























forces on the lives of people, the challenge is for a greater number of South African social workers to recognise and fulfil their policy-making, advocacy and social-change roles. In drawing a direct comparison with the United States, Pozzuto (2001:158) goes on to say:

*“South Africans know better than this. The transition of the South African government and the current recreation of the civil society show that the social order is not fixed, nor permanent, nor immutable. This is a lesson, a gift, South Africa can provide to the US. South Africans also know that there are competing ways to conceptualise the social world.”*

The situation is not as positive or as straightforward as Pozzuto claims. There are marked tensions and contradictions within South African society that present major challenges both for the social work profession and for South African society.

Some of the students' fieldwork experiences offered them an alternative view of professionalism to that of the dominant logical-positivist conception that they had been exposed to. Logical-positivism, reflecting modernism's technical rationality, favours a linear reductionist approach to assessment and management, sees the practitioner as the "expert" who prescribes solutions, adopts the "proof-is-truth" axiom as defined by logical-positivist empiricism, and calls for the practitioner to be uninvolved, detached, value-free and neutral (Sewpaul, 1997, 2001). Such a view of professionalism is incompatible with anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1996b). There is a need to mainstream alternative conceptions of professionalism and for a redefinition of professionalism from a feminist perspective (Dominelli, 2002). An emphatic tuning into the life worlds and suffering of people, especially in circumstances of extreme deprivation, poverty and inequality, means that we cannot remain value-free and neutral. We cannot help but make sense of the lives of people in relation to the structures that surround them and engage the positive forces of people as we come to terms with our own limitations as professionals and as we confront the major challenges involved in the change process.

Acquiring these insights can form an important part of the international exchange experience. One group of students had the opportunity of being educated by a group of HIV-positive women whom I had worked with. A colleague from Minnesota, who spent some time in Social Work, University of Natal, trained two of the women in English language skills. These women then did a full session with the rest of the group, with the students as participants as well. While the focus was on language acquisition, the messages were about what it means to be living with HIV/AIDS and a brief, simple lesson on South African politics. On the same day the students had the opportunity to see the women, who had extensive training in HIV/AIDS counselling, education and outreach, in action as they engaged in an HIV/AIDS education programme in a hospital context. The power and credibility of the HIV-positive women as peer educators were obvious and the impact much greater than I could have hoped to make as a professional.

One student cried bitterly during a debriefing session, on account of the emotional trauma as she daily encountered children and adults with symptomatic HIV and children dying from AIDS. (Although naught for the students' comfort, such events did serve to highlight the extremely profound and direct implications of macro-economic and health policies). Linked to this was her major concern about how people back home could possibly understand what she had experienced. While I acknowledged her feelings and concerns, I pointed out that the power for her lay in the lived experience, and that it

would be difficult for someone on the outside to fully understand such an experience. In discussing what they could do to make a difference, I often affirmed that they were making a difference simply by their willingness to engage with people on the level that they did. Their affirmation, acceptance and validation of the people with whom they came into contact were gifts, as might be a change in perspective that they might offer. However, the major challenge was recognising their personal and national privileged spaces (which many talked about and acknowledged), working towards de-stigmatising the people of Africa and raising awareness about global politics and economics. One student, on returning to the US, wrote frequently to indicate what a life-altering experience the exchange programme was and that he had sustained his interest in the area of HIV/AIDS. After attending a local conference, he said: "I learned so many different ways that I could help Africa here in my own state, even in my own town. I am going to be telephoning, writing and lobbying my local representatives and urge them to STOP GLOBAL AIDS" (e-mail correspondence 01/10/03).

Freire (1972, 1973) Gramsci (1971, 1977) and Giroux (1983, 1997) believed that the development of critical consciousness might lead to critical action. Freire's idea of praxis or conscious action involves a dialectical movement from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action (Freire, 1972). Giroux (1983) points out that subjective intentions alone pose little threat to the existing socio-political order. However, social action must be preceded by an awareness that makes the need for such action comprehensible. Awareness represents an important step in getting students to act as engaged and responsible citizens who question the structural basis of social life. One student expressed a great deal of confusion as he cried and said:

*"I grew up in America and I was led to believe that we were of value to the world by virtue of being the United States. We were always made to feel so proud to be American. I have come half way across the world to learn about our economic policy and how it might be affecting people in different parts of the world."*

Students, like all other people, are constructed within particular cultural, social, political and historical relations. Thus, they had difficulty in integrating information and experiences that confronted both self and national identities and loyalties. However, the value of education needs to be questioned if it is not used to challenge dominant paradigms and ideologies. Such confrontation, I believe, is central to shifting the boundaries of knowledge, to one's personal and professional development and to one's commitment to social change. Radical pedagogy confirms that it is the self that must be the main site of politicisation. It provides scope for students to:

*"...extend their understandings of themselves and the global contexts in which they live... [and it] affirms the importance of offering students a language that allows them to reconstruct their moral and political energies in the service of creating a more just and equitable order, one that undermines relations of hierarchy and domination." (Giroux, 1997:225)*

## CONCLUSION

International exchanges broaden horizons through the challenges provided by field placements, new opportunities for discussion, debate and critical reflection, and the destabilising experiences that the students undergo. These challenges question their taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and the world, and require that they in

turn challenge the boundaries of their knowledge. My own biography and the influence of the emancipatory pedagogy of Freire (1970, 1972, 1973), Gramsci (1988, 1971, 1977) and Giroux (1983, 1994, 1997) were powerful factors that influenced my work with the students, and in offering alternative conceptions of professionalism and social work practice. The emphases on global and local discourses around “race”, gender, poverty and HIV/AIDS served to heighten awareness of local struggles, the strengths and limitations of national policies and responses, the impact of American foreign policies and of international financial institutions and transnational companies on South Africa’s development opportunities.

While the experience seemed to be overwhelmingly positive, several concerns arise both in relation to local and international students. How does one sustain students’ interests and passions, especially where such teaching/learning strategies are not replicated in other contexts? How do we encourage/foster transfer of learning across cognate disciplines and from one situation to the next? How do we balance students’ need for certainty and directives against the general flexibility and the acknowledgement of shifting signifiers in emancipatory education? Do we understand what drives students’ need for such certainty and directives? How do students’ conceptual abilities and their relative positions of disadvantage impact on such need? Given the time-consuming and labour-intensive nature of emancipatory teaching/learning, how do we get educators to support and institutionalise it? How can the culture of teaching/learning and forms of assessment at institutions of higher learning, which seem to be informed by a technical, logical-positivist and market-driven rationality, be transformed to support emancipatory strategies?

## REFERENCES

- ALEXANDER, N. 1989. Liberation pedagogy in the South African context. **In:** CRITICOS, C. (ed) **Experiential learning in formal and non-formal education**. Durban: Media Resource Centre, Department of Education, UND.
- COETZEE, J.K. 2001. A micro foundation for development thinking. **In:** COETZEE, J.K. *et al.* (eds) **Development: Theory, policy and practice**. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- DEPARTMENT OF WELFARE AND POPULATION DEVELOPMENT. 1998. **White Paper on Population Policy**. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- DOMINELLI, L. 1996a. The future of social work education: Beyond the state of the art. **Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare**, 5:194-201.
- DOMINELLI, L. 1996b. Deprofessionalising social work: Anti-oppressive practice, competencies and postmodernism. **British Journal of Social Work**, 26:153-175.
- DOMINELLI, L. 2002. **Feminist social work theory and practice**. New York: Palgrave.
- FANON, F. 1970. **The wretched of the earth**. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- FREIRE, P. 1970. **The pedagogy of the oppressed**. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- FREIRE, P. 1972. **Cultural action for freedom**. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- FREIRE, P. 1973. **Education for critical consciousness**. New York: The Seabury Press.
- GIROUX, H.A. 1983. **Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition**. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

- GIROUX, H.A. 1994. Living dangerously: Identity politics and the new cultural racism. **In:** GIROUX, H.A. & McLAREN, P. (eds) **Between borders: Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies**. New York: Routledge.
- GIROUX, H.A. 1997. **Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling**. Colorado: Westview Press.
- GRAMSCI, A. 1971. **Selections from the prison notebooks** (ed & transl by HOARE, A. & SMITH, G.N.). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- GRAMSCI, A. 1977. **Selections from political writings 1910-1920**. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- GRAMSCI, A. 1988. **Gramsci's prison letters** (transl by HENDERSON, H.). Edinburgh: Zwan Publications.
- GUEVARA, J.A. & YLVISAKER, R. 2003. Two models for international collaboration to create service learning opportunities. **In:** HEALY, L.M., ASAMOA, Y. & HOKENSTAD, M.C. (eds) **Models of international collaboration in social work education**. Washington: NASW Press.
- HOOKS, B. 1989. **Talking back**. Boston: South End.
- MIDGLEY, J. 2000. Globalization, capitalism and social welfare: A social development perspective. **In:** ROWE, B. (ed) **Social work and globalization**. Ottawa: Canadian Association of Social Workers.
- MINISTRY OF FINANCE. 1996. **Growth, employment and redistribution: A macro-economic strategy**. Available: [www.gov.za/reports/1996](http://www.gov.za/reports/1996).
- NELSON MANDELA/HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL STUDY OF HIV/AIDS. 2002. **South African National HIV prevalence, behavioral risks and mass media household survey**. Cape Town, SA: Human Sciences Research Council Publishers.
- NETTLEFORD, R. 1995. **Outward stretch, inward reach: A voice from the Caribbean**. New York: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- POZUTTO, R. 2001. Lessons in continuation and transformation: The United States and South Africa. **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 37(2):154-164.
- SEWPAUL, V. 1992. Primary care: The challenge to social work educators. **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 28(3):20-28.
- SEWPAUL, V. & JONES, D. 2005. Global standards for the education and training of the social work profession. **International Journal of Social Welfare**, 14(3):218-230.
- SEWPAUL, V. 1997. The RDP: Implications for social work practice and social welfare policy development in South Africa. **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 33(1):1-9.
- SEWPAUL, V. 2001. Models of intervention for children in difficult circumstances in South Africa. **Child Welfare**, LXXX(5):571-586.
- SEWPAUL, V. 2002. The enigma of anti-retroviral therapy: The fight for life. Critical Forum article. **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 37(4):404-406.
- SEWPAUL, V. 2004a. Emancipatory citizen education in action: Discourse ethics and deconstruction (Part 1). **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 40(4):336-343.
- SEWPAUL, V. 2004b. Emancipatory citizen education in action: Creative teaching/learning options (Part 2). **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 40(4):336-343.

- SMART, R., DENNILL, K. & PLEANER, M. 2001. **Planning in the new millennium: A Primary HIV/AIDS capacity development course for government planners**. AIDS Media research Project (AMREP): Department of Social Development, Pretoria.
- STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA. 2002. **Earning and spending in South Africa**. Pretoria.
- SUNSHINE, C.A. 1996. **The Caribbean: Survival, struggles and sovereignty**. Washington: EPICA.
- WILLIAMS, L.O. 1988. **Partial surrender: Race and resistance in the youth service**. London: The Falmer Press.
- WILLIAMS, L.O. 2002. **Adolescents and violence in Jamaica**. UNICEF.

*Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul, Postgraduate Programme Director, Centre for Social Work, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban, South Africa.*