Beyond indigenization and reconceptualization
Towards a global, multidirectional model of technology transfer

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Throughout the 20th century, global social work education has been transformed by two key processes: indigenization and reconceptualization or authentization. In much of the developing world, such influences have greatly affected the formation of both social work education and practice as systematic responses to local social and economic development problems. Social work in developed countries has also been shaped to some extent by similar phases (Bernard, 1995; Midgley, 1981).

This article presents an overview of the indigenization and authentization of social work education in developing countries. Existing frameworks describing the progression of social work education are reviewed, mainly from Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, whence the principal models of social work exchange have emanated. Finally, an alternative model is presented, which conceptualizes the multidirectional exchange of information and technology between and among developed and developing countries. The proposed model builds on frameworks by Cox (1997), Ragab (1995), Resnick (1995), and Mayadas and Elliott (1997), and responds to criticisms that developing countries’ historical
dependence on western social work has rendered social work education inappropriate to address the demands of social work practice in the host countries (Billups and Juliá, 1991; Midgley, 1981).

Conceptual framework

The social work profession comprises an eclectic mix of theories, values and practices, influenced by the ideological, cultural and political contexts of a particular country (Hokenstad et al., 1992). It is often how – and if – a country chooses to define its social problems that dictates how the social work profession in that country will respond, and similarly how social work education will be formulated to train professionals to respond. Because countries differ not only in their political, economic and social structures, but also in their definitions of social problems, indigenization and authentization emerged over the second half of the last century in the developing world largely in response to an underlying discrepancy in the transfer of appropriate social work ideas and technology among countries. The presence of multicultural, multiethnic and religiously diverse populations in many developing countries has also precipitated the indigenization of the western social work model as well as the authentization of native responses to the unique social problems of each country (Cox, 1997).

Indigenization

Indigenization has its conceptual roots in academia in Latin America, surfacing as a result of the disillusionment experienced by social workers with the use of western theories and practices in the region. Latin American social workers claimed that many of the ideas, values and methods required vast modification if they were to be an appropriate response to their social problems and needs (Midgley, 1981; Resnick, 1995).

Conceptually, indigenization connotes a process through which a recipient country experiences discontent with the imported western model of social work in the context of the local political, economic, social and cultural structures. Subsequently, the social work profession in the recipient country identifies incongruous components of the western model and works to adapt, adjust or modify them in order to improve the model’s fit to the local country and culture (Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988).
**Authentization or reconceptualization**

In the late 1960s, dissatisfaction with the outcomes of indigenization in the developing world prompted many countries to distance themselves from the western social work model and to generate new responses to structural social problems from within. The social work profession in many developing countries recognized that inherent in the western model were remedial approaches based on individual need. It became evident that continuous attempts to indigenize and re-indigenize the imported model would fail to change the original model’s ingrained philosophy from remedial intervention to approaches favoring mass restructuring of the surrounding social systems (Resnick, 1995).

Characterized by a radical shift in social work’s overall focus, reconceptualization aimed to modify the individually based goals of western social work to address social problems that were considered to be more structural in origin. In Latin America as early as 1969, the Catholic University of Chile was the theoretical pioneer of the movement, creating indigenous social work theories and practices based on local values and concepts including liberation theology, dependency theory, subjective and objective realities, solidarity, conscientization, praxis and critical thinking (Aguilar, 1995; Resnick, 1995). In the Middle East and parts of North Africa, Egyptian social workers channeled their discontent into efforts to develop indigenous models of social work based on the political, economic, cultural and religious realities of the countries in the region. Ragab (1995) describes the Islamic reorientation of social work movement in the Gulf region as an effort to harmonize social work theory and practice with the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith. Similarly, capitalizing on the diversity of the South Asian region, India developed its social work education and training by drawing on teachings and methods from other academic disciplines such as social anthropology, social psychology, economics and political science. *Satyagraha*, or non-violent resistance as used by Gandhi, is a popular social-action method taught in schools of social work to effect political change (Nanavatty, 1997). Across regions, the impetus to develop local social work theories and practices was determined not by the presence of a poorly fitting western model but rather by the local social problems and characteristics of each society (Resnick, 1995; Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988).
Existing models of the development of social work practice and education

A review of the literature reveals four models that present the transmission of western social work ideas, practices and technology from the developed countries to developing countries. The first three models constitute region-specific models (Cox, 1997; Ragab, 1995; Resnick, 1995), and the fourth model is a general depiction of the global exchange of social work concepts, ideas and methods (Mayadas and Elliott, 1997). In Table 1, Cox (1997) portrays the process through which social work practice and education have evolved in the Asia-Pacific region.

In Phase 1, characterized by traditional-sector welfare systems, Cox (1997) includes the indigenous cultural practices and charitable acts as precursors to the introduction of social work to the region by western colonial powers. Although not formally deemed as social work, the charitable activities prevalent during this phase range back to the period before Christ and continue to the present day as a parallel helping structure to the social work profession.

The arrival of western colonial powers and missionaries in Asia, together with the rapid industrialization and urbanization of countries throughout the region, marked the inception of Phase 2, known as the industrial charity model. During this period, the western model of remedial and charitable social services was introduced to schools of social work and to governmental and non-governmental agencies. Indigenization of western methods and practices followed as countries began to experiment with imported, individualized helping techniques in response to their respective local needs. Yet as industrialization and urbanization began to introduce their own social problems, many social workers discovered that the indigenized western model was incapable of meeting the needs of local societies and of addressing the emerging social problems encountered by the profession.

Phase 3 is characterized as an era of contrast with respect to social workers’ attempts to create institutionalized responses to their local problems. Western-trained welfare personnel, convinced of the effectiveness of their imported approaches, continued to apply American and British social work models. Conversely, locally trained personnel, dissatisfied with this approach, reacted against modernization and dependency on the West and began to generate authentized, local models of social work education and practice, based on principles of social development.
The second model, in Table 2, developed by Ragab (1995), presents a three-stage model of the diffusion of social work education from the western world to the Middle East and Egypt.

Like the previous model, Ragab’s model is a linear, stage-based depiction of the transfer of social work practice and education, with virtually no retransmission of the indigenized or authentized efforts back to the developed world. Also, progression from one stage to the next is largely precipitated by an adverse reaction to the outcomes from the previous stage. Unlike the Asia-Pacific experience, however, social work in the Middle East during the third phase consists of a much more concerted effort towards reconceptualizing social work theory and practice.

The third model, by Resnick (1995), portrays a similar three-stage model of the development of social work education in Latin America (see Table 3).

Congruent with the other models, the exchange of social work education in Latin America mirrors the three-stage, linear Asian and Middle Eastern experiences. In contrast, though, social work in Latin America underwent a much shorter period of indigenization compared with the profession’s development in Asia and the Middle East. Several authors attribute this rapid movement from Phase 1 to Phase 3 to the political and social changes in Latin America during the decades of the 20th century in which other developing areas were experimenting with the indigenization of the western model. The spread of communist military regimes and oppressive dictators, the Cuban revolution, the rise and fall of the Alliance for Progress and the defeat of the Allende government in Chile by a revolutionary coup d’etat hastened the realization that western remedial approaches were ineffective responses to the political and social crises endemic to the region during that period. Rather, the scope of massive human need and suffering, poverty, human rights violations and war required other indigenous approaches from the region’s social work profession (Aguilar, 1995; Resnick, 1995).

Finally, Mayadas and Elliott’s (1997) model, presented in Table 4, delineates four phases in international social work exchange.

Similar to previous models, this explanation represents a stage-based process of social work exchange between the developed and the developing world during Phases 1, 2 and 3. However, the uniqueness of this model lies in the addition of a fourth phase, in which social work is currently embedded, that inserts international social work exchanges into the context of social development. The social
Table 1 The three-stage process of the evolution of social work in the Asia-Pacific region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Descriptive characteristics of phase</th>
<th>Key highlights of phase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Traditional-sector welfare systems</td>
<td>Roots of social work found in traditional culture (e.g. Buddhist religious structures, Zhou dynasty, Marxism). Local-based social work has coexisted with industrial and modern social work throughout history via religious institutions and women’s movements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Industrial charity model</td>
<td>Introduction of social work to region by the West, by colonial powers or accompanying religious missionaries. Governmental and nongovernmental groups affiliated with colonial powers established services for populations negatively affected by development process. As countries rapidly industrialized and urbanized, funds emerged to finance welfare systems, but unique urban social problems emerged across countries. Social needs continued to be addressed via remedial and charitable services. Social work during Phase 2 was disassociated from earlier traditional phase, given its application largely in urban sectors across countries.</td>
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Characterized by entry into the welfare field of local welfare personnel. Phase 3 deemed as a period of stark contrast:

1. Local welfare personnel trained in the West tend to emulate British and American social work models, theories and practices; alternative models are scarce; compared with:

2. Local welfare personnel reacting against modernization and western dependency tend to promote people’s power, conscientization, community development, social action, grassroots organizations and bottom-up paradigms.

Source: Cox, 1997.
Table 2 The three-stage process of the diffusion of social work into the Middle East and Egypt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>1935 to 1960s</td>
<td>Transplantation of American model into Egypt</td>
<td>Rapid proliferation of new social work training programs based on American model. Graduate schools became in high demand. Market opened for skills of trained Egyptian social workers.</td>
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<td>Transfer of American</td>
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<tr>
<td>model of social work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Early 1960s to</td>
<td>Dissatisfied with blind emulation syndrome, Arab countries began to adapt and adjust the American model in congruence with local conditions and requirements.</td>
<td>Arab countries continued to experience dissatisfaction with American model. Universities identified incompatibilities between underlying assumptions of traditional western models and the basic tenets of Islam. Social work educators began looking for viable alternatives to indigenization movement based on Islamic beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenization of social</td>
<td>early 1980s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work movement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Early 1980s to</td>
<td>The ultimate indigenization stance: incorporates Islamic concepts of humankind, society and universe into locally generated social work theory and practice.</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction minimized. Egypt is exporting the model to neighboring Arab countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic reorientation</td>
<td>present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>of social work</td>
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development approach, which links micro, mezzo and macro initiatives while aiming to synchronize social policies and efforts to promote economic development at the grassroots level, offers a promising framework within which inclusive, multidirectional models of information and technology transfer can be designed (Midgley, 1995). The presence of this additional stage invites the social work profession to proactively enter the global 21st century by generating innovative models of international social work exchange that are derived from principles of social development. As revealed in the present overview of existing frameworks, such models of global social work exchange are virtually non-existent.

**Limitations of existing models**

There are three commonalities among the existing models depicting the international exchange of social work ideas, practices and technology. First, with the exception of the Mayadas and Elliott (1997) model, the other frameworks all describe a linear, stage-based process in which western, developed countries (the haves) disseminate technology, knowledge and skills to passive recipients in the developing world (the have-nots). The recipient countries subsequently experiment with the foreign-developed ideas and technology, progressing to later stages in the event that the western model fails to address the local social problems or to fulfill the demands of social work practice in the host countries.

The second commonality among the existing models consists of their representation of a unidirectional flow of information and technology from the developed to the developing world. Aside from the interregional flow of exchange depicted by the Mayadas and Elliott (1997) model, the remaining unidirectional models generally fail to capture the retransmission of successful interventions from developing countries back to the developed world. These include the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh (Counts, 1996); the inclusion of training in economics and social and economic development for social workers in African schools of social work (Asamoah, 1995); neighborhood associations (juntas) to encourage citizen participation in Chile (Resnick, 1995); and adult education programs based on Freire’s pedagogical techniques, which seek to transform oppressive social conditions for poor and disadvantaged populations (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982). In the search for a truly global model of social work exchange, multidirectionality is essential.
Table 3 The three-stage model of the development of social work education in Latin America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Main impetus</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Importation of social work practice and education from Europe and United States</td>
<td>Beginning in 1925 with the first school of social work in Chile</td>
<td>Social work practice emerged as a response to the creation of national social welfare institutions and the formulation of national plans of social and economic development. Social work education emerged in Latin America largely with the advice and financial support of European social work professionals and United Nations experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Indigenization of western models of social work</td>
<td>After 1945, following the First Pan-American Congress of Social Service in Chile</td>
<td>Indigenization is characterized as a brief period in the history of social work practice and education in the Latin American region. Schools of social work began translating western-based social work materials into the Spanish language and recognized the need to train social workers in methods and techniques that were consistent with the Latin American value system. Latin American social workers began to draw upon theorists and pedagogues indigenous to the region for examples, such as Paulo Freire (conscientization) and Father Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino (liberation theology).</td>
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</tbody>
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Phase 3
Reconceptualization, retheorization and reformulation of social work movement

Mid-1960s to present

The Catholic University of Chile changed its social work curriculum in alignment with the social reality of Chile during the 1960s. Academics felt that intellectual colonialism from the developed world permeated existing social work theories, values and practices taught prior to that time. This event sparked a ripple effect throughout the region and many schools of social work followed the Chilean precedent.

The social problem, rather than the theory and methods approach that previously defined the profession, became the determining factor in the development of alternative, indigenous social work practice and educational methods. Local social work values, including conscientization, praxis, liberation theology, critical thinking, transformation, dialogue, participation and solidarity became the central, guiding principles in the social work profession in the region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Predominant direction of exchange</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Model of services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 Early pioneers, 1880s–1940s</td>
<td>Europe to America</td>
<td>Paternalism, Ethnocentrism, Protectionism</td>
<td>Charity, Philanthropy, Social control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 Professional imperialism, 1940s–1970s</td>
<td>America to rest of world Centrifugal</td>
<td>Paternalism, Ethnocentrism, Colonialism</td>
<td>Social control, Remedial, Medical, Crisis-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3 Reconceptualization and indigenization, 1970s–1990s</td>
<td>Within regions Worldwide Centripetal</td>
<td>Regionalization, Polarization, Separation Localization</td>
<td>Developmental in developing countries, Remedial in western industrial countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4 International social development, 21st century</td>
<td>International networking</td>
<td>Globalization, Transculturalism, Multiculturalism Democracy, diversity Social, cultural and ethnic interchange</td>
<td>Developmental in rural and urban areas worldwide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for a sustainable model encapsulating the innovative ideas and successful practices of countries in development.

The third commonality among existing frameworks refers to the delineation of a reactive process of the exchange of social work technology and ideas. It is precisely a country’s response to the goodness of fit in the prior stage which will determine any subsequent movement into the following stages of technology development. For instance, a developing country that adapts a direct practice intervention from a developed country to its own local context and culture – and subsequently experiences a goodness of fit – may never proceed to the authentization stage of technology development. This, in turn, may perpetuate the recipient country’s dependence on the donor country for additional interventions to respond to social problems that arise in the future, rather than encourage the social work profession in the recipient country to look internally at both its local needs and available resources to generate a solution.

As depictions of the historical reality of international social work exchange, the four existing models represent a reality in which recipient countries generally acquired their methods from abroad, or rather, were subjugated into applying them at home, as in the case of historical colonialism in much of the developing world. In Social Work in the 21st Century, Mayadas and Elliott (1997) urge social workers in the new millennium to devise innovative, international networking models based on values such as globalization, transculturalism, democracy, and cultural and ethnic interchange to complement the existing unidirectional and reactive models of social work exchange.

Towards a global, multidirectional model of technology transfer

In light of the limitations of existing frameworks of cross-cultural social work exchange, this article presents an alternative model. As shown in Figure 1, the proposed model consists of three fundamental characteristics which are absent from existing explanations to date. It is multidirectional in its flow of exchange, proactive in nature and circular in dimension.

The proposed model is different from existing models in various aspects. First, the multidirectional model is contingent upon the continuous transfer and re-transfer of technology and ideas between donor (or instigator) countries and recipient (or receiver) countries, as well as among receiver countries and other countries at large.
According to this model, ideas can be received and implemented; received, modified and implemented; or newly generated within a country or culture as a product of the local political, social and economic contexts. In essence, the continuous vertical and horizontal dialogue and exchange unify these three possibilities and keep the multidirectional model functioning.

Second, under the multidirectional model, there is no developed/donor–developing/recipient hierarchy in which technology consistently initiates with the former and is transferred to the latter. Rather, the proposed model is proactive in nature; that is, any country can enter the cycle at any point to disseminate innovative technology and ideas and/or to receive such technology and ideas from other countries. According to the model, the dissemination can occur along three dimensions: first, pure technology and/or...
ideas that have not undergone indigenization or authentization; second, technology and/or ideas that have been imported and subsequently indigenized; and third, technology and/or ideas that have not been subjected to foreign influence and hence are a result of pure authentization. The key element linking all dimensions is the transmission and/or retransmission of technology and ideas among all countries. Thus, the proposed model eliminates the hegemony inherent in existing models in which developed countries are continuously the creators and donors of technology and ideas, while the developing countries are consistently the recipients and modifiers of imported knowledge and practices.

Lastly, the proposed multidirectional model is circular in dimension and thus does not require that countries progress through previous stages in order to arrive at later stages. Under the circular model, a particular country can directly apply imported ideas and technology or, rather, adapt and modify foreign ideas to its local reality through indigenization. A country may also choose to authentize wholly new practices and technologies without having first passed through prior phases, much as many Latin American countries have done by introducing indigenous concepts into social work practice (Aguilar, 1995; Resnick, 1995), or as some Middle Eastern countries are currently doing by aligning social work more closely with Islam’s tenets (Ragab, 1995). Essentially, this circular model rests upon the assumption that ideas and knowledge are fluid and are continuously adapted, re-adapted, implemented and re-implemented from one country or culture to another.

Due to its global and multidirectional nature, the proposed model would be useful for explaining the international dissemination of innovative techniques that originate in developing countries and are effectively applied in the developed world. Such exchanges, as evidenced earlier, are generally not captured and explained by existing models. One eminent example of a successful intervention designed in the developing world and subsequently modified and implemented in the developed world consists of an urban adaptation of the Grameen Bank: the Full Circle Fund (FCF) of the Women’s Self-Employment Project in Chicago (Balkin, 1993). Analogous to its Bangladeshi counterpart in group structure and lending methodology, the FCF promotes a gradualist approach to lending via a series of small loans to organized groups of poor women in Chicago in order to finance an array of social and community development ventures.
Counts (1996) delineates other examples of projects modeled after the Grameen Bank that have been effectively adapted, or indigenized, in western developed countries, including the Good Faith Fund in rural, impoverished counties throughout Arkansas; the Lakota Fund for Native Americans in South Dakota; Acción Internacional in low-income, Hispanic communities in Brooklyn, NY; and the Coalition for Women’s Economic Development for African Americans and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. Unlike many existing models of international social work exchange, the multi-directional model of technology transfer presented here could effectively depict the global dissemination of these and other initiatives that originate in developing countries and are subsequently implemented in the developed world.

Based on values of egalitarianism, democracy, multiculturalism and respect for diversity, this model proposes that all countries be viewed as both donors (instigators) and recipients (receivers) of technology and ideas. In essence, it is only through the collaboration of all countries, as co-participants, in circulating successful adaptations of existing methods, as well as in transmitting new local technology and ideas, that international social work education and the profession at large can provide a global response to the economic development, environmental, health and social welfare problems that have become progressively more international (Hokenstad et al., 1992).

References


