Social Work in Europe: Radical Traditions, Radical Futures?

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This article is concerned with recognising these important discourses. It attempts to deconstruct the meaning of social work and to suggest a reconstituted and reconstructed social work which has the potential to engage with processes of social transformation (Ife, 1997, 2000; Powell, 1998; Barry & Hallett, 1998). However, it is important to recognise that although social work possesses the potential to engage with excluded and marginalised communities and provide people, in Raymond Williams’ words, with the ‘resources of hope’, it also has other, less benign, functions. Skehill (1999: p.799) argues that Powell (1998) has failed “to consider the necessarily regulatory and contradictory nature of Irish social work presently”. These comments reverberate wider than the debate between Skehill and Powell and replicate age old tensions between care and control, repression or liberation. They parallel current discourses around empowerment where the question of liberation or regulation has been posed as a rejoinder to some of the more Utopian notions of the ways in which social work can create new forms of social relations (Baistow, 1995).

It is first necessary to begin with an analysis of what we mean by social work. Does it cover the broad range of activities with which people engage when they work with excluded and marginalised people, or is a concept such as that of the social profession more inclusive and all encompassing? We need to clarify what we mean by social work as this establishes the parameters of the discussion that we are embarking on. The increasing privatisation of welfare, and the intrusion of market precepts into discourses around social work theory and practice, make the attempt to remember the radical history of social work, let alone reaffirm its relevance for contemporary debates, feel sometimes as if it involves ‘swimming against the stream’. Such considerations become even more
complex when considering ‘social work’ within broader European traditions. It is therefore necessary to consider what we mean by ‘social work,’ what distinguishes the different methodological traditions, particularly the tradition known as ‘radical social work’, and what relevance such formulations have for contemporary debates about welfare practice.

What is social work?

Lorenz (1994) suggested that “regardless of the particular model of welfare state within which social work operates there are great similarities in the daily practice of social workers” (p.28). However, he declined to define social work, arguing that “social work has a history of uncertainty and constantly changing identities” (p.14). Munday (1996) has described social work as a “notoriously difficult term to define, with significant variations across Europe in what constitutes a ‘social worker.’ ” (p.7).

This article starts with the idea of social work as a social profession; that is, it suggests that social work shares professional concerns and dilemmas with a range of occupational groupings including social pedagogues, social and special educators, agogues, animators, social workers, youth and community workers (Lorenz et al, 1996).

Marynowicz-Hetka, Piekarski and Wagner (1999) suggest that:

"the category of social professions includes both professionals, that is persons specially trained to work with specific types of persons, families, social groups and communities at high social risk, as well as persons who conduct this type of work as volunteers and have no professional training." (p.23).

Furthermore, for the purpose of this discussion, social professional activity is defined in terms of the contribution social professionals can make as change agents, igniting processes of social transformation. It therefore draws from the work of what has, in previous guise, been called radical social work, specifically those forms of intervention which focus broadly around collective campaigns and collective provision.

Lorenz (1994: p.10) suggested that social work faced many uncertainties but that:

“social work practice interprets and makes manifest the nature of solidarity that prevails in a particular society and the level of citizenship reached”. Smale et al. (2000: p.19) make a similar point when they suggest that “social work is an integral part of the society within which it is practised. It is one dimension of the way social problems are managed”.

Payne (1997: pp.7-13) suggested that social work can be regarded as socially constructed and suggests therefore that we should be aware of applying theories about social work to different countries and cultures because the value and cultural bases of different societies may be incompatible. Societies face different problems and issues, and there are concerns about cultural imperialism and the history of oppressive colonialism. He points to the complexities of the definitions of social work and to the way in which categories of social work practice, in the UK, can include varieties of sub-category; within casework - psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural, crisis intervention, task-centred, and within community work - community development, community organizing, community action, social planning.

Recently Lyons (1999) has suggested that social work can be distinguished by its methodology - field casework, group and community work, and is characterized by ‘child rescue’ services, as well as “practices underpinned by concepts of conscientisation and empowerment such as radical social work’. To these can be added perspectives around identity or ‘social division’ such as feminism/gender (Hanmer & Statham, 1998); disability (Drake,1999) and anti-racism (Dominelli, 1997; Williams et al., 1998). Lorenz (1995: p.34) pointed to the challenge racism posed for the social professions when he suggested that:

“Racism .... represents a challenge to pedagogy as the institution responsible for society’s cultural reproduction ... It also provides a challenge to social work with its mainly unexamined notions of ‘normality.’ ”

Midgely (1997: p.21) has argued for a social development approach grounded in materialist analysis to which, he suggests, social work is well suited, given its “long experience in working with deprived and needy people, global involvement, and ethical commitment to promoting human well-being”. There have also been renewed calls for attention to be given to the impact and influence of users of services in the struggle to democratize and make relevant services and to reposition the user as a ‘subject’ or an active agent in the process of social transformation (Beresford & Turner, 1997). Describing the exclusion of people in poverty from
poverty discourse, Beresford and Croft (1995: p.91) argue that it is “only with their involvement that poverty discussion is likely to identify, reflect and advance their needs, concerns, interests”. The same can apply to users of welfare services and it will be a mark of social work’s ability to promote social change how far it can create genuine partnerships with users and their organisations.

One other factor is also worth remembering when we try and account for what social work is. In Shardlow and Payne’s words “social work is both a national and an international activity”. They raise the question of:

“How far the profession will continue to be defined through different national traditions and practices, or how far the future will see a harmonization of theory and practice across the various states”? (Shardlow & Payne, 1998: p.158).

Johannesen (1997: pp.148-153) has suggested that social work internationally is well placed to respond to the challenges posed by the UN’s 1995 World Summit for social development in Copenhagen. He points to the way social work should target three particular commitments which emerged from the social summit - eradicating poverty, fighting unemployment and empowering disadvantaged groups. Lyons (1999: p.46) argues that the best way for social work to contribute to this process is through:

“taking a structural perspective and giving an increased emphasis to the concept of empowerment (which) clarifies the need to promote community networks and their interaction with the formal organizations in society”.

However, Giarchi and Lankshear (1998), reviewing social work in Europe, described it as a fragmented and diffuse activity, increasingly eclipsed by trends in the delivery of welfare that promote the blurring of professional boundaries and the reduction of professional autonomy. The profession, they suggest, is riven with tensions, to the extent that it is not possible to speak of a ‘Euro social work’, suggesting instead that the impact of new Liberalism, new Right ideas and the consequent promotion of the market has led to a weakening of social work claims to professional autonomy. They conclude that “only in Denmark is the post war notion of the welfare state maintained and public sector professional status of social work conserved” (Giarchi & Lankshear, 1998: p.27) and that “there is considerable evidence that social work as a profession or as an identifiable occupation is hard to find” (p.34). Given the substantial diversity of work undertaken within Europe under the umbrella of the social professions, it is hard to reconcile their conclusions with the diverse range of practices and practitioners described in the recent proliferation of texts about social working in Europe (Marynowicz-Hetka et al., 1999; Williams et al., 1998; Shardlow & Payne, 1998; Adams et al., 2000).

Lorenz, speaking at the Ostrava Conference of ECSPRESS in 1998, was much more optimistic, arguing that “the role of the social professions in relation to the growing danger of exclusion and racism remains crucial for the achievement of a Social Europe” (Lorenz, 1998: p.5). He pointed to the way ECSPRESS was seeking to ensure that European integration “does not cause greater fragmentation and new forms of exclusion” (p.3).

A key outcome of these processes is an increase in racism and xenophobia. Aluffi Pentini and Lorenz (1996: p.vi) point to the importance of social professionals addressing racism when they describe the challenge faced by Italian youth and social workers who felt that, “racism was a challenge to educators in all parts of the country, that all pedagogical interventions had to be embedded in a clear political analysis, that cultural differences reflected power differentials.”

Dominelli clearly articulates how this poses a challenge for social work, in that it becomes necessary to:

“Contextualise social work within the state apparatus; understand the dynamics in both covert and overt forms of racism; recognise how racism is legitimated through social processes and institutions outside social work structures; and relate these to everyday routines in social work’ (Dominelli, 1997: p.19).

Humphries (1997: p.647) points to a further factor which impacts on the practice of social work - its relationship to people in poverty:

“Social work has always had a contradictory function in regulating the poor by both control and support. With growing state intervention in all aspects of social life comes a more direct inspectorial role for social workers ... the tradition of emotional support is marginalized in the social worker’s repertoire in a disciplinary society”.

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Writing about the Irish child care system, Buckley et al., (1997: p.31) make a similar point when they say that “poor and disadvantaged people figure disproportionately in the child protection system”.

Social work, is increasingly confronting pressures to refocus its gaze on individuals and to ignore or play down the way that the problems individuals face are structured by broader social economic and political factors. In the UK, the mixed economy of welfare, increased marketisation of welfare services, and the focus on assessment and regulation in social work practice has led some to argue that any potential for radical practice has become marginalised. Yet, at the same time, there is an increasing recognition of the role of the user of welfare services as an active agent. Williams et al. (1998: p.21) have suggested a new welfare paradigm which:

“emphasises the capacity of people to be creative, reflexive human agents of their lives, experiencing, acting upon and reconstituting the outcomes of welfare policies. It also points to the complex, multiple, subjective and objective social positionings that welfare subjects inhabit”.

Social work, as it is currently constructed in many countries, operates in the context of the growing poverty and social exclusion of service users and it is being recognised that social work can make a contribution to the process of social inclusion by empowering people to overcome their exclusion through promoting forms of social inclusion. But as Barry and Hallett (1998: p.9) note:

“There seems to be a dichotomy between the philosophy behind the notion of social inclusion which could be argued to be welfare-orientated and based on notions of a collective responsibility rather than individual blame, and the emerging trend within social work to move away from a more proactive welfare and collective approach to social problems and towards refocusing on reactive management of individual behaviour, irrespective of the wider social and economic context.”

At present, there is a tendency to emphasise the control and management functions of social work without visibly examining or re-examining the potential that social work may have for promoting processes of transformation. This article seeks to remind us again of the issues raised by those theorists and activists who were promoting a ‘radical social work’ in the early to mid 1970s and who have recently, at least, been seen to be swimming ‘against the stream’ of managerialism and the competency culture. Ife (1997) argues that this managerial focus is one of four identifiable discourses around which social work is constructed - the others being market based social work, profession based social work and community based social work - and that the managerialist discourse ‘representing a hierarchic and positivist tradition’ is the dominant current discourse.

He suggests that social workers need to engage with new forms of critical practice and that the fourth approach, (community based) requires a “significant shift away from the extreme individualism that characterises much of the political, social and economic orthodoxy of modern society” (p.75). Central to such a perspective is the need to bring radical social work in from the margins and engage with, and listen to, people marginalised in the other discourses. At heart, this means developing strategies to internationalise social work and create links between the macro and the micro levels of struggle.

This suggests continuities with the concerns of writers and activists who attempted to construct such a ‘radical social work’ during the 1970s and 1980s. The drive to marketise social work as a commodity, evident in many European countries, has resulted in the downplaying of this tradition. Yet this body of work laid the basis for a more systematic and structural framework against which we can evaluate social work’s potential to engage with processes of change.

Radical social work - what was (is) it?

In the mid to late 1970s a body of literature emerged in the UK which could be said to fall within the umbrella of radical social (notably Bailey & Brake, 1975). The literature also included important texts on community work and community action (such as Jones & Mayo, 1975). Some of this literature drew extensively on the work of Paulo Freire (1972) which has also been influential in shaping some practices in the current environment (Ledwith, 1997; Popple, 1995).

Running throughout the literature is a commitment to forms of practice that do not individualise and pathologise people’s problems, particularly radical community action. Mayo (1975: p.135) had warned against the dangers of allowing the state to dictate the agenda, particularly around community development, which she warned carried the danger that “as a relatively cheap and typically ideological
attempt to resolve various economic, social and political problems it has clearly been attractive to governments and voluntary agencies”. A decade later she argued for the continuing involvement of radicals in community work, who could criticise local services but also defend them as they came under attack from central government.

Similar arguments were subsequently found in other texts during the 1980s. Jones (1983) sought to show how social work clients are separated off from those sections of the working class in employment: the focus of much social work is on the poor and disfranchised. He argues that: “for many clients, the sheer struggle to survive compels them to adopt most individualistic and introverted strategies which are completely at odds with the traditions of collective action which have developed within the organised working class both in their communities and in their work places” (p.57) and social workers should do their best to “maintain a broad front of appositional work” (p.152). This would involve highlighting the inequalities which clients/service users face and arguing for the democratisation of welfare services.

A brief review of the radical social work literature suggests a number of key themes, which can be incorporated into discussions of current welfare practice, as follows:

1. The need to reinsert class into our analysis. Phillips (1999) has noted the way that attention has shifted from the focus on class inequalities to the way gender, racial or cultural hierarchy undermine equal citizenship. Radical social work and its attendant literature can remind us of this need to connect all forms of oppression.

2. Discussions of race/ethnicity and gender relations are important for social work, not just because they describe the social relations between groups/collectivities but because they also provide a means of grounding our practice.

3. The need to democratise the organisations in which we work and to democratise the agencies and structures of the welfare state.

4. The need to build a critical consciousness which can empower the individuals and collectivities with which we work.

5. The need for a transformative vision that looks beyond the situations we currently face.

**From radical social work to critical social work**

Langan (1998) has suggested that the radicalism that was seen in British social work practice in the 1970s became transformed in the 1980s to a top down process in which a progressive agenda, to the extent it existed, was promoted from above - by academics and managers. While the 1990s saw the promotion of anti-discriminatory/anti-oppressive practice, from both practitioners and the regulatory body, CCETSW, she argued that, “the radical commitment to liberation appeared to have been transformed into a mechanism for regulation.” (p.215).

It has been suggested that the reason for this may lie within radical or critical social work itself. Healy (2000) argues that critical social work has become marginalized because it has failed to re-evaluate its own practice. In particular, she suggests that critical or radical social work privileges “certain practice contexts” over others, fails to take account of the manner in which social workers minimise the implications of power relations in their practice, oversimplifies the power differential between workers and users and devalues some forms of change activity. This is an important corrective to an overly naive approach to the issue of social change and social transformation and in some ways replicates earlier invocations to work “within (and against) the system by using social work skills and techniques in such a way that we ‘demystify’ it by discussing its origins, purpose ... and by encouraging service users to ask questions.” (Mullaly, 1993: p.174)

Dominelli (1999) has suggested that social workers have responded to the increased privatisation of social work, an accompanying loss of professional autonomy and a dissipation of their professional role, in three ways - through accommodation, escapism or resistance. *Accommodations* occurs in social workers’ engagement with the new contracting culture, in a naive belief that “they will continue to provide a service that is more consistent with a public service ethos and social work’s professional ethics” (p.20). *Escapism* strategies are pursued by those who feel professionally disempowered and respond by looking for work outside the public sector. Their position is characterised by a cynicism derived from their view of “the system’s capacity to respond appropriately to any challenge which is mounted against it” (p.20). The *resisters* are also
characterised by their feelings of alienation and disaffection from the system but the difference is in their response. They take an activist role in challenging the decisions of the agencies within the system:

“The activities of women, black people, gay men, lesbian women and disabled people in raising the failure of social services to respond appropriately to their needs are examples of resisters who have sought to change the situation that service users face”. (Dominelli, 1999: p.21)

This schema provides an interesting means of distinguishing the responses of social professionals to the challenges faced by globalisation, privatisation and the dampening down of the radical agenda. However, Dominelli’s account simplifies a complex situation by an over-concentration on the public sector, where many of the changes she describes have been experienced by state social workers. But a consequence of privatisation has been the expansion of social work into other areas of the mixed economy. NGOs or voluntary sector organisations have to some extent benefited from the disillusion of state workers. Forms of radical and alternative practice exist which can ensure that emancipatory forms of practice can still be found. Three examples drawn from different countries illustrate their range and type:

1. **OctopussylBlakespratten** in Denmark - a project working with young people from minority ethnic communities which focuses on working with young people in a way which values their cultures, promotes their rights and seeks to tackle the discrimination they face;
2. **Muslim Women’s Network** in Wales - developing services for Muslim women in Wales and attempting to overcome the discrimination they face within and without their community. They have a particular focus on promoting an image of Muslim women as active agents;
3. **Travellers Visibility Group** in Ireland - represents Travelling people who have been seeking to challenge the discrimination facing them. The group aims to promote Travellers as a nomadic group with their own distinctive culture/lifestyle, enable Traveller self-determination and empowerment in improving their lives, and promote mutual understanding, acceptance and support between Travellers and other groups in Irish society.

Critical to the practice of all three organisations is a commitment to ensuring that the people involved exercise control over their lives. It is suggested, therefore, that the typology suggested by Dominelli (1999) can, therefore, be expanded to encompass a more diverse range of practices and reconstructed as illustrated in Figure 1.

The ECSPRESS network symbolises a growing commitment to the development of networks of social professionals and the establishment of training and education initiatives that seek to improve inter-country co-operation. Lorenz, writing in 1997 about the future facing the ECSPRESS network, argued that there were a number of challenges confronting social professionals if they wanted to develop a European perspective particularly as:

“A broader European perspective relativises the traditional national understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a particular professional

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<th>Figure 1: Models of Practice</th>
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<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Accommodation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Escapism</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Resistance</strong></td>
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As indicated, a key factor impacting upon contemporary social work is the way many service users lives are framed by poverty and social exclusion. Their absence from debates around social work theory and practice is beginning to change, and disadvantaged and excluded groups are beginning to make demands to be included. But what do we mean when we talk about poverty and social exclusion? Poverty is held to be a narrow concept, which refers particularly to processes that result in economic disadvantage. Social exclusion is seen as a broader concept, describing the outcome of relational processes which place the excluded ‘outside’ of society. There is a suggestion that the concept of social exclusion has become more widely used because poverty was seen as too politically contentious by a number of members of the European Union - including the UK (Hallerod & Heikila, 1999). Byrne (1999: p.128) sees social exclusion as:

“a necessary and inherent characteristic of an unequal post-industrial capitalism founded around a flexible labour market and with a systematic constraining of the organisational powers of workers as collective actors”.

Levitas (1998) has argued that the concept of social exclusion is problematic precisely because it dichotomises the experience of the included majority and the excluded minority and “draws attention away from the differences and inequalities among the included” (p.7). She suggests that there are three distinct discourses around social exclusion, characterized as the redistributive discourse, the moral underclass discourse and the social integrationist discourse. Drawing on Levitas’ analysis it is possible to codify these discourses and suggest how they can ‘fit’ with our conceptualisation of social work, as in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Discourses around social exclusion (adapted from Levitas, 1998: pp 7-28 & chapter 2)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Redistributive</th>
<th>Moral underclass</th>
<th>Social integrationist</th>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty prime cause</td>
<td>Underclass culturally distinct</td>
<td>Narrow definition exclusion - emphasises paid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in benefit levels</td>
<td>Focus on behaviour of poor</td>
<td>Does not imply increase in benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can valorise unpaid work</td>
<td>Implies benefits are bad</td>
<td>Obscures inequalities between paid workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posits citizenship as obverse exclusion</td>
<td>Ignores societal inequalities</td>
<td>Obscures gender inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad critique of inequality</td>
<td>Gendered discourse about idle, criminal young men and single mothers</td>
<td>Obscures class inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on processes that cause inequality</td>
<td>Unpaid work unacknowledged</td>
<td>Unable to deal with question of unpaid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies radical reduction of inequality and redistribution of societies resources</td>
<td>Dependency on state problematised, emphasises personal economic dependency</td>
<td>Ignores unpaid work and its gendered distribution, implies increase in women’s work load, undermines the legitimacy of non-participation in paid work</td>
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Emphasis on collectivism and community empowerment | Promotes individualism, casework driven | Community development - emphasises plurality of society. Help people fit within
social democratic welfare regime type. For social professionals this suggests a valuing of the user of welfare services, an emphasis on the promotion of social inclusion and a partnership with the state to remedy exclusive practices and activities. The moral underclass discourse (MUD) is clearly predicated on the pathologisation of the poor, at best a refusal to acknowledge social inequalities and a gendered commodification of welfare. This places it firmly within the liberal/conservative regime type and suggests a form of welfare practice that is based on the denial of agency and the promotion of a coercive, punitive form of welfare practice which reinforces negative stereotypes of the poor.1

The social integrationist discourse (SID) provides a half way house, being neither as punitive nor as inclusive as the other discourses. Its focus is on inclusion through the medium of paid work. It obscures, without denying, social and class inequality and reinforces gender inequality through its attempts to commodity welfare and its downplaying of unpaid caring roles. Consequently it is liable to promote forms of welfare practice that are enabling rather than challenging and that fit within professional rather than user led paradigms of the welfare relationship.

Such distinctions are important because they frame the way we work with, and relate to, the users of welfare. In particular they guide the way we understand the world in which service users live. Jordan (1996) argues that the choices open to people in poverty and facing exclusion are more constrained than those from more affluent communities and that “processes of social exclusion through community formation and ‘voting with the feet’” (p.169) indicate that the life chances of the affluent and the dispossessed are constrained by their occupation of ‘communities of choice’ or ‘communities of fate’. He suggests that the latter should not be characterised as “passive, anomic or resigned” but should be seen as generating “strong resistance cultures” which involve both “solidaristic and supportive association and opportunistic, predatory action against the residents of communities of choice” (p.174). He points to the way in which these processes impact disproportionately on women and people from minority ethnic communities. He argues that:

“Poor women, and especially women from ethnic minorities, constitute the basis for ‘community’ and hence for social policies that try to define the relationship between public providers of welfare services and their clienteles in terms of ‘partnership’” (p.185).

This is an interesting attempt to introduce the notion of welfare recipients as active agents who consistently negotiate space for change. Indeed, Jordan points to the way in which these women often have to resist dual pressures in that public authorities exploit the “community of women in the very manner that individual men exploit their partner.” (pp.182-183).

Lister (1998: p.29) sees poverty as spelling, “exclusion from the full rights of citizenship in the social political and civil spheres and undermines people’s ability to fulfil the public and private obligations of citizenship.” She argues that there is a need to distinguish between a person’s capacity to be a citizen and to act as a citizen, and that to tackle poverty and exclusion and promote inclusion we need to promote the idea of active citizenship.

This focus on citizenship is particularly important given the way in which social work is internationalising. Johannesen (1997) has argued that “international social work cooperation is needed... so that professional social workers around the world are effectively able to respond to the challenge posed by the internationalisation of social issues.” (p.157) and that social work educators should develop a common core (which) “should reflect our dedication to helping people in interaction with their environments.” (Taylor, 1999: p.315). This means exploring the potential for making the values and concepts with which we work intelligible in different social and cultural contexts, while retaining the meaning and specificity of these concepts in our national settings.

Not surprisingly, in international and European social work, language and meanings are a constant source of debate, as are discussions and disagreements over the causes and the remedies for the discrimination/oppression faced by many of the service users with whom we all work. However, instead of engaging in a process of cultural colonisation, in which the truth is held to reside in one country relative to others, there needs

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1. It has been suggested that much of the practice around child protection in Ireland veers towards this perspective with its underlying categorisation of poor families as being dysfunctional or pathological (Skehill et al, 1997).
to be a genuine attempt to evoke dialogue around core ethical and value positions, particularly if, as Shardlow (1998: p.23) suggests in his review of social work values in the UK, “no consensus exists about value questions in social work”. For example, in the UK social workers bring with them perhaps a more explicit understanding of how discrimination and oppression manifest themselves in their society, particularly around issues such as racism, gender inequality, disability, sexuality and age. In Scandinavian countries, social workers/pedagogues bring a commitment to social solidarity and social cohesion that provides a useful counterpoint to the UK experience. In other countries social professionals bring with them knowledge and skills from within their own cultural practice (Hatton, forthcoming).

The following illustrates how questions of equality and difference are played out in social work discourses. Taking Denmark and Britain as examples it is possible to observe a noticeable contrast between the Danish and British value systems. Danish social work has translated Grundtvig’s, Kierkegaard’s and Friere’s commitment to tackling unequal power relations into a commitment to equality. Perhaps this is not surprising given the Danish welfare state’s espousal of social solidarity as a policy goal. Goul Andersen (1997: p.25) has shown that, despite challenges to the legitimacy of the welfare state within Denmark, it remains true that welfare state support in Denmark has survived severe economic crises as well as sometimes quite aggressive (but verbal rather than institutional) attacks on the welfare state during more than ten years of bourgeois political rule.

However, this promotion of solidarity and equality can also be a denial. It denies difference and assumes people have common interests, regardless of their class, race, gender, age or sexuality. It results, for example, in processes in which the needs of black and ethnic minority communities are perceived as being the same a) both within and between all minority ethnic groups and b) as other Danish citizens. It accounts for the fact that in the words of one Danish anti-racist campaigner, “The only way to succeed in Denmark is to be Danish”. The outcome is the development of policies of assimilation that minimise cultural difference. Siim (1998: p.391) makes a similar point when discussing the challenges facing the Danish welfare state. She suggests that:

“The old vocabulary of universalism and social equality had been favourable to the integration of women, but it is based upon a high degree of homogeneity among citizen’s which made it difficult to integrate difference based on ethnicity”.

British social work values, on the other hand, centre precisely on the need to recognise differences. This is perhaps the outcome of eighteen years of New-Right government, the development of social policies that promoted inequality and a welfare state, which during this period, was configured by a lack of resources and commitment to social justice. It may also be the outcome of Britain’s need to deal with its post-colonial history and the presence of a larger and more established minority ethnic community. However, it is also about recognising the unique way in which oppression structures people’s lives. It is, for example, about saying that people with disabilities may have common experience but that this commonality is impacted upon by factors such as race, class, age, and sexuality. However, it is not about being different and unequal. It is about recognising difference within the context of struggles for equality. It is not enough to treat all people the same. We must take account of different needs and expectations (Yuval-Davis: 1998).

Yet we can learn from each other. British social work should encompass values of equality and solidarity; Danish social work the importance of difference within the context of an anti-discriminatory practice. It is not that we are far apart. A separate analysis “clearly demonstrates similarities between our value bases” (Hatton, forthcoming). The time has come for us to respect each others contribution to the debate, to learn from each other and to develop a form of praxis committed to social transformation and transferable to different national cultures and experiences.

Conclusion: towards social inclusion

I have argued that the most effective way of achieving the goal of social inclusion is through engagement in forms of collective action, which can help transform the way people understand everyday life and, in the words of Alberto Melucci to:

“act as ‘revealers’ by exposing, that which is hidden or excluded by the decision-making process. Collective protest and mobilization bring
Such an understanding can enable us also to learn from each other about broader issues such as social exclusion/social inclusion. We can recognise the potential within our own countries to develop strategies to tackle social disadvantage and marginalisation. This may be achieved through the development of a framework for social inclusion which seeks to be transformatory and promotes social change. Such a perspective may have at its core the following principles, encapsulated as the A-F of social inclusion:

**Active citizenship** - by and large people are not passive they merely lack the belief in their own capacity and the knowledge and skills to achieve change (EFILWC, 1997).

**Bringing people in** - overcoming the them and us mentality which so often creates impasses in attempts to revitalise areas, normally people express anger and frustration because they are not being heard not because they are (Popple, 1995).

**Capacity building** - to overcome this passivity people need to be given the resources - physical, material and economic to change their situation (Midgely, 1997).

**Doing things for themselves** - this means local authorities, key agencies and voluntary organisations not imposing their agenda’s but allowing people the opportunity to make their own mistakes, learn from their experiences (Beresford & Turner, 1997).

**Empowering people and promoting equality** - this is more than giving people information or £100 to support their community newsletter, this means really listening to people, hearing what they say and taking action together to bring about change. We cannot empower people they can only do that themselves. Equality should be our central concern because that is the only way in which we will overcome the discrimination and oppression which underpins people’s experience of exclusion (Ledwith, 1997).

**Fear, or rather overcoming fear**. Partnership and real involvement are challenging but they do work, we all need to lose our fear of the excluded (Beresford, Green et al., 1999).

Engagement with such processes will ensure that social work resists attempts to marginalise it, encourages the development of services accountable to those who use them and work within them, and helps us engage in a form of professional practice that promotes social transformation.

**References**


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