



DEVELOPING A TEACHING MODULE IN SOCIAL WORK ON ASSESSMENT  
ESPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR STUDENTS IN A MULTICULTURAL  
ENVIRONMENT: INFUSING CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES INTO TEACHING  
METHODS AND STYLES

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DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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| Abstract  | <p>The aim of this development project was twofold: to design a course on assessment in social work and secondly to examine the concepts of cultural diversity and cultural competency and how these issues are incorporated into teaching. These issues were examined through a reflection on my teacher practice experience in Cyprus in the spring 2006.</p> <p>The theoretical background was based on experiential and constructive theories of learning and a review of literature on culture and language issues in teaching. I have attempted to interweave theory with observations from practice. Practice refers to my case study, my teaching experience in Cyprus.</p> <p>The module on assessment has been planned for second year social work students whose mother tongue is other than that of the language of instruction. Different teaching methods are employed with emphasis on the teaching style of the teacher and on interaction between student and teacher when students may come from many different cultural backgrounds and their level of English can be very varied.</p> <p>This development project endeavours to be a continuous dialogue between my practical experience and theoretical reflection which helped me design the teaching module in assessment focusing particularly on cultural perspectives and teaching styles.</p> |                     |
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This development project really has two parts. In the first part I will try to develop a teaching module specifically on learning the skills of assessment in social work. The concept of assessment is very complex but a core skill in social work. The teaching of assessment is often taught embedded into various aspects of the social work curriculum rather than as a separate teaching module so I would like to try to develop a module which both embraces different interpretations of what we mean by this concept and secondly, examine possible approaches and methods and also the skills needed by the social worker to carry out a quality assessment. In this part I will be concentrating on the subject content of the course.

In the second part, influenced by my practice-teaching experience in Cyprus, I will examine the cultural and linguistic aspects of designing this course for students who have English as a foreign language and who come from different culture and ethnic backgrounds. This could also mean that the teacher is of a different cultural background to that of the students or it could also be possible that both teacher and each student come from different cultures. I will examine in more detail these concepts and their relevance and significance to teaching and learning and how they may or should influence the choice of teaching methods. So this second part focuses on how the content of the module developed in the first part, can be effectively taught to students with diverse cultural and linguistic origins. My development project focuses not so much on the content of the module but on searching for appropriate teaching methods and teaching styles to help the students in their learning process. This development plan does not aim to be a scientific research study but more of a reflective study of my own experience which is in itself a learning process for me and one which I want to benefit from by using this experience in my future teaching. This experience is presented within the context of a person – myself, the teacher, and so does not describe teaching methods and styles as isolated processes but places emphasis on the style or characteristics of the teacher.

The first chapter looks at teaching in a changing world and how the concepts of knowledge and learning are taking on a new meaning in contemporary society. In the second chapter I will discuss the pedagogical models which have particularly influenced my own conceptions of teaching and learning today. In the following chapter I will examine the concept of assessment in social work and the skills needed by social workers to enable them to carry out successful assessments. In the light of this, I shall consider the content of the course. Following this, I will delve into more detail into the concept of culture and how it influences teaching and learning. This discussion will form the introduction to a case study: a comprehensive report of the ten weeks I spent in Cyprus, starting with a look at the history and socio-demographic features of Cyprus leading onto a description of my teaching practice which was my experience of constructing my own knowledge through reflecting and evaluating through my own experience and which provided me with the main focus of my development project, namely, to find suitable tools for effective teaching to students with diverse needs.

Using the findings and observations of this case study as a guideline and the educational approach of experiential learning, I will then plan my teaching module on assessment and consider different teaching methods and teaching styles. In my conclusion, I will summarise my project and briefly discuss why there is a growing demand for developing and planning teaching modules in social work for pupils from diverse cultures remembering as a teacher that it is not enough just to give facts, whatever the subject, but that it is equally important to concentrate on ways to be an effective teacher.

## **2 TEACHING IN A CHANGING WORLD**

The nature of teaching is being forced to change due to the globalising forces of social change and with this phenomena, the changing meaning of knowledge and education or learning. The traditional concepts of truth and knowledge are being called into

question and this is having great implications for teachers. I will now examine briefly these changes and how they are affecting learning and teaching processes.

## **2.1 Globalisation**

There is no consensus as to how globalisation can be defined. It is not just something which happened overnight but we can argue that it is a collection of phenomena which are penetrating into societies worldwide. Globalisation is a very complex and chaotic process, full of the unexpected and one which is never complete. (Urry 2003). The whole globe is affected by the changes these phenomena are causing. These phenomena are not only economic but are political and social and cultural as well as Giddens(1992) and Hirst(1996) have pointed out and are interrelated processes.

The social conditions for education have changed. One of the main features of globalisation is the new meaning of time and space and what this has meant for our concept of knowledge and learning. With information technology and electronic communication such as e-mail and the internet, knowledge which was once found in a specific form, for example a book, and kept in a specific place, for example a library, is now being transformed into digital information which can travel instantaneously “along the fluid networks of global communications.” (Urry 2003, 20.) Education along with the working environment and commerce is being transformed by this growth of networked, spatially indifferent information. (Castells 1996). This has caused the very concept of knowledge into doubt. No longer do we speak of one truth but instead knowledge has become relative and fragmented. This has in turn led to the role of the teacher as one of helping students to learn effectively instead of just giving ready answers.

Globalisation is characterised by diversity, consumerism and choice. Learning has become a commodity which can be purchased by the student who has become a consumer. Learning has been reconstructed on a more individualised basis and so in following market principles, there is more responsibility resting on the individual. (Jarvis, Holford and Griffen 2003). The individual has more choice to choose his or her lifestyle as value and cultural systems become more fragmented. Also at the work place, the emphasis is on continual learning and on developing new skills and a feature of globalisation is lifelong learning where there are no age limits. I will now

examine in more detail, the concepts of knowledge and learning in the context as conceived in the modern society and then in a postmodernist and global society.

## **2.2 Concepts of Knowledge and Learning**

Historically, education has functioned as a process of socialization into the established structure and culture of society; the older generation passing onto the next, knowledge which was regarded as valuable. Education can be seen as maintaining and reinforcing social order and social cohesion because it encourages people to conform to prevailing norms and cultures. Education controls and manages the individuals aspirations, so they are fitted into the social structure of employment, class or social status in ways they accept. Education therefore reproduces the workforce necessary to an industrial or post industrial society with its various divisions of labour, skills, careers and so on.

Kant asked “How is human knowledge possible?”. Nietzsche replaced it with the question “Why is human knowledge essential?” Foucaults response was “Human knowledge is basically a question of the desire for power”. Foucault maintains that knowledge cannot be separated from power, one just is not possible without the other. Foucault regarded knowledge as discourse and for him, discourse is ideological. He recognised that knowledge is rarely value-free and inherently further the cause of certain powerful groups in society. For example, one can look at the way the market has developed and suggest these changes in knowledge are themselves a function of the market (Jarvis 2002). Learning in itself is an individual process or set of processes. But no person is an island, and change always has social consequences. The fewer the consequences of learning for the social group,eg. if the status quo is retained, the easier it is to maintain social harmony and cohesion. But without change, the potential of the individual learner is prohibited. When there is freedom to learn, learners have more freedom to develop their own potential. However, since learning itself is essentially a change process, this can be a threat for social groups who might wish to maintain the status quo either socially or culturally. (Jarvis,Holford and Griffin 2003).

So we see the process of learning as the process through which individuals go in acquiring their knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, beliefs, emotions and senses. Earlier knowledge was regarded as a “truth statement”. Today knowledge has become relative i.e. it can be changed again as soon as some new discovery is made that forces

people to change their thinking. This causes the relationship between knowledge and truth to be called into question – knowledge has become information. Ulrich Beck (1992) has pointed out that society has now become reflexive. In the same way, learning has changed from learning from remembering “facts” and “knowledge” to seeking to understand and be critically aware of the things to be studied. Knowledge, seen as a discourse should be critically reflected upon before accepting or rejecting it. The same applies to the “knowledge” that teachers teach. Students need to be helped to reflect critically on the information with which they are presented. Teachers are only interpreters or facilitators of the many forms of knowledge. (Bauman 1987).

Robert Lane argues that in the knowledgeable society, experts and expertise inevitably become more important. It appears that the political domain is shrinking and the knowledge domain is growing in terms of criteria for decisions. (Lane 1966). Such a growth leads to the growth and consolidation of groups of experts around particular areas of knowledge of social importance. Another relevant characteristic of the knowledgeable society is structural differentiation- the increasing sharp division of labour which characterises mature industrial society. Activities previously undertaken by the family, the community or by informal groups within it, becomes the province of experts. How does all of this reflect on learning?

Recently, learning has acquired a social institutional meaning in terms such as the learning society or the learning organisation. It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between life-long learning as a human process of learning throughout the whole of an individual’s life and lifelong learning as a governmental strategy achievable mainly through institutional processes.

### **3 PEDAGOGICAL MODELS**

#### **3.1 Radical Pedagogies**

Radical pedagogies are often constructed against a background of the risk society, globalisation, the meaning of culture and the issue of cultural power (Livingstone et al

1987). They may be concerned with content or method or the relation between them. In the context of the risk society, Beck includes it in the teaching and learning implications of social movements, citizenship, peace, environmental and other concerns of the post modern world. (Beck 2003). Radical pedagogies try to effect societal change by empowering the student. Particularly associated with postmodernism are critical pedagogy, postcolonial pedagogy and feminist pedagogy to name but a few. Radical pedagogies claim that in the traditional method of teaching where the teacher stands in front of a class and feeds knowledge, dominant values about society to passive students who internalise these values, then people are not realising how they are being manipulated to accept their oppression. Radical pedagogy is concerned with how the role of teacher is changed from expert to that of interpreter. The teacher in this role listens, encourages discourse and critical awareness of the socio-cultural positioning of ideas, beliefs and values. Experiences are shared and examples are taken from daily life. Preece and Griffin write:

*the goal of radical pedagogy is to legitimate the experience of the oppressed or marginalised by relating these experiences to wider social influences and by encouraging a theoretical perspective that explains how people give meaning to their world.....Educational systems and the people within them need to problematize what seems normal (Preece and Griffin 2002).*

Feminist educators and writers such as Freire, Shor, Foley and Giroux to name just a few, represent this perspective.

### **3.2 Constructivism and Experiential Learning**

Constructivism derives from the cognitive sciences and the writings of Piaget, Vygotsky and Gardner. Constructivism describes the development of knowledge through learning. It is a process of active construction of meanings in relation to the context and environment in which learning takes place. Through the reflection upon knowledge, learners construct their own views of the world in relation to the new knowledge and put it into a useful context and therefore one must provide students with environments where they can contextualise the information they are taught. The central point of constructivism is that knowledge does not exist independently in the world. Any situation can be understood from many perspectives and there is not a correct meaning to strive for. (Duffy and Jonassen 1992).

The experiential learning approach is very similar to that proposed by the constructivist theories of learning. It derives from two main concepts "learning by doing" (Dewey 1938) and Lewin's (1951) action research model. The most well-known experiential framework which brings together these two concepts is Kolb's 4-step cycle of learning: doing, reflecting, understanding or conceptualisation and applying or testing. (Kolb 1984). Experiential learning occurs when a person engages in an activity, reflects on it critically and processes it and then puts the results to work. After reflecting on and understanding the activity, new knowledge is constructed. So we can see that this process of learning is very similar to what is proposed by the constructivist theories of learning. Traditional education is seen as more politically and socially controlling of learners and inhibitive to individual creativity. (Dewey 1938), whereas progressive education is seen as the "education of equals" (Knowles 1978). Experiential learning is a complex process involving theory and practice, action and reflection. Bould et al, (1993) state:

*Most of what is written about learning is from the perspective of teachers or researchers who assume that there is a body of knowledge to be taught and learnt. What is missing is the role and relevance of learning from experience no matter where it occurs. Learning involves much more than an interaction with an extant body of knowledge; learning is all around us, it shapes and helps create our lives- who we are, what we do. It involves dealing with complex and interactable problems, it requires personal personal commitment, it utilizes interaction with others, it engages our emotions and feelings, all of which are inseparable from the influence of context and culture.*

Bould et al go on to list 5 propositions about learning from experience:

- 1) experience is the foundation of, and the stimuli for learning**
- 2) learners actively construct their experience**
- 3) learning is a holistic experience**
- 4) learning is socially and culturally constructed**
- 5) learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs**

Experiential learning advocates interaction and learning with others, not in isolation, and then reflecting together and giving feedback. It is also emancipatory in that it is about moving imposed restraints about how we acquire knowledge, constraints that

are both internal and external that deal with the experience and the interpretation of experience. Equally it is about taking the cultural and social fabric of society into our reflective frames when we seek to learn by and from experience. (Jarvis 2002).

## **4 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ASSESSMENT?**

### **4.1 The Concept of Assessment**

Assessment in social work is a core social work skill but there is no one theory or consensus on what the process should entail. In the social work context, assessment is about gathering information and finding the key elements of a situation and the strengths and weaknesses and then plan in partnership with the person (s) being assessed the steps which need to be taken. Those being assessed can be individuals, families, carers, groups or communities. Bevan gives us this definition:

*Assessment should bring together information relevant to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of the situation. Once this is gathered, the worker needs to make sense of the information by understanding the person as part of many systems-eg. family, school friendship and the religious and cultural dimensions of their lives. For assessment to be both accurate and adequate, it is imperative to acknowledge the influential factors of race, culture, gender and disability. Importantly, the assessment needs to recognise the structural and social dimensions and the way these disparities impact on a person's coping resources. (Bevan 1998)*

In accordance with this definition, we can say that assessment is a holistic process which involves looking at the situation from a wide perspective and is therefore a very complex process. Assessment is considered to take place from the first point of contact between professional and service user and may require only a short contact or it may take the form of a process involving many client contacts over a longer period of time.

Thompson (1996,2000) talks about systematic practice whereby using a five-stage process, the social worker is able to clarify the objectives, strategy and how termination of a case is determined. Assessment is the first stage of this five-stage process. This is followed by intervention, review, termination and evaluation. There is increasing discussion that assessment should be more than just a process about passive

clients, and that clients should be involved in the assessment process as much as possible. Hence, in some cases, service-users themselves first undertake a self-assessment of their needs before the social worker makes a formal assessment. (Crisp, Anderson, Orme,Lister 2003).

As I said in the introduction, the focus of my development project is how the skills needed for an assessment and the processes involved in assessment can be effectively taught and learnt. Therefore, my focus is concentrated not so much on the actual content of the module but on teaching methods and styles which will facilitate the students learning process.

#### **4.2 Assessment and the Social Work Curriculum**

Teaching assessment as a separate teaching module in basic social work curriculums is rare, rather it is usually integrated with other teaching. However, in courses for current practitioners, there are more courses which concentrate on the actual teaching of assessment. There is a lack of evaluation data on courses related to assessment teaching but the Social Care Institute for Excellence, provide suggestions which may guide the development of good practice in this aspect of the social work curriculum:

- **principles of assessment:** social work programmes need to ensure that graduating social workers have an understanding of the principles of assessment. While particular frameworks and assessment tools may be used in teaching as models, teaching which focuses primarily on the administration of these run the risk of producing social workers whose assessment skills are not transferable to other settings and client groups.
- **embedded curriculum:** even if the teaching of assessment is embedded into the curriculum rather than taught as a separate component of qualifying social work programmes, programme providers should be able to articulate how learning objectives in relation to assessment skills are to be achieved.
- **practice learning:** students need opportunities to apply theoretical learning on assessment. This can occur in both university-based practice learning and in supervised practice learning.
- **working in partnership:** social work programme providers should work in partnership with other key stakeholders, including employers and service-user

organisations, to ensure students gain access to a range of perspectives around the assessment process.

- **knowledge and skills base:** social work programmes need to ensure that graduates not only have knowledge of the assessment process but be able to draw on a broader repertoire of social work skills and social science knowledge when undertaking assessments.

I shall be using these suggestions to help me plan my teaching module.

## **5 DESIGNING A TEACHING MODULE OF THE CORE SKILLS IN ASSESSMENT**

### **5.1 The aim of the Course and the Target Group**

The aim of the course is to provide students with an understanding of the concept and process of assessment in social work practice and to teach them the skills needed to perform good assessments in a wide range of settings.

The content of this module is applicable to all students but in my development project I am particularly interested in how this content can be effectively taught to students whose mother tongue is different to the language of instruction, in this case English, and who come from different culture backgrounds to that of the teacher. Probably the students will have varying skills in the English language and represent many different cultures so these characteristics will influence my choice in teaching methods. The content if needed will be adjusted to fit the needs of the students but my main emphasis will thus be on searching for effective teaching methods to provide a meaningful learning experience for all students.

### **5.2 The Content**

I will now briefly describe the actual content of the module because as I stated earlier, the focus of my development project is to explore the pedagogical possibilities of teaching such a course and not on the content as such.

Before students can carry out assessments, they need to have an understanding of what we mean by assessment in the social work context so as an orientation into the subject, this concept will be examined from different perspectives.

Following this, skills needed to carry out assessments will be considered. Social workers not only require specific skills and knowledge but they must also draw on a broader repertoire of social work skills. Firstly, they should develop critical thinking skills and be able to critically analyse different situations and perspectives. Secondly, to be able to gather and evaluate information which as we have seen is an essential part of the assessment process, students require research skills. One course on assessment for social work students in America describes how students were taught skills in ethnographic research with the aim of them becoming more sensitive observers of other cultures and be able to form assessments which are culturally relevant. (Thornton and Garrett 1995). In the light of my own project, this is a research method that I would like to incorporate into my own teaching module. Thirdly, the knowledge base. Again, referring to cultural awareness, I would like to include in my module, training which makes students aware of their own self and their own culture and how that culture influences their own behaviour and thus how they perceive situations. Also, social workers make assessments in many different contexts and it is very important that students have the relevant knowledge base to do this. Although nobody can have expertise in every field, it is important that social workers have an understanding and awareness of the many personal and social problems service users have. An understanding of concepts of family, poverty, illness, deviance, cultural dynamics and so on.

The module also aims to provide the student with the necessary tools for assessment. I think it is impossible to teach any one framework as a structure which is suitable for all situations but guidelines can be given to help students construct their own framework for assessment and how it is important to consider a wide range of domains when carrying out an assessment. If the teaching involves a narrow focus on structured assessment tools, there is the risk of social workers having an insufficient understanding of the assessment process. A holistic approach is required and assessment is not just about asking set questions in a mechanical fashion but an important discourse between client and social worker, the outcome of which will

affect the client-social worker relationship in the future. So teaching communication skills is another important theme which I will pay a lot of attention to in my course when considering teaching methods.

So, to summarise, this module will examine the concept of assessment and then the skills needed for assessment. Firstly from a wider perspective; critical thinking skills, research skills and the knowledge base and then introducing various tools for assessment and guidelines and finally but crucial to a successful assessment, skills in communication. These themes will form the framework of my course. In the following chapter, I will present my “case study” which serves as a guide in planning my teaching methods and styles for my teaching module in assessment.

## **6. A CASE STUDY: TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN CYPRUS**

This chapter is a description of my stay in Cyprus in the spring 2006. I begin firstly with a brief history of Cyprus and a look at the socio-demographic features and then examine social work education in Cyprus today. I believe this is relevant and necessary because it helps the reader to grasp the context in which my teaching took place and better understand the reasoning behind the teaching methods I choose for teaching students with different culture backgrounds and with a mother tongue other than that of the language of instruction. I will then examine the concept of culture and draw attention to language issues and then describe the content of my teaching modules and discuss the teaching methods I used. Finally but perhaps the most significant, a self evaluation of my teaching experience and also feedback given by support teachers and the students themselves which actually provided me with the idea of this development project.

### **6.1 Putting the Teaching into Context: A Brief History**

It is difficult to give a brief account of the history of Cyprus because it has such a complex and troubled past. Remains of the oldest known settlements in Cyprus date

from the Neolithic Age. This civilisation developed along the north and south coasts. During the Bronze Age, trade developed with the Near East. After 1400 the Mycenaeans from Greece, reached the islands as merchants. They gradually took control of Cyprus and spread the Greek language. They established the first city-kingdoms of Pathos, Salamis, Kition and Kourion. From 55BC-330AD, Cyprus came under the dominion of the Roman Empire. During the missionary journey of Saints Paul and Barnabas, the Proconsul Serius Paulus is converted to Christianity and Cyprus becomes the first country to be governed by a Christian. Destructive earthquakes occur during the 1 century BC and in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the cities are rebuilt. After the division of the Roman Empire, Cyprus comes under the Eastern Roman Empire, known as Byzantium, with Constantinople as its capital. Christianity becomes the official religion. In 1191 AD Richard the Lionheart took possession of Cyprus marrying Berengaria of Navarre in Lemesos where she was crowned Queen of England. However, a year later, Richard sells the island to the Knights Templars who resell it to Guy de Lusignan, deposed King of Jerusalem. During the period 1192-1489AD, the island is ruled on the feudal system and the Catholic Church officially replaces the Greek Orthodox. The period 1489-1571AD is known as the Venetian Period. The Venetians viewed Cyprus as a last bastion against the Ottomans in the East Mediterranean and fortify the island. However in 1570 Ottoman troops attacked Cyprus. They killed over 20,000 of the population. On annexation to the Ottoman Empire, the Latin leadership is expelled or converted to Islam and the Greek Orthodox Church restored; the Archbishop, as leader of the Greek Orthodox, became the people's representative to the Sultan. When the Greek War of Independence broke out in 1821, the Archbishop of Cyprus, three bishops and other prominent Cypriots were executed. The Muslim minority during the Ottoman period eventually acquired a Cypriot identity.

Under the 1878 Cyprus Convention, Britain assumed administration of the island. It remained formally part of the Ottoman Empire until the latter entered the First World War on the side of Germany and Britain in consequence annexed Cyprus in 1914. In 1923, Turkey relinquishes all rights to Cyprus and in 1952 Cyprus is declared a Crown Colony. In 1955 there is a national liberation struggle against colonial rule and for the Union of Cyprus with Greece. In 1958 Civil War breaks out with one side fighting for union with Greece and the other for the partition of the Island. On an international basis Greece and Turkey were threatening to go to war over Cyprus. In

1960 Cyprus became an independent republic according to the Zurich-London Treaty but Britain retained two Sovereign bases and Cyprus did not have any say in the drawing up of the constitution. The treaty set the official seal on the division of the two ethnic groups; the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots were each given their own presidents and ministers. Their task was to build a combined republic, of a unified state and one people – Cyprus and the Cypriots. However, peace did not last and in 1963 there was more fighting between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. The situation calmed down again but in 1974 the Greeks launched a military attack and five days later Turkish motor torpedo boats landed on the north coast. They quickly succeeded in occupying an area to the north of Nicosia where many Turkish Cypriots lived. The Turkish army refused to withdraw and on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, the troops marched across the island. Tens of thousands of Greek Cypriots fled from the north leaving their possessions behind. In two days, the Turks had achieved the objective of their operation: 37% of the island was occupied and partition was a reality.

Since 1974 all talks both direct and indirect, between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides have so far failed, even though UN leaders have tried everything in their power to find a solution. So the island remains divided although citizens of both sides can now cross the border. (Cyprus Tourist Office 2004).

## **6.2 Socio-demographic Features**

Cyprus is situated at the northeastern end of the Mediterranean basin and is the third largest island with an area of 9,251 square kilometres. Cyprus has a population of roughly 800,000 people of which 80% are Greek Cypriots, 11% Turkish Cypriots and 9% foreigners. The capital is Nicosia with a population of 208,900 in the Government controlled area. Greek and Turkish are the official languages and English is widely spoken. Cyprus is an independent sovereign Republic with a presidential system of government. Under the 1960 Constitution, executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic, elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term of office. The President exercises executive power through a Council of Ministers appointed by him. Ministers may be chosen from outside the House of Representatives. Cyprus is a member of the United Nations and U.N. Agencies. It is also a member of the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in

Europe and many other international organisations. Following the signing of the EU enlargement treaty in Athens in April 2003, and its subsequent ratification by the Parliament of Cyprus, Cyprus officially joined the EU on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004.

Southern Cyprus has rebounded from the Turkish invasion to such an extent that it is now four times wealthier, per capita, than Turkey and the north and also wealthier than Greece. The construction and tourism industries have boomed side by side, as new hotels, flats and leisure facilities have been built to meet the increasing number of tourists. The some 165,000 refugees from the north have contributed to growth in two mutually-dependent sectors: they provide a ready supply of labour and present a massive demand for urgently needed housing. Agriculture, shipping, trade and manufacturing have also underpinned the economic expansion. Also, recently, there has been a fast growing financial and services sector. (Inside Guides, Cyprus 2004). Economic growth has brought with it many social changes, some positive, others negative as in any society which sees great and rapid changes in its economy. For example, there used to be unemployment but today there is a shortage of labour and many workers have been brought in from abroad, notably from Eastern Europe, South Asia and the Philippines and are often exploited working for very low wages.

### **6.3 Social Work Education in Cyprus**

The rapid transformation of Cypriot society has brought with it many changes within its social institutions. Their economic and culture outlook is undergoing rapid development. For example, the concept of the “family” is changing and this has created new social demands on society as a whole. The entire structure of Cypriot society has been transformed as a result of demographic shifts, fertility decline, the ageing of the population, the changing role of the woman, the growing divorce rate and increasing number of single parents, family violence, mixed marriages, increase in social mobility, the rapid development of tourism, the increase in foreign labour, the decline of the extended family and the rise in the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco(Michailidis and Panayiotopoulos 2005). These present big challenges for social work. Up until 2001, Cypriots wanting social work training had to go abroad. The majority have been trained in Greece but also in Britain. To meet the growing demand for trained social workers, a private college, The Frederik Institute of Technology, started a 4-year Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work in 2001 in

Greek, and in 2005, another private college, Intecollege started a 4-year Bachelors degree in social work. This is the college where I carried out my teacher practice. All the instruction at this college is in English because it hopes to attract students from overseas. The curriculum draws on theories of human development and behaviour in different developmental and cognitive stages, on global social systems, social welfare and policy, and the teaching of core social work skills. Practice training forms an important part of the curriculum.

#### **6.4 Teaching in Cyprus at Intercollege in Nicosia**

My teaching practice took place in Cyprus from February-April 2006. As well as teaching, I was actively involved in the everyday life of the college. The Department of Social Work was only founded last Autumn so it is being developed all the time and amendments are still being made to the curriculum. Over the ten weeks, I had lots of discussions with other teachers about teaching methods, how to motivate students etc.

Intercollege is a private university college institution which operates under an ERASMUS university charter offering European credits. Intecollege closely cooperates with many European and American universities offering in some cases dual or joint degrees. The international character of the college is a vital part of the institutions life and mission. There are students and faculty staff from more than 60 countries studying and working on the campuses.

There were nine first year students, eight female and one male. They were in their early twenties. Their skills in English varied and they were all Greek Cypriots.

#### **6.5 Two Teaching Modules.**

The aim of these two teaching modules was to provide the students with a knowledge of the social and health services of Finland, but also to stimulate conversation on the differences and similarities of the systems in Finland and that of their own country. In this way students become aware of the significance of the social context. One important goal was to involve all students and place emphasis on providing them with the tools to work things out for themselves and not to give them ready answers.

The first teaching module was part of a larger module “Social Welfare in Different Societies and in Cyprus”. My teaching comprised of four lectures, each lasting 90 minutes. The subject was “An Introduction To The Finnish Welfare System”:

### **FIRST LESSON :**

- **Intoduction and presentation of students and teacher.**
- **framework of the four lessons**
- **presentation of teaching methods**
- **aims and goals of lectures**
- **what the course does not aim to do!**
- **introduction to Finland**
- **socio-demographic features**
- **history and politics**
- **education system**
- **health and social services**
- **social work education in Finland**

### **SECOND LESSON**

- **family benefits**
- **concepts of the family**
- **role of the woman**
- **poverty in families**
- **“Building the family”- groupwork**
- **discussion**

### **THIRD LESSON**

- **health services**
- **social insurance**
- **sick benefits**
- **working age adults – benefits**
- **measures taken to reduce unemployment**
- **continuation of “Building the family”-groupwork**
- **discussion**

### **FOURTH LESSON**

- **social insurance, pensions, disability pension**
- **benefits for the elderly**
- **rehabilitation**
- **continuation of “Building the family”-groupwork**
- **final discussion**
- **the changing welfare state**
- **looking to the future**

The second teaching module was also made up of four, ninety minute sessions. This module was entitled “An Introduction to Social Work in Health Settings”:

**FIRST LESSON**

- **introduction to the course**
- **framework of course**
- **teaching methods**
- **aims and goals of courses**
- **the role of the social worker in health care settings in Finland**
- **the employment of medical social workers**
- **social work methods**
- **teamwork**
- **networking**
- **discussion and group work**

**SECOND LESSON**

- **primary health care and acute health care**
- **special groups: the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill.**
- **organisation and services in Finland**
- **group work**
- **discussion**

**THIRD LESSON**

- **concept of illness**
- **stigma**
- **working with immigrants**
- **working with HIV and AIDS**
- **group work**
- **discussion**

**FOURTH LESSON**

- **drug abuse and HIV patients**
- **experience from Finland**
- **creativity and innovation in social work**
- **personal and professional development**
- **final words and feedback**

**6.6 Teaching Methods**

I tried to carefully prepare my lessons. The lessons were structured but flexible. At the beginning of each lesson I told the students which topics we were going to cover and which methods I would use. Before the lessons, I put up big coloured posters on the wall with the subject material written in a clear and concise language. We worked through this material together in the first half of the lesson and I always tried to give clear and focused explanations of difficult concepts. My students were very responsive and asked a lot of questions and we had a lot of discussions on what

differences and similarities there are between Finland and Cyprus. We had continual interaction and in this way we could exchange knowledge. I used a lot of personal experience as examples to help the students put the facts I was giving them into context. As my class was quite small, we did a lot of group work. This would usually be based on the lecture I gave them at the beginning of the lesson. I usually divided the class into 3 groups for example, and give them case studies to work on. These were then presented to the class. I found this an effective to involve everybody. Some of the students could express themselves very well in English, others had more difficulty but they were able to take an active part in the group work. I gave them coloured paper and pens and they would construct case studies. On the course on social welfare, to enable them to get a feel of the complex social benefits system in Finland, each group built a “family” with different problems or life situations in different phases of the life cycle. For this I cut out figure shapes from magazines and they chose the figures they needed to make a poster of the family at different stages of the life cycle.

These two courses did not include written assignments but the students had an end of term exam which included questions on these courses. I gave them written material after each lesson so that they could refer back to what I had been teaching.

## **6.7 Language Issues**

The students in Cyprus I was teaching have all their lectures in English and they have to write all assignments and exams in English. Their mother tongue is Greek and they have all studied English at school. I think that it is very important for the teacher to try and assess early on the level of each students' level of proficiency in English. In my class, the level varied quite considerably and this was something I had to be aware of so that I could ensure that the lessons were understood by each student. Apart from obviously speaking slowly and clearly, I tried to use vocabulary that they would understand and I carefully explained difficult concepts, using a lot of examples. To make sure that each student was involved, we had a lot of conversation and group work where I was able to observe how well the students were coping with the language. I have found little literature which specifically focuses on this subject but after the experience of teaching these students, I have realised that it is very important when teaching foreign students, to plan carefully the teaching methods and way of

presentation because we cannot assume that students are able to follow difficult topics in a language which is not their mother tongue. In my class of nine students, as I mentioned earlier, there were considerable differences in their English language skills. Some of them could express themselves well and take part in discussions, others clearly had difficulty although they were eager to try which is very positive but it can mean that students who have good English skills become bored when a student who has only a very basic knowledge is laborously trying to express him or herself. So, how does the teacher react? When I realised that I had students with varying levels of English, I used many different teaching methods, including a lot of group work where it was possible for each student to be involved. I also used visual aides like posters as mentioned earlier.

Paying attention to this aspect of teaching if there are pupils in a class where the language of instruction is other than their mother tongue is very important. With many students studying abroad and many courses being offered in English in countries where the mother tongue is other than English, there is an increasing number of students from different cultures. Teachers must ensure that the language content of their course is being understood, otherwise students will lose their motivation to learn and also of course, if they don't really understand the language then the whole object of the lesson is defeated! When there is the situation that teachers themselves are teaching in a language other than their mother tongue and also the students' mother tongue is other than the language of instruction, particular attention should be paid to the question of language!

## **6.8 Evaluation and Feedback**

This teaching practice has proved to be a very good opportunity to experiment with different teaching methods. It was quite challenging in the beginning before I got to know the students. We did however quickly develop a warm and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. The students were not afraid to ask questions and they wanted to participate in discussions. I think it would have been a mistake to rely on lectures especially as they had to concentrate so much on the language. Their concentration would easily have wandered. Instead, we had continuous interaction. They were very keen on the group work and liked to present their work. This was a new method for them. In the future, I will pay even more attention on the preparation and planning of

the lessons. I was surprised at how much time is needed for preparation. We covered a lot of ground in a short time but I hope with the help of the group work they were able to “digest” the contents and reflect on it. My goal was to give the students tools and not answers and to become aware of the importance of context in learning and the influence of their own life experience.

## **7 THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL AWARENESS**

This chapter turns to the question of why culture in learning and teaching is significant. Firstly, I discuss the concept of culture and then examine the significance of verbal and non verbal language. This is followed by a look at what is meant by cultural competence and finally the chapter concludes why we should embrace cultural diversity and not see it as a problem.

### **7.1 What is Culture?**

Culture is often conceived of in an essentialist manner. This sees culture constructed as a rigid and constraining concept which is seen to automatically determine peoples’ behaviours. (Ahmed 1993; Sheldon and Parker 1992; Cully 1997). This deterministic approach to culture fails to recognise the significance of differences of socio-economic status, gender and age within ethnic groups but sees them as homogeneous wholes (Cully 1997). In contrast to this culturistic view which sees culture as static and determined, is the view that culture is a complex and dynamic process and ethnicity as one fluid and shifting aspect of identity (Hall 1992; Cully 2000).

*We are all ethnic, yet our ethnicity does not define us. We all need our ethnicity to be respected, yet we cannot be adequately understood solely in terms of our ethnicity (Gerris et al 1996).*

From this perspective, culture is forever changing and moving. In the teaching profession, as in other professions, educators should be sensitive to cultural differences. With the intention of *helping* professions to become aware of cultural issues, in the health services for example, professionals are often given *factfiles* to give them information about particular ethnic backgrounds. This can however create more problems than answers because they often give a deterministic and one-sided view. Gerrish et al (1996) writing about the health services argues that strategies need to be developed which enable practitioners to manage cross-cultural encounters

efficiently. They emphasise the importance of communication skills and speak of intercultural communicative competences. By this, they mean communication skills which can be learned and so prepare practitioners to be flexible and competent to meet the challenge of intercultural interactions, regardless of the specific cultures involved in the exchange (Cully 2004). I would argue that it is equally important for teachers to be aware of cultural differences and to learn this intercultural communicative competency.

Jarvis (Jarvis 1987) writing about adult learning also stresses the significance of culture for our understanding of learning and he focuses on a sociological perspective:

*The position adopted here is that learning is not just a psychological process that happens in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives, but that it is intimately related to that world and affected by it.....Hence, it is as important to examine the social dimension of adult learning as it is to understand the psychological mechanisms of the learning process (Jarvis 1987).*

## 7.2 The Importance of Language

Language is not only a question of linguistics. Through language, both oral and body language, we convey our cultural values through our interactions. Therefore, the teacher must be sensitive to other ways and styles of communication from students from different cultural backgrounds. If the teacher is not alert to this, then there will be misunderstandings in communication (Clayton 2003). For example, drawing on my teaching in Cyprus, I quickly became aware that verbal language was very important as students readily broke into conversation and debate with one another and often spoke at the same time when they became excited over some topic we were discussing. Accordingly, I ensured that the lessons included a lot of space for verbal expression. Perhaps, if I held the same lesson in Finland for example, the students would have been more reserved and not so readily and spontaneously entered into open debate and so then I would have assessed the most suitable teaching method. Perhaps there would have been more weight put into written work. Writing and how we express ourselves also reflects culture. Some cultures are more inclined to use written language to communicate and pay attention to detail and description, and other cultures emphasize verbal communication. The teacher needs to be aware of this and also remember that the words, expressions and thoughts she or he is conveying to the students may be interpreted in other ways than what was intended.

Before we learn to talk, we learn non-verbal communication meanings in our culture. This is a vast language which we internalise and learn as we grow up in our culture. For example, without being aware of it, we learn what different gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, the concept of time, different modes of clothing, smells and silence for example mean. These modes of non-verbal communication often have completely different meanings in different cultures. If a student sits very quietly, is he shy or is he showing respect for the teacher and will he only say something if he is spoken to? If a student avoids eye contact and looks the other way when being spoken to, is this being impolite or is this too a sign of respect? And if a pupil smiles all the time, is he really happy or could he be actually showing grief? These are just examples of how people from diverse cultures can attach different meanings to symbols and gestures etc. For example, as someone coming from a culture which respects punctuality, I found it a little difficult adjusting to the concept of time in Cyprus. It appears to be normal there to be late for appointments or lessons so luckily I realised this and refrained from saying anything to students if they were late for class. the teacher needs to be aware of the difference of meaning which can be attached to non-verbal communication. Perhaps this is something we do not always pay enough attention to but it is very important because otherwise there can easily arise a mutual lack of understanding between student and teacher which is perhaps difficult to repair afterwards.

### **7.3 Developing Cultural Competence and Cultural Sensitivity**

Cultural diversity has primarily been associated with race and ethnicity but diversity is taking on a broader meaning to include the socio-cultural experiences of people of different genders, social classes, religious and spiritual beliefs, ages and physical and mental abilities. Therefore cultural competence in teaching implies a heightened consciousness of how students experience their uniqueness and deal with their differences and similarities within a larger social context.

Cultural competence refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, language, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religious, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognises, affirms and values the worth of individuals and preserves their dignity.

Cultural competence is never fully realised, achieved, or completed, but rather cultural competence is a lifelong process for teachers who will always encounter diverse students, and new situations in their work. Therefore teachers need to realise that cultural competence is an ongoing learning process. Teachers should demonstrate respect for differences, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources and therefore at the same time promote a teaching environment which advocates fair and equitable treatment of all students alike.

To achieve this, teachers need to examine their own cultural backgrounds and identities to increase awareness of personal assumptions, values and biases. This awareness influences our teaching and interactions with students. When teachers are culturally aware of the heritage of others, they can celebrate differences in others, rather than maintain an ethnocentric stance. We must continually expand our understanding of the impact of culture on behaviour, attitudes and values, and as discussed earlier, the role of language, speech patterns and communication styles of different cultural groups. Importantly, teachers need the critical skill of asking the right questions and asking students about what works for them.

The personal attributes of a culturally competent teacher includes qualities that reflect genuineness, empathy and warmth and the capacity to demonstrate flexibility in teaching, an acceptance of and openness to differences amongst people, a willingness to learn to work with students of different backgrounds. Effective teaching also requires the teacher to continually evaluate the validity and applicability of new techniques, research and knowledge.

## **8 THE PRACTICAL REALISATION OF A TEACHING MODULE IN ASSESSMENT**

### **8.1 The Framework of the Course**

This module is planned for second year students so they have at least one year of studies behind them.

The module will consist of two workshops and each one will last for four hours so making a total of eight hours. The number of students participating will be limited to a maximum of ten. This is a suitable size to carry out group work and stimulate discussion and achieve lively interactive processes.

Each student will be given a written programme of the contents of the course and the time schedule and also a list of references and useful web sites. Because of the intensiveness of the course, students will be required to attend the whole course. The first workshop will include the following themes:

- **orientation to the subject, a short introductory lecture by the teacher**
- **the concept of assessment and assessment as the first part of the social work process**
- **the knowledge base**
- **skills in critical reflection and research skills**
- **value base and ethics**
- **social problems**
- **law and policy**
- **cultural aspects**

The first workshop will be more theoretical and there will be a written assignment to complete before the following workshop at a fixed date. This workshop will be a blend of lectures and group work but with the emphasis on short lectures on the relevant subjects. Each lecture will be followed by time for questions and discussion. The exact methods used will be decided upon when the teacher has assessed the pupils, taking into account cultural differences and the verbal skills of each one. For this end, the teacher needs to find a way at the beginning of the workshop to evaluate the english language skills of the students, perhaps by asking them to present themselves to each other in a lighthearted way. It is crucial that right from the start the teacher is able to create a relaxed atmosphere.

The second workshop will concentrate more on communication skills needed to perform a successful assessment and will include more group work and case examples. The written assignments will be given back together with a written feedback from the teacher.

Themes in this second workshop will include:

- **skills needed to use knowledge and how to integrate theory and practice**
- **assessment skills**
- **counselling skills**
- **communication skills**
- **diverse clients**
- **working in partnership**

The aim is to stimulate curiosity and motivate the students and to achieve this, the workshops will use a wide variety of teaching methods and will as far as possible endeavour to take account of the diversity amongst the students.

I will now examine in a little more detail learning and teaching styles – issues which I need to be sensitive to when planning my teaching module.

## **8.2 Learning Styles in Different Cultures**

Cultural sensitivity means being able to recognise that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds have learning styles which are very much linked to their culture beliefs and values of the society to which they belong and what is thought to be very important to learn in one culture may be of no significance in another.

Personal learning styles are influenced by three strands; cognitive, affective and physiological (Griggs 1991). The cognitive strand refers to the ways in which information is received, stored and processed and students from different ethnic backgrounds will show numerous learning styles. It means therefore that the same teaching techniques cannot be effective with all students. The affective strand of learning means the emotional and personality characteristics. Factors such as interests, persistence, a willingness to take risks or a need for structure and sociability (Clayton 2003). The third strand is the physiological strand which is made up of two parts: the environmental context of temperature, noise level, room arrangement and light, and the preferred tools for teaching ( visual and auditory). In Cyprus, posters and visual aids were effective tools in my teaching. They supplemented the oral presentations which were perhaps difficult for some

students to follow. In this way, I tried to think of each students' needs, which in this case, were teaching methods which would be sensitive to their possible lack of English skills and in this way allow the student to become aware of how she or he learns most effectively. Also, by using multi-teaching techniques, I tried to be sympathetic to the students preferred learning styles. If a student has the opportunity to use his or her preferred learning styles then it follows that the learning process will be more effective which is indeed our goal.

Culture also influences learning styles and I found the theories of learning styles developed by Manuel Ramirez and Alfredo Castaneda (1974) useful in comparing teaching in Cyprus and teaching scandinavian students. These theories speak about two learning styles: Field Sensitivity and Field Independence. These theories are related to a cultural world view. Field sensitive students readily work in a group, are interactive with each other and the teacher, are more relationship than task orientated and pay less attention to details and more to the overall picture. My students in Cyprus liked to work with others, they helped one another and asked a lot of questions. Lessons included a lot of dialogue and descriptions of real life situations, they were very interactive events. When teaching students from Scandinavia, I have noticed that they often like to work independently and will willingly take on projects they work on by themselves. In the classroom, the teacher has to work quite hard to achieve an interactive atmosphere where students are more formal towards one another and keep a distance from the teacher. These two learning styles are not mutually inclusive of course and most students have blended tendencies. Ramirez and Castaneda relate these two learning styles to differences in cultural context. Students who are more field sensitive, come from cultures where there is more emphasis on groups and extended families, where there is more cooperation than competition. Students who show field independence on the otherhand, have been brought up in cultures which are more individualistic and competitive. They are more task orientated and do not pay so much attention to the social environment.

In the following discussion on teaching styles, I return to these theories which have helped me understand why in different contexts it is so important to reflect on who we are teaching and from which cultural backgrounds they come from.

### 8.3 Teaching Styles

It is since my teaching practice that I have become aware in the process of teaching and learning of the importance of style and the distinction between methods and style. By style, I mean here the *distant qualities* displayed by a teacher (Conti 1990). Whereas teaching methods are about the science of teaching, style refers to the art of teaching (Jarvis 2002). Interviewing students last year about what makes a good teacher, nobody mentioned the expertise of the knowledge base of the teacher. However each one named characteristics a teacher ought to have. The way in which the content is presented and the methods used seemed to have priority over actual content. Teaching is not just about methods nor is it solely about style but it should be a blend of the two for effective teaching.

Each lesson is a unique event. Each student is unique and each teacher is unique. The performance is always different although the props and technical aids may remain the same. The personality and the character of the teacher play a very significant role as to how he or she relates to the students. Teaching today is an art. Parker (1998) reflects upon his own teaching:

*After three decades of trying to learn my craft, every class comes down to this: my students and I, face to face, engaged in an ancient and exacting exchange called education. The techniques I have mastered do not disappear but neither do they suffice. Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command, my identity, my selfhood, my sense of "I" who teaches – without which I have no sense of the "Thou" who learns .....good teaching cannot be reduced to technique, good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.*

In my own teaching, I have noticed the importance of communication skills. Teaching is a continuous interactive process where the teacher must be constantly alert as to how the students are reacting. The teacher must work hard at managing the class and keeping students interested and involved. It is not enough to stand at the front of the class and concentrate solely on delivering the contents of the lecture. For effective teaching a teacher needs certain personal qualities but these are not very easily learnt and it is also difficult to define what these qualities are but James Stronge in his book “Qualities of Effective Teachers” explores various characteristics which are attributed to effective teachers: role of caring, listening,

understanding, knowing students, role of fairness and respect, social interaction with students, promotion of enthusiasm and motivation for learning and the role of reflective practice (Stronge 2002).

In teaching diverse students from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, I refer again to the field sensitive and the field independent student. As well as personal attributes of the teacher as discussed above, one needs again to reflect on who we are teaching. Are there students from a more collectivist culture background or more individualistic? It is useful to carry out this exercise in the mind when planning teaching modules. Will the emphasis be on more formality and less interaction or on group work and discussions? The most effective style is probably a blended version where the teacher is however sensitive to differences and will be at least aware when teaching students from both field sensitive and field independent cultural backgrounds in the same classroom, that the teaching style will sometimes be a new experience for the student.

## **9 FINAL WORDS AND CONCLUSION**

The aim of this development project, as stated in the introduction, was to design a teaching module in assessment in social work and secondly and most importantly, to examine and reflect on issues of cultural diversity and its implications for teaching. This development project has been essentially a dialogue between my experiences in Cyprus and my own reflections on teaching and cultural diversity. I have attempted to interweave throughout this project, experience with reflection and analysis of my own thoughts so in this respect, this project is very personal. I have repeatedly drawn upon my experience in Cyprus to reflect upon how teaching modules are created, what I teach, how I teach, which styles I adopt and how my students learn. What is their cultural background and what is mine and how does this affect my teaching.

In this project, I have attempted to arouse interest in and to draw out the essence of what is meant by such concepts as cultural sensitivity, cultural competence etc. and how teachers respond to these perspectives when planning and carrying out a teaching performance. I say performance because each teaching lesson is unique. We may have the basic props to help us, but the players are always different and we must therefore be sensitive to the needs of the students and their expectations. Teachers need to be flexible and be able to adapt themselves to sometimes unfamiliar and new situations and be ready to adopt different techniques.

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