology. In a homogeneous society like Taiwan, international social work primarily focuses on going abroad or engaging in foreign social work activities. It seems that Taiwanese students need to physically



leave the country to be truly immersed in the international environment. Such activities as having internationally focused lectures, courses, and conferences, or receiving visiting scholars or international students, are not perceived by Taiwanese students as “international”. Thus, while the world population is aging fast, more international social work practicum opportunities are necessary for Taiwanese gerontological students to leave their safety zone and to learn from experienced professionals in other countries.

When students go abroad, they must fulfill educational purposes, not simply be tourists (Gray & Webb, 2010). This study suggests that in order to better prepare students academically and professionally for overseas placement, social work departments need to bring in more international elements into the current curriculum design. Possibilities may include: (1) elective courses like international Social Work or American/European Social Welfare, (2) specific pre-practicum requirements, in particular, proof of adequate language competency, and proof of sufficient prerequisite knowledge in the chosen field of practice, (3) study plan writing workshops, and (4) international practicum workshops to have alumni and senior students meet with potential applicants and share experiences and information. All these measures serve to ensure a quality international educational experience.

This study shows that students were critical and reflexive while immersed in social work practice in a different society and culture. They appreciated the opportunities to be challenged, personally and professionally. Taiwanese social work education is deeply rooted in North American and European models. Most of the school faculty received their doctoral degrees in the US or Europe. Students have been acquainted with developed nations’ social work history and more recent welfare systems, programs, and services. As globalization contin-

ues, their opportunities to access international sources have expanded. However, Taiwanese students lacked experiential field learning in a real international environment. The interviewed students of this study state repeatedly that the international practicum enables them to synthesize knowledge, values, and social criticism through true immersion and personal observation. They followed and shadowed experienced supervisors in everyday work situations and learned to help real older adult clients from various cultural and racial background. Besides work, they made friends, they tried to solve everyday life problems, and they lived independently in a foreign country, which for most of them are all first time experiences in their lives. With their personal and professional international experiences, these students enhanced their cultural competency. In addition, they have understood themselves better and have better positioned themselves to participate in, or even lead, future discussions of global social work.

It is hoped that the dichotomy of international/local, foreign/native, young/old, and they/we will be broken through increased human or virtual contact. The professional ideology of emancipation and social change are crucial to international social work education. Taiwanese students witnessed and experienced the great efforts made by their field supervisors and colleagues to effect change in long-term care systems and to honor personal choice and dignity. The person-centered care applies both to the elderly clients and the students, who are grateful and prepared to continue the legacy.

The international practicum has undergone development, from an informal working relationship to a formal commitment. This formalization of collaborative relationships echoes the findings of Sugawara (2009) on the value of human relations in developing social work curricula, especially the importance

of personal contact and communication. But our study also highlights the lack of resources and financial support for international training that current Taiwanese social work students may encounter compared to students in medicine, nursing, or business (Ter Maten & Garcia-Maas, 2009). More capital must be invested in international social work training if both Taiwan and the US wish to train future social work leaders, and to share expertise in mutual problem solving on global aging issues (Healy, 2008) .

This study is limited by its exploratory nature. First, due to the scarcity of field placement in gerontology, only one agency and four students were included in this study of international social work practicum in gerontology. Second, all the interviewees were committed partners of the Taiwan-US partnership and the students all received financial support from the school. Their opinions may be positively biased, especially when interviewed by a faculty member and advisor of the program. Future studies are suggested to compare students in various fields of practicum, in various agencies, and in various international cities. Especially, how international practicum may be distinguished from domestic practicum in students' professional learning needs to be further explored and documented with clear evidence.



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老人領域國際社工實習：臺大社工系 與美國機構之合作案例分析

楊培珊*、Phyllis Erlbaum-Zur**、王麗容***

作為促進臺灣社會工作教育國際化的一項新興項目，臺灣大學社會工作學系碩士班提供 MSW 學生至紐約老人機構國際實習的計畫自 2006 年起舉行，由臺灣大學社會工作學系與美國老人生活照顧機構合辦。本研究為一小型探索性研究，於 2010 年深度訪問美國實習機構主管 2 人、實習督導 3 人，及歷年參與此機構實習學生共 4 人，訪談資料逐字稿參考紮根理論進行分析。本研究為檢視此實習計畫至今之過程與實際效益。結果顯示，國際實習的核心概念是整合。學生能融入實務與在地生活、詳細的事前規劃，以及主辦與合作單位專責的實習聯絡人，是提升學生國際實習方案成果的關鍵因素。研究者認為，透過國際實習沉浸在跨文化的社會工作領域之實踐經驗，使學生更加能夠整合社會工作的知識、價值觀和思辨力。然而，社工學生國際培訓資源相較其他學系學生而言是相當短缺的，研究者建議，為培育具有國際觀的社工人才，急需爭取更多資源投入國際社會工作實習。

關鍵詞：國際社會工作、老人社會工作實習、全球化、社會工作課程設計、
社會工作教育

* 國立臺灣大學社會工作學系副教授。

** The Director of Admissions and Discharge Services, the Bronx Division, Jewish Home Lifecare, USA.

*** 國立臺灣大學社會工作學系教授。





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