



An Anti-Oppressive Model for International Practicums

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of social workers who completed international practicums and how their experiences have impacted their practice after their placement. Based on the results, a model is presented to support the trifecta of stakeholders: the student, the administration, and the community served. The model includes the organization of: meaningful orientation and debriefing, an anti-oppressive practicum learning environment that aligns with the community's needs, communication between the sending institution and host program, and professional supervision for students that provides organized oasis experiences that encourage immersion and cultural growth and learning.

Keywords: international social work practicums; cross-cultural social work; cultural competency; anti-oppressive practice; international social work education

Introduction

Along with an opportunity to respond to needs beyond the borders of one's own country, international field practicums provide immense opportunities for international learning in social work education. In developing a model of international practicums, one must consider how to provide the best learning and practice environment for the participating students, meet administrative requirements, and also serve the community of the practicum well, all while working to prevent oppressive practices. Based on a qualitative study on the impact of international practicums on the participants, this article describes a model for developing international social work practicums that maximizes the positive benefits and learning outcomes of international practicum experiences.

Literature Review

The Case for International Learning in Social Work Education

Globalization has increased at an exponential rate, providing more and more interest and opportunity for international study (Ife, 2000; Wells, 2001). Agbényiga and Huang's (2014) research on globalization suggest there is "an urgent need for greater international awareness and perspectives in American social work education, research, and practice" (p. 290). The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) all support the importance of both field education and global learning as part of social work education (CSWE, 2008; IASSW, 2004).

Applied experiential learning through field practicum experiences is considered a universal aspect of social work education worldwide (IFSW, 2012; Skolnik, Wayne, & Raskin, 1999). All accredited social work programs in the U.S., Canada, and Australia mandate intensive practicum or field placement experiences as a part of the educational experience (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2012; Canadian Association for Social Work Education [CASWE], 2014; CSWE, 2015). In 2008, CSWE stated that field practicums are the signature pedagogy. Field practicums abroad provide an opportunity for meeting the combined objectives of global learning and field practicum experiences. Kim (2017) suggests that many schools of social work have not yet built capacity for such experiences. These experiences not only give students the opportunity to learn in a global setting, but also give students the opportunity to learn valuable cross-cultural practice skills (Olsen & Chatterjee, 2017).

Since 2008, the U.S. Council on Social Work Education's standards (CSWE, 2008) have included a core competency addressing global issues that states: "social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights" (p. 5). In 2017, a group of educators affiliated with CSWE's Commission on Global Social Work Education; the Council on External Relations; and the Council on Global Learning, Research, and Practice established principles for international collaboration. In summary, these principles emphasize: the importance of cultural competence that reflects indigenous cultural systems and globalization, values international collaboration, and encourages the understanding of the political contexts where one is engaging; the importance of engaging in empowering practices that share power based on mutual respect and learning; sustainability of local leadership; and exploring opportunities to bring "learning home" in order for international collaborations to

have “significant positive effects in social work educators’ home institutions” (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 16-18). The need for a globalized social work curriculum that reflects these principles, combined with the increased emphasis on field practicums, is at the foundation of the rationale of this study and the developed model for international practicums.

Key Components of International Practicums

Unlike domestic practicums, students doing international practicums experience an immersive cross-cultural living experience in a foreign community. The unique aspects of international practicums are considered not only as practical aspects of organizing international placements, but also relate to their impact on the community and on student learning outcomes (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007). Although the empirical literature on international practicums is limited, important components of international study experiences were suggested in the literature and explored further in the qualitative study. As there was minimal research on long-term field practicum outcomes, outcomes of both short-term and semester or longer experiences were included in this review.

Although mostly anecdotal in nature, the literature notes the importance of pre-departure orientation as a valuable aspect of any international educational experience (Barlow et al., 2010; Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers, & Cox, 2010; Panos, Pettys, Cox, & Jones-Hart, 2004). In Hunter and Hollis’ (2013) study, 83 percent of programs offered some degree of orientation to their students participating in international practicums. It is suggested that orientation can contribute to how well received students are into the culture and field practicum experience (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007) and can minimize culture shock and help students learn the most from their experiences. Lager et al. (2010) suggest orientation can contribute to financial preparedness, cultural competency, physical health preparation, focus and self-discipline, flexibility, and understanding of the trip as an educational opportunity, rather than a vacation. Language can also be an important part of orientation (Lager et al., 2010; Rai, 2004).

Literature also suggests the importance of the participant in study abroad having language knowledge. Both Dominelli (2004) and Gammonley, Rotabi, and Gamble (2007) write of the importance of language communication in international experiences. Use of the local language is an opportunity for fostering empowering relationships with local people, if the international social worker learns the language, or disempowerment for the local people, if social workers make no effort to learn the language.

According to the literature, living accommodations can influence students' adjustment and on-going language and cultural learning (Barbera, 2006; Barlow et al., 2010; Gammonley et al., 2007; Rai, 2004). Living arrangements vary. Most often housing is in a dormitory or apartment with other students – from one's own country, other foreign countries, and/or the host country – or with a local host family. Home stays can be challenging logistically, but there is evidence that they offer rich opportunities for cultural and language learning (Kelly, 2009).

The literature suggests that students learn much through informal activities and relationships built outside of their scheduled classes and practicum. Poole and Davis' (2006) research on one particular social work study abroad experience found that students benefited much through the informal learning of recreation and leisure. These activities brought students into contact with local people and their culture and customs, which had a greater impact on students' personal growth and development than their classroom experiences. Wehbi (2009) suggests that learning about culture abroad “without engaging in a critical analysis of the contextual factors which surround it could potentially reinforce misconceptions as cultural stereotypes” (p. 51). Wehbi (2009) suggests that students need to “critically examine their motivations for undertaking an international placement” (p. 49), as part of the process of preventing unequal power relationships.

Anti-Oppressive Practice Concerns

Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) acknowledges the power differential and oppressive structures that can exist between various dominant and non-dominant groups in society (Laird, 2008). AOP also recognizes the power of the social worker over the client system and the danger of this one up position, emphasizing the client as their own agent of change (Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2002). AOP practitioners are aware of the unintentional oppression that can take place when in the role of the helper (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002). Issues related to oppression are particularly important when examining study abroad outcomes of students from North America, particularly the United States, given their imperialistic reputation in international work (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006; Winks, 1979).

Rotabi et al. (2006) and Gammonley et al.'s (2007) models of study abroad examine the values and ethics of social work as a basis for developing ethical study abroad experiences. Fisher and Grettenberger (2015) propose a Community-Based Participatory Model for short-term social work study abroad. Their model emphasizes

shared power between partners to reduce potentially oppressive power dynamics, shared learning and teaching amongst all participants, and community-level leadership in determining a reciprocally beneficial relationship that truly empowers and is sustainable.

Supervision and Support towards an Effective Practicum Experience

Whether the supervisor was trained in the U.S. or not, it is important for administrators and supervisors of the international field practicums to have the proper training, support, and understanding of the required practicum experience. This will facilitate supervision that supports learning outcomes, which include the requirements of the accrediting bodies and sending university's social work program (Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999; Shively, 2010). Barlow et al. (2010) suggest the need for a clear learning agreement to clarify students' roles and expectations. The supervisor can serve an important role as cultural broker to students, helping them to connect their prior social work knowledge to the cultural context they are practicing within (Tesoriero, 2006). Supervision that supports learning goals and has cultural understanding can help students move toward greater self-awareness, cross-cultural skills, and professional growth. Lager et al. (2010) also discuss the importance of communication between those involved in the experience (including students, administrators, and host setting) in order to have clearly defined roles and expectations between the various stakeholders.

Being a Minority

According to the literature, although usually a privileged minority in the international setting, participants in social work education abroad developed a greater understanding of what it is like to be different, or a minority, which increased their ability to understand and work with people different from themselves (Barbera, 2006; Barlow et al, 2010; Gilin & Young, 2009; Laubscher, 1994). Their experiences increased their ability to empathize with those who have experienced oppression and lack of privilege (Albertson, 2003; Savoy, 2003). Research also reported that participants in social work education abroad increased in their self-awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity which helped to reduce ethnocentrism (Barlow et al., 2010; Lindsey, 2005; Mapp, 2012; Mapp, McFarland, & Newell, 2007; Poole & Davis, 2006), contributing to their ability to practice effectively in cross-cultural settings both at home and abroad (Boyle et al., 1999; Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Larson & Allen, 2006; Patterson, 2004).

Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to understand the lived experience of those who participated in semester long international practicums. Through seeking to understand significant experiences and their practice outcomes, a model was developed to help maximize positive outcomes and minimize any negative consequences of international field practicums in social work. This research was based on an interpretivist, post-positivistic perspective (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Porter & Robinson, 2012). As participants were interacting with the community served, concerns of community impact led to an anti-oppressive practice perspective to be adopted for this study. In cross-cultural and international settings, anti-oppressive dynamics are even more important to recognize due to the power differentials that exist (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015; Roe, 2016).

First, a thorough review of the literature took place. This literature review contributed to the development of the interview questions, and combined with the results of the study, contributed to the developed model. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Then, eighteen 60-90 minute qualitative interviews took place with social workers who had participated in international practicum experiences and are now practicing professionals. Their ages at the time of their placement ranged from 18-28 years old. Participants completed their placement between one month and sixteen years prior to the interview. They studied in 11 different countries and were from a variety of universities. Participants completed practicums in Canada ($n=2$), Mexico ($n=1$), Dominica ($n=1$), Guatemala ($n=1$), Ecuador ($n=1$), Northern Ireland ($n=2$), Romania ($n=5$), India ($n=1$), Ghana ($n=1$), Uganda ($n=3$), and South Africa ($n=1$). Fourteen of the participants had studied abroad during their BSW program and five had studied abroad during their MSW program. One had studied abroad during both her bachelors and masters programs. Four participants identified as male and fourteen as female.

Participants were interviewed using an interview guide with prompts asking them to describe their significant experiences, related learning, and how they have been able to apply their experience to practice. In addition, they were asked their perspective on best practices for both international social work/development work and international field practicums. Their interviews were recorded and transcribed, then responses were input into atlas.ti software and coded for themes through a process of constant comparison. Participants were sent a summary of their interview in order to member check, which Creswell (2007) and Lofland et al. (2006) support as a means of validating the accuracy and credibility of qualitative research in order to increase their rigor. A

brief summary of results of the study, which contributed to the development of this model for international practicums will now be discussed. Names were changed to protect participants' identities. The results presented in this paper are part of a larger study. For the purposes of this paper's goals, the results presented will focus on the meaningful experiences and how they impacted participants' practice approaches as social workers beyond their experience.

Results

Orientation

Not all participants in this research study had an orientation experience, but all of those who had an orientation expressed the importance of orientation to their overall experience. Many who felt they did not have adequate orientation recommended an orientation specific to their experience that included both cross-cultural and practical learning related to financial preparation, supplies and physical/fitness preparation, as well as any needed academic and insurance issues that should be set up before they leave. Many participants also discussed the importance of debriefing, both during their experience and after. For example, one of the participants in this research study, Carla, had a professor who helped orient her. The study abroad program she was a part of provided orientation, but she felt that other students who were not a part of her first orientation missed out on its benefits and were not as prepared. Andrea suggested a more specific orientation to the country of study.

Housing

Housing experiences were reported as significant experiences for many participants, as their living situation was an important part of their immersion in the local culture. However, the housing experience could either impede upon or encourage an immersion experience, impacting learning and practice outcomes. Heather stated: "If I would have been staying with other Americans or by myself [...] I probably wouldn't have learned as much as I did." Lindsey confirmed the value of her host family experience by stating:

It was really great just because I was in a home environment [...] hospitality is such a big thing in their culture, so I just always felt really comfortable [...] there was always something going on [...] they just kind of all planned a trip and got the whole family together [...] I think it was a really great experience to be really immersed in the culture.

Participants who either lived with or spent more time with Americans during their study abroad experience tended to not have as immersive of an experience. For example, Lori described this tension:

It's easier to make friends with Americans [...] I think it is easier to bond together [...] we really wanted to, you know, have friendships with Ugandans, but it's just so much easier to gravitate towards the Americans. [...] It's something you fight against but you want so badly because, you know, you're going through all this culture shock only certain people can understand and you want to be able to talk to people who understand.

Regardless of their own experience, many participants recommended that host families should be a part of study abroad programs.

Self-Awareness and Relationship Building

Many participants discussed that significant learning took place through the self-awareness they built due to feeling different, or being a minority, often for the first time. Unexpectedly, Melissa and Carla both felt this difference, even though they did not look that different than those in the culture they were in. Melissa stated:

I didn't anticipate feeling so different because you know, I am white and the [Romanian] culture is white, so I didn't feel the same in terms of feeling different racially [...] I had lived in Korea, I had been to Jamaica [...] and so I didn't have that feeling of I'm an "other" because of that. But certainly the way I dressed, I think I kind of, you know, stuck out.

Others, like Michelle, had a more obvious difference due to their skin tone being much lighter compared to the people from the local country they were in. Michelle noted the experience of being a minority in Uganda as it related to being fully immersed in relationships with people from the local culture.

There was never a break from it, ever, for 4 months you were the stand out, different person and it wasn't something that like, "Oh if I just don't talk, they won't know." It was visible 100% of the time that I was different. [...] having that experience of being the minority and being the different one, I think was helpful.

This often changed for participants as they became more immersed and developed relationships with local people. Heather stated, "On the surface level when I first got

there I felt so different. [...] by the end of it I definitely felt like I belonged [...] that changed, as relationships grew and changed.”

These relationships built contributed much to the participants’ learning about the culture, increased the feeling of being different, but also facilitated interactions with people who were different than them.

Theresa learned about differences in her upbringing that have impacted her perspective compared to friends she met during her practicum in Romania.

I’m a dreamer and I like to have what I want; Americans [are] like that. And you know, [Mihai] shared basically you can’t always have what you want. And as a Romanian, you know, that would have been very tough, because he didn’t have a choice in a lot of things. He grew up, you know, in the Communist era, where you got what you got and that’s it. [...] And I still think about that some days. You can’t have everything you want. And I hear that voice.

Experiences with houses and relationships built impacted students’ opportunity for cultural learning and immersion. Supervision experiences were also significant to students’ learning.

Supervision

Participants in this qualitative research study had a variety of forms of supervision from native-born supervisors, supervisors from the U.S., and supervisors from other countries. Some also had forms of group supervision or field seminar type classes. Along with practical support in arranging the internship experience, the most helpful supervisors helped to bridge the cultural gap of what social work was like in the country and culture of the internship, compared to what they had learned in classes in the U.S. At times, a social worker native to the practicum country was able to do this, but participants with native-born supervisors felt they needed to have some knowledge of social work in the U.S. to be effective. Participants with foreign-born supervisors suggested that these supervisors were best suited for the role if they had knowledge of the local culture. Some participants had a supervisor that had this knowledge and ability; others did not. Lori described her experience:

I think it was good because I had a field instructor, Ugandan, at my agency, but because of the cultural barriers, he wasn’t really supervising me in a social work kind of aspect. [...] I think the American [supervisor] was just really good at

relating things back to what this would look like in the U.S. or what this would look like in other international settings. [...] She was really good for our sanity I think, just helping us to realize that it's ok that it's different. Because I think a lot of us came with the idea that, "Oh, we'll be doing American social work in Uganda." That's not really what it's going to be like, you know. So I think she was very good at helping us make that difference, make that change.

Others, such as Mike, had a more negative experience with an American supervisor, due to her lack of knowledge of social work in the country of the practicum. He suggested:

I think a better situation would have been somebody who had either practiced or worked in Mexico, if they were a foreigner, or a Mexican person who understood the social welfare system in the U.S., so they could have helped deal with some of the differences.

Others reported the importance of having a supervisor who was approachable, available, and trusting, so they could speak to them about anything related to adjusting to the culture and not feel embarrassed or put down. Melissa described two supervisors that had U.S. social work education. She appreciated the one who was "not going to be critical of" her feelings and experiences related to cross-cultural adjustment.

These supervision times, whether group or individual, offered an "oasis" away from the immersion experience. An "oasis" experience is a time where students can step away from the immersion experience for a brief period in order to process their cross-cultural experiences openly and honestly. This supportive environment allows international practicum students to discuss their feelings about adjusting to the culture and its people, as well as their understanding of the internship experience. Often this was an official supervisor for their internship, but other valuable oasis experiences include group activities with other students. Based on the results of the research, these oasis experiences should be time-limited and encourage students to move back towards immersive experiences, where they spend the majority of their time.

Significant Learning During the Practicum Experience

The results of the qualitative research completed for this study provide evidence that these outcomes can impact social work practice long-term. The depth of this study revealed an interesting process of development in their understanding. A common

theme expressed was participants' discovery of the importance of developing rapport with their clients, above any particular theory or method of practice, which is also evidenced in social work literature (Trevithick, 2003). As trust is built with clients, they saw positive outcomes towards the desired goals.

The other general outcomes related to their ability to work cross-culturally, an important skill in effective relationship building. Although housing experiences were important, other relationships beyond the housing experience are significant to participants. Throughout this study, a common thread of learning that impacted their future practice positively was the relationships that they built both during, and outside of, their practicum experience. Participants seemed to have moved from a more objective view of culture, as learned in the classroom, to a more subjective understanding. This learning reflects anti-oppressive practice principles, which appeared to lead participants from cultural competency to the development of cultural humility. A culturally humble social worker does not see their own competence as the key to success with a client, but works collaboratively with the client in a continual learning process (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington Jr., & Utsey, 2013). Participants also began to appreciate difference to a greater degree, creating a more humble view of their own cultural understanding. Lori described how her supervisor helped her develop an understanding of anti-oppressive values:

She really stressed the fact that Americans often come into another culture and think that they're going to save the world and bring in their programs and their style. And she really stressed the idea of just being humble and going with that culture. That's going to help so much more than bringing in our ideas. It's not going to help in that culture if I brought in my American treatment plans and DA's and that kind of thing [...] that's going to be a loss there [...] I think it all gave us much less of an imperialistic kind of sense that like we have this "White Man's Burden" and we are going to come in and save the world.

Katrina noted the value of working with American and local staff in a way that modeled anti-oppressive practice:

I feel culture should be preserved. [...] I liked how [my internship] was because it wasn't like this American agency is forcing these things on people. So I didn't think it was invasive in that sense [...] that would be something I would pay attention to in the future. If I were to choose an agency to work for, I wouldn't want to be in an agency that's overbearing and, you know, trying to force something at all.

As is supported by the literature, through this process participants often developed a greater understanding of their own privilege in society compared to minority groups, recognizing that power differentials exist and can create oppression. This newfound understanding of privilege allowed them to practice anti-oppressive practice principles, even though they had often not directly studied anti-oppressive practice during their social work studies. Heather described that her practicum agency exemplified an empowering, rather than oppressive, model of practice at the organizational level.

I really liked how [the foreign staff] were working themselves out of a job, always trying to empower and promote the Romanians that were there to be doing what you're doing so that became theirs and not just a mission thing. It was just like equipping them, I saw that so much. [...] It's very similar [to what I am doing now] and part of that reason I'm feeling released from this area [of my community development work in the U.S.].

On a social welfare policy level, both Mathew and Andrea, who completed their semester practicum in South Africa and Canada respectively, discovered how models of practice were more accessible and less restrictive to clients, and contributed to their views of advocacy towards systemic change at home. Andrea stated:

It's totally opposite of our system where people start with outpatient treatment and if they fail that they maybe go to intensive outpatient treatment and if they fail that then they might get to go to rehab if they have insurance, and in Canada if somebody lived in the province and they want help, they've got help and there was no question of insurance and there was no question of had they failed a previous level of treatment before.

On a more micro level, upon her return home, Melissa compared how her experience impacted her ability to practice using anti-oppressive methods.

And so there were some people who we were working with that by [typical] American standards were in poverty and other practitioners were like, well they are eating possum [...] I don't think that's that big of a deal. I think that came from being influenced by living there and seeing not everything has to be [suburban] America. Most of the other practitioners who I was working with, that's their experience, growing up in middle-class or upper-middle-class families [...] they hadn't experienced anything different. [It was] an unnecessary standard. [They also would say] I don't know if this is healthy for a family to be

sleeping in the same room here [...] I had just come from Romania where that was a typical thing where everyone was going to sleep in the same room. I didn't see that as a problem at all.

Although all participants suggested both areas of strength and room for improvement in how their study abroad programs were organized, no participants regretted their experience. All participants in this qualitative study encouraged other students to do a practicum abroad, due to the positive impact of the experience. The results of this qualitative study confirmed some discovered findings in the literature about general international social work education in the form of mostly short-term trips, while offering more detailed substance to contribute to our understanding of semester abroad practicums more specifically, filling a gap in the available literature. The following model was developed after careful analysis of the results of this qualitative study, but also informed by the literature review conducted prior to the study.

International Practicum Model

Although overlapping in nature, this study indicates three areas for recommendations for the trifecta of stakeholders: the administration, the participating students, and the international settings. A trifecta indicates the success of three winners. When organizing international field placements, it is important to recognize these three players at stake. The administration needs to successfully administer a program that satisfies their academic and accreditation requirements, while keeping in mind the success of students. Both the administrators of the international practicum and the participating students need to be mindful of the community that students are serving. The international setting should help support students' experience, while not undermining their mission and goals. All players should be knowledgeable of anti-oppressive practice in order to provide a meaningful experience for students, while working with the local community in a way that values the culture and local leadership and helps students to learn and grow into new awareness of unintentional oppression that can take place, especially when working cross-culturally.

The following recommendations suggest ways to encourage successful outcomes. General recommendations that are overlapping in nature are displayed in Figure 1. Figure 2 displays the model for international practicum programs with suggested recommendations for each stakeholder before, during, and after the international practicum.

Figure 1: Recommendations for Trifecta of Stakeholders

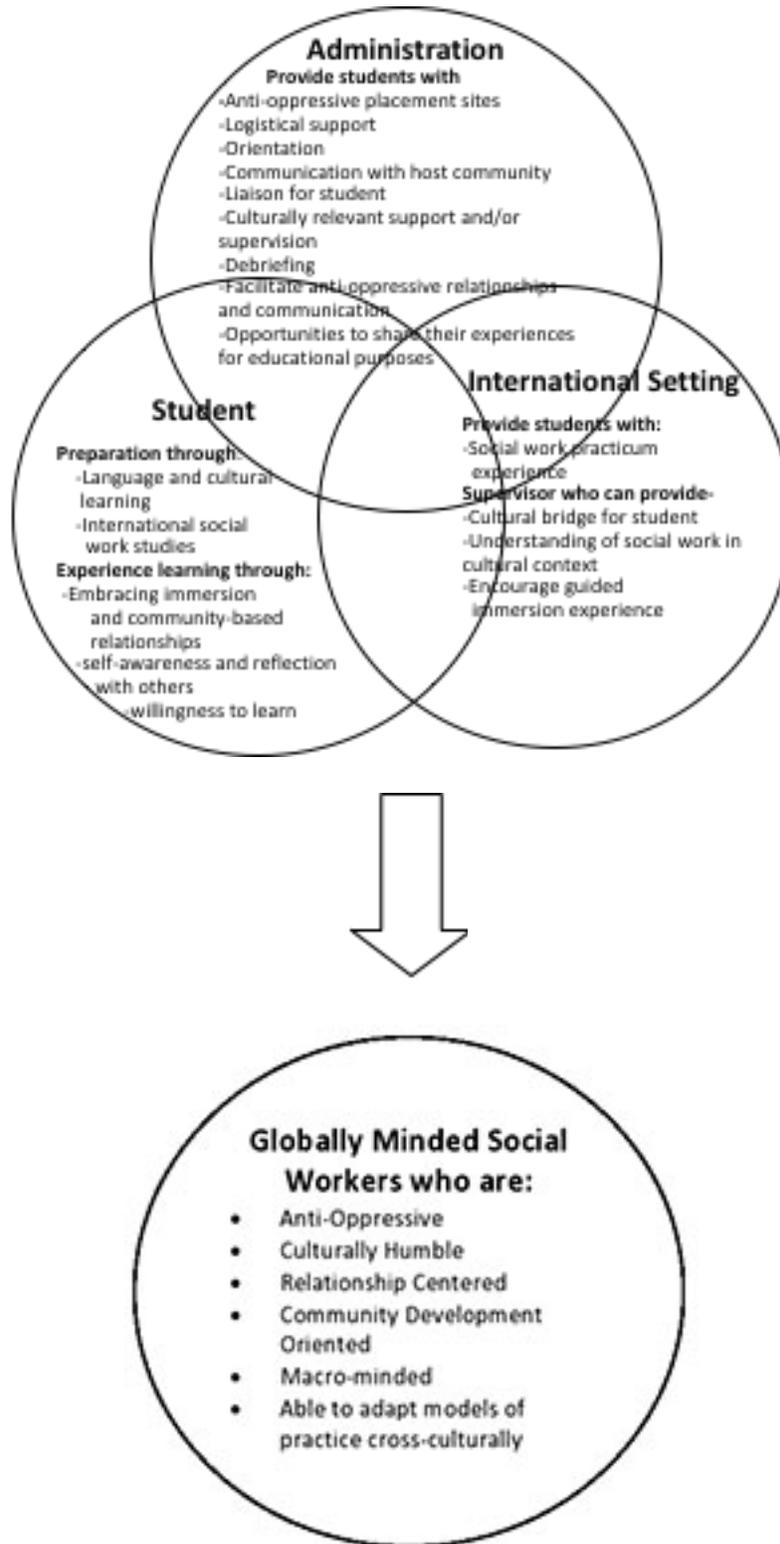


Figure 2: Model for International Practicum Programs

	Administration	Student	International Setting
Pre-Trip Departure	<p>Provide international social work education to students.</p> <p>Facilitate logistical needs regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate field sites • Supervision • Academic credit • Financial aid • Student housing • Practicum placement • Insurance <p>Communicate with host and agree on anti-oppressive, mutually beneficial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic expectations • Student support expectations • Practicum expectations • Living environment <p>Provide orientation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical to host setting logistics specific to country (including financial issues, packing & fitness expectations, etc.) • Includes cross-cultural training 	<p>Determine and complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic approvals • Financial aid paperwork • Housing plan • Practicum placement • Transportation • Insurance needs <p>Learn about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International social work/development skills • History of host setting • Social welfare system in host setting • Current events • Culture • Beginning to learn the language of the host setting <p>Communicate with administration at home and international setting regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics of travel • Practicum information 	<p>Plan for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student housing • Practicum opportunities • Academic requirements • Financial logistics (cost of student experience) • Practicum supervisor knowledge of social work in both countries/cultures • Student transportation logistics <p>Communicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host setting's needs • Opportunities for students that will support host setting's needs • General student expectations • Practicum opportunities and expectations

	Administration	Student	International Setting
During International Experience	<p>Provide student and host environment with communication and support.</p> <p>Fill in any gaps of supervision not offered by host country.</p>	<p>Embrace immersion through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicum • Relationships with locals • Community activities <p>Embrace opportunities for growth through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection • Supervision • Field practicum seminar and other coursework <p>Develop cultural humility by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being open-minded to different ways of living and practicing social work • Discovering how this impacts personal growth 	<p>Provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicum experience that facilitates student growth and learning • Supervision to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Bridge cultural gaps o Support culturally-based social work learning o Encourage guided immersion experience that will encourage relationship building through internship, housing, and community activities
Post-Practicum	<p>Provide debriefing experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support students in adjustment • Help students discover ways their experience can positively impact their social work practice • Offer opportunities for students and faculty to learn from participating students' experience 	<p>Reflect on learning through formal and informal debriefing.</p> <p>Discover ways that international experience can impact current perspectives and practice methods.</p>	<p>Reflect on experience and communicate to sending universities how future experiences can support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local goals • Local empowerment • Sustainability <p>Facilitate student growth and learning towards cultural humility.</p>

Recommendations for the Administration of International Practicums

The administration of the study abroad program is the key locus of control that can help maximize the positive outcomes and minimize the negative outcomes for both students and the communities they are serving within. As each university has its own culture and context, administrative structures will look different based on their unique policies and procedures (Cohen et al., 2017). For example, some universities may have their own or approved international practicum sites. Others may approve sites on a case-by-case basis. Yet, there are still some overarching principles that sending universities should consider. It is important that sending institutions and those administering the international practicum work together in order to determine appropriate international practicum sites.

Administrators of international field programs also have a responsibility to support students in their learning goals and maximize the positive impact on the communities served through the practicum. This process begins by organizing students' experience while they are still at their home institution through providing orientation and logistical support. This orientation should be practical so students understand the needed logistics (academic credit, financial information, insurance, vaccines, understanding of supplies needed), and also prepare students generally for cross-cultural practice that is anti-oppressive in nature.

The faculty field director and practicum liaison at the sending university should make clear to students and the overseas supervisor what the learning goals are, but also be realistic of the cultural practice differences that may impact these goals. Therefore, some cultural "translation" may need to take place. This requires cultural sensitivity, openness, and creativity on behalf of students' university faculty liaison, as not to be imperialistic or oppressive in developing specific learning goals that are inappropriate in the international setting. In order to do this, it is important for the faculty liaison to have some general global social work knowledge. This can be learned through continuing education opportunities both at home and abroad.

The administrators at the international practicum site and/or the on-site supervisor(s) also have an important role in this process, in order to communicate their needs and how students can best learn and work within their programs, without being intrusive to their ongoing work. Once students are in the international setting, their internship supervisor has a very important role of supporting students in their growth and learning. As the practicum supervisor is typically in the host setting, details of their responsibilities will be described in that section. However, if the supervisor is not

able to provide all of the needed support for students, the faculty liaison at the home institution may need to fill in gaps to support students in their social work and cross-cultural learning and encouragement towards immersion.

In addition, the administration of the study abroad program should make sure that students participate in debriefing either right before they leave or immediately upon their return home. Further formal debriefing after they have been home is also recommended as debriefing can help students process their experiences and apply them back to their home environment. As a part of this debriefing, the field director can assess whether the international practicum setting is a good fit for future international practicums.

Finally, social work faculty back at the home institution should support students on their return home as they continue to process and reflect on their experiences. Students' experiences can assist in learning at home as students have the opportunity to share what they have learned with their faculty and classmates. In order to maximize anti-oppressive practice learning, key questions that could be considered include: What did students learn in regards to anti-oppressive international work? What models did students experience that can be transferred into a knowledge and practice skill base for others to learn from and apply in their own practice settings?

Recommendations for Students Preparing for an International Practicum

Although the administration carries some responsibility to arrange the experience, students also have agency in maximizing the positive impact of their experience. Students should make sure the practical logistics are known, such as their transportation to the practicum site, housing arrangements, financial needs, and insurance necessary for the trip. A list of suggestions are provided in figure 2.

While preparing practically, students should also prepare themselves for their international experience by embracing all opportunities for global learning before their departure. This can be facilitated through: taking available courses that focus on anti-oppressive practice, international social work, or international development; going on other short-term international study trips prior to their semester-long international practicum; and studying the language and culture of the practicum host country. They should also learn as much as they can about social work and social welfare in the culture and country they will be working in, including the differences and similarities to social work practice in their country of study, along with any social welfare reform initiatives that are taking place. Students should be prepared for immersing themselves

in the culture as much as possible. They should be encouraged to utilize brief “oasis experiences” that can benefit their immersion experience, but also self-guide towards embracing the local culture, building relationships with local people, and taking advantage of all opportunities they are given towards learning and immersion.

Students should also be prepared that social work practice will not be exactly like it is at home, and to find ways to develop their critical thinking skills to understand similarities and differences and embrace the unique learning that will take place through this experience. Supervision can help guide this learning, but it is ultimately up to students to embrace the experience.

Recommendations for the International Setting of the Field Practicum

The international setting provides the learning experience for students, but the experience is also affected by the presence of students and their supporting program. As administrators arrange international practicum sites, it is important for them to provide an experience that is appropriate for student learning, yet is also anti-oppressive in nature to the community and practicum setting. The international setting needs to know that the sending and supporting institutions desire this anti-oppressive structure, while understanding that students may begin their experience with some ethnocentric attitudes and behaviors as their reference point and will likely begin with an American worldview. This reference point will likely shift with time, if students have the right learning environment. On-site supervision can help guide students away from these tendencies and help prevent unintentional oppression.

The supervisor also has a key role in supporting students by providing an environment where they can be honest about their feelings both within their international practicum and in the general experiences of living in the country they are studying in, while pushing their growth and learning through immersion experiences. This can be done through individual supervision, group supervision, and field practicum seminars.

To maximize the positive learning through immersion, students’ supervisors can help facilitate experiences that encourage further learning. Students should spend minimal time having oasis experiences, and much more time experiencing immersion. If necessary, assignments can be given to facilitate further immersion to push students out of their comfort zones. Language classes should be encouraged if the main language spoken is not English. Housing can also facilitate or intrude upon immersion. Host families or settings with local students that are not as familiar with American students are ideal for maximum immersion.

In order to achieve positive outcomes, it does not necessarily matter if students' social work supervisor is from the local host country, American, or an ex-patriot from another country. However, it is particularly helpful for the supervisor to be able to have enough knowledge of the U.S. system and global practice to act as a bridge to help support the international practicum setting towards their goals, while also supporting the students. The supervisor should guide students in their ability to understand differences between cultures and ways of practicing social work in a way that will not undermine community empowerment, while also preparing them for their future social work practice beyond the placement.

Panos, Panos, Cox, Roby, and Matheson (2002) suggest that effective social work supervision can take place via the internet with a qualified supervisor. This is often facilitated due to academic requirements for supervision to be performed by a licensed social worker. Based on the participants' experiences, this can be a positive situation for students if the supervisor in their home country is knowledgeable about global and anti-oppressive practice, and if they also have someone supportive on site, regardless of their social work credentials.

Some students may feel that agencies they are working with have imperialistic or oppressive methods of practice. Other students may work in agencies that have developed positive examples of community development and anti-oppressive methods. Either way, the supervisor has the opportunity to discuss the situation as a model to learn from to enhance students' current and future work in anti-oppressive practice methods.

If students' practicums are arranged by an organized study abroad program, the study abroad program should be cautious to reduce the risk of harm by their intrusion upon the community. They have an opportunity to model anti-oppressive practice methods in the community. This could be particularly important if the host agency is fully staffed by local people in a developing nation. In this situation, there is potential for the host agency to feel that it is in a less powerful position, especially if the agency is receiving any financing or benefit for hosting students. It may be helpful to make sure the agency knows that the sending institution values its work and does not want students' educational goals to impede upon the agency's practice. It is also important to help host agencies develop clear goals with students, and then make sure that these goals can coincide with the agency's goals and the requirements of the sending university.

Strengths and Limitations to the Study

Although this study had a small group of participants compared to larger quantitative studies, it was relatively large for a qualitative study. Given its qualitative focus, steps were put in place to increase rigor, while offering depth and breadth that only exists in qualitative studies. The qualitative nature of the study also allowed opportunity to draw out unknown themes. However, due to the small sample size compared to larger qualitative studies, further research may be done to confirm suggestions.

Strengths of this study include: the diversity of time since students' placement, the variety of study abroad programs included, and the variety of current areas of practice for participants. However, a limitation to this study was the fact that all the participants were Caucasian and American, and therefore lacked racial diversity. This limited the study to focus on how international practicum experiences have impacted a particular population group; however, due to the fact that most participants in study abroad experiences come from a more privileged background, important learning outcomes transpired related to their recognition of their position of privilege and the importance of working to reduce oppressive power dynamics. Even though this study was specifically focused on social work practicums abroad, further analysis studies could determine if the results and developed model could help guide general study abroad programs as well to be more anti-oppressive in nature.

Conclusion

Field educators now have the opportunity to utilize an evidence-based model for their international programs that was developed based on this qualitative study and supported by the existing literature. Even so, this model of developing international practicums is only a starting point in developing effective opportunities. Each setting is unique and requires building positive relationships with the community. The development of effective international practicum relationships is a dynamic process as one works to meet educational goals that support the international community and practicum site's efforts while encouraging anti-oppressive practice methods of learning and practice.

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