

A Comparative Analysis of Social Work in Vietnam and Canada: Rebirth and Renewal

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Abstract

Social work education is rapidly developing in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and it is facing new challenges as it blends the historical, political and cultural influences. This article reviews and compares the historical and recent developments of social work in Canada and Vietnam. Canadian social work developed in Euro-western culture and its values, whereas, Vietnam suffered under French colonialism, a 30 year war of independence and then economic depression. For many years, social work remained nebulous but in recent years, the country has seen a rebirth of social work. Field education is the link from theory to practice and is often where differences between the two countries become evident. The article concludes with a discussion on the professionalization of social work and its future contribution to the emerging “new” Vietnam.

Introduction

The profession of social work is one of the most misunderstood professions and its role in society is constantly challenged. It gets blamed for all sorts of societal failures, yet, ironically, it is the first called upon to address the social problems facing our communities.

This article reviews the historical development of social work, and conceptualizes a comparative analysis of the culturally appropriate social work practice and education applied in Canada and Socialist Republic of Vietnam. There are basic values and ethical principles that are common in both countries, which include the respect for the worth and dignity of all people, concern for vulnerable groups, and efforts to end discrimination. However, political ideology, cultures and traditions are impacting on the practice and value of social work practice between the communally-oriented society of Vietnam and the individualistic-oriented Western society of Canada. In Canada social work has been shaped by its multicultural society that encompasses many values, beliefs and perspectives of human well-being. In Vietnam social work has gone through different stages in its development process, from the French-colonial period, through 30 years of violent war to the modern developing nation it is today. In the face of newly emerging social problems caused by the transition to a market-oriented economy, professional social work and social work education are being reintroduced. Vietnamese culture, the political ideology, and social and economic influences are shaping the rebirth and development of social work practice and education. There are many challenges, but there are also critical supports for the development of the social work profession in Vietnam. Although the article is descriptive in that provides the historical developments, it does attempt to compare and contrast how these developments shape the conceptualization of social work in each country. However, since Vietnamese social work is relatively young in its modern development, there is not a lot of information to compare. As it develops and matures, it will provide more to analyze with western understandings and practice of social work.

Definition of Social Work

Definitions of social work are both time and culture-bound. Over time, new issues and new problems emerge, changing the face of social work. The international definitions of social work have also changed and in 2000, the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) adopted the following definition.

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFSW, 2000).

Within this definition are four vital concepts: social change, problem solving, person-in-the-environment and empowerment (Hick, 2006). Social work is the application of the social sciences to address social problems and promote well being at the micro, meso and macro levels of society. At the micro level, "Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems" (CASW-ACTS, 2010). Also social work is concerned about national and international macro issues such as globalization, poverty, unemployment and domestic violence.

Social work operates in the context of human rights and social justice respecting the dignity and rights of all people, nationally and internationally. Perhaps unique to the profession is the emphasis on client choice and participation in the intervention: empowering the client to make positive choices.

Social work education provides a critical role in the formation and face of the profession. It is the foundation and starting point. It develops and shapes future social workers. The students acquire the knowledge, skills and most importantly, the values of the profession. In addition, social work educational institutions provide an academic and scholarly environment where social work knowledge is researched and disseminated, social welfare policy is analysed, and critiqued and methods of professional development are explored. In a sense, this international perspective should be the foundation that binds all social work programs.

Social Work in Canada

Social work practice and education are influenced and reflect the country's culture (Johnson, McClelland, & Austin, 1998). Canada is a multicultural country with a diverse, pluralistic population. It is a society that is in constant change that encompasses many values, beliefs and perspectives of human well-being (Durst, 2007). Its bi-lingual culture of French and English is deeply rooted in European traditions in government, justice and education. Hence, Canada has a distinctly Eurocentric orientation with little participation and involvement with its First Nations (Indigenous) peoples.

In recent years, Canada has seen an ideological shift from liberalism towards increasing individualism. This wave of neo-liberalism threatens the values inherent in social work and attacks the social welfare system. Global trends toward market-driven philosophies can create a population of disadvantaged members that become marginalized. These trends conflict with social work principles that promote notions of dignity and respect for individuals as fundamental societal values (Teepel, 1995). Since the Second World War, Canadian public policy has attempted to address the various economic and social problems. Generally, Canada's social programs and policies are typically characterized by a federal vision of intervention. Since the 1980s, most developed countries have moved toward privatization of programs and services, seeking to terminate egalitarian and universal programs (Durst, 2007). With these changes in federal and provincial programs, public attitudes about welfare have also shifted from a collective to an individualistic orientation. "Welfare has shifted from being a program of 'entitlement' designed to help fight poverty, to a temporary support intended to promote individual self-sufficiency through labour force attachment strategies" (Canada, 2000, p.2).

These shifts have not seen a decline in need. Increasing demands for services and significant reductions in human and fiscal resources have put stress on service providers. It is understood that client needs have become increasingly complex and poverty and unemployment continue to plague society (Durst, 2007). Social problems, such as family violence, child neglect and substance abuse, continue as governments set priorities of deficit and debt reduction.

Social work practice in Canada is generalist in nature and covers five areas of practice: individual, family and groups; community development; social policy; social administration and management; and social research. Social workers are seen to have a wide range of knowledge and skills in such areas as problem solving, conflict resolution, mediation skills, therapy, communication, poverty, advocacy, and social justice, to identify a few.

The first university level social work program was established in 1914 at the University of Toronto (Hicks, 2006). In 2010, there were 37 schools at the university level, offering 35 B.S.W. programs, 31 M.S.W. programs and 10 Doctorate level programs (CASWE, 2010). At the college level, there are 46 schools, offering 69 programs (CASSW, 2001). Canadian universities experienced a rapid period of expansion in the 1970s due to an effort to make education more accessible. It was during this time that most of the B.S.W. programs began. Until that time, social work education was predominately at the Master degree level and to call one-self a “social worker” meant having a M.S.W. (Durst, 2007).

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) was founded in 1926. As the professional body, it is mandated to provide national leadership, providing support to provincial and territorial associations, encouraging and assisting the development of professional standards, conducting research, and disseminating information about current social issues. In 1939, it had about 600 members and today, it has 15,000 (CASW, 2010). Most provincial associations are responsible for the control and title of “social worker” and regulate its membership. The Canadian Association for Social Work Educators (CASWE) can trace its national roots back to 1948. It is an association of social work educators, which is responsible for the accreditation of social work programs at the university level and dissemination of information about social work education in Canada (CASWE, 2010).

One of the strengths, which characterize social work in Canada, is the profession’s practice orientation. Practice orientation is described as a holistic and systemic approach to understanding people and social structures. This approach is broadly applied through various practice settings and jurisdictions. Canadian social work education links theory and practice, particularly in the field component of education. The Canadian Association for Social Work Educators (CASWE, 2010) sets minimum standards of 700 hours of field education for the Bachelor of Social Work degree. In the Master of Social Work programs, the student is required complete 450 hours in a one year program if the student has a Bachelor of Social Work degree. If the student does not have a social work degree but a Bachelor degree in a related field, he/she would be required to complete 900 hours in a two year M.S.W. program.

In the field practicum, students are required to apply their knowledge and skills and demonstrate social work values under the tutelage of an approved field instructor. The same accreditation standards also require specific linkages between the practice community and the educational institution. This may include training for agency based field instructors and participation from the professional social workers in accreditation reviews.

Social Work in Vietnam

Like Canada and other countries throughout the world, Vietnam’s social work profession was motivated from humanitarian values. After three decades of war, professional social work in Vietnam has been influenced by foreign models and political forces. Prior to 1945, Vietnam was exclusively a colony of France. Social Work in Vietnam had taken the form of a charity model that was most common in western countries at the time. It was basically the domain of religious institutions (Kelly, 2003). In the southern regions of the country, France maintained a firm colonial rule. As a result, the development of a social work profession and its practice and philosophy had a French orientation. During this period, social work served mainly the

French individuals and corporations. “The social work model introduced into former colonies stood apart from the national trends, and had no effect on the millions of poor, illiterate and unemployed people” (UNICEF, 1972).

A number of writers criticized this French social work perspective as ineffective because it was not sustainable and had paternalistic overtones (Kelly, 2003). Catholic missionaries imported institutional care models, such as orphanages and care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities. These interventions have been seen as inappropriate and ignored the strength of the traditional extended family and the community. During this time, there were only a few workers who would call themselves “social workers (Nguyen, 2002).

From 1954 until 1975, Vietnam was divided into two parts that came to be called: North Vietnam and South Vietnam. During this time of war, North Vietnam was governed under the socialist government and did not develop professional social work.

In the south, “professional social work was introduced with, on one hand, the creation of a government directorate for social welfare and, on the other, the establishment of the Caritas School of Social Work (1947) organized by the French Red Cross.... The School operated until 1975 and closely followed the French model” (Nguyen, 2002, p.85). In South Vietnam, social work was used to serve the war. It focused on problems related to the war such as relief for refugees who had moved to escape the violence and those who were relocated into the cities to facilitate the American war against rural insurgents (Nguyen, 2002).

With the support of the United Nations, the National School of Social Work was created in 1968 (Nguyen, 2002). Other social work training was available at the Army School of Social Work, Da Lat University and Van Hanh University in Sai Gon. The Vietnam Association of Social Work was set up in 1970 and was member of the International Federation of Social Work (Kelly, 2003). “Although social welfare and social work developed rapidly during this period of the war, they were regarded as tools of the invading forces. They were not seen as serving the poor at the grassroots level” (Nguyen, 2002, p.87).

After the 1975 reunification of the north and south, the entire country was governed by a central socialist government. Services provided by the former southern government and non-profit organizations ceased or were taken over by the new government located in Hanoi. These programs and services include institutional care for persons with disabilities and mental health issues. The modest social work education programs ceased at this time. It was believed that once socialism was firmly established, social problems would fade away. At that time, there were about 500 social workers with short-term training; 300 diploma workers with two year of training, 10 university graduates from abroad including seven with masters degrees of social work and masters of community development (Nguyen, 2002). Because of the “advancement of socialism” and the pending creation of an egalitarian state, social work and social workers were considered redundant and existing programs and services were closed.

By the mid-1980s, the country was trapped in a period of economic stagnation and severe poverty because of failed socio-economic management. In response, at the Sixth National Congress in 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam launched a renovation program, known as “Doi Moi”. This reform was aimed at re-orienting the Vietnamese economy to a “socialist-oriented market economy under the State management” (Vietnam, 1986). By changing the country’s economic mechanism, pursuing an open-door policy and engaging the country in proactive international economic integration, the Doi Moi process had promised socio-economic improvements for the entire Vietnamese people (MOLISA, 2001). However, the new economic reform has created a dramatic shift not only in the economy, but more notably in the social culture of Vietnam. It has negatively affected critical aspects of Vietnamese life, including

family relations and traditional values, and leading to an increase in “social evils” (social problems) (Hugman, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen, 2002). Nguyen describes, “Vietnam is confronted with the whole range of problems connected with modernization, and they are developing faster than expected” (Nguyen, 2002, p. 88). These problems include rural and urban poverty, rural-urban migration leading to problems of street children, exploitation of women in prostitution, national and international trafficking of women, substance and drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, and child neglect and abuse (Nguyen, 2002). As these social problems rapidly increased, the Vietnamese Government was slow to respond and appreciate the role that professional social work could make in ameliorating these problems.

By the late 1980s, social work training was seen as essential and urgently needed. The existing Vietnamese social workers realized that they were working without sufficient theory or skills. From 1986, social workers and community workers campaigned for more training and education in social work (Durst, Nguyen & Le Hong, 2006).

Throughout the 1990s, a core of experienced professionals from South Vietnam lobbied the government for social development that was based on theories from the social sciences and less on ideology. Child rights, child welfare, community-based prevention of child abuse and exploitation, and community development issues have been instrumental to the rebirth of social work training in Vietnam. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Committee for Protection and Care of Children are government bodies responsible for social policies for vulnerable people, including children. These developments led the move towards social work being accepted and promoted as a profession. Local NGOs such as the Social Development Research and Consultancy in Ho Chi Minh City, the Child Welfare Foundation, Ho Chi Minh City Youth Association, the Social Worker Training Group in the North and local government departments contributed to the recognition and rebirth of social work in the context of the new Vietnam (Durst, Nguyen & Le Hong, 2006).

International organizations took up the call for the re-birth of social work. Some of the leading organizations were UNICEF, Save Children UK, Save Children Sweden, World Concern, Holt International and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) was also actively involved in promoting the re-development of social work through the promotion of social work education (Durst, Nguyen & Le Hong, 2006).

The Vietnamese term for ‘social work’ is a general term that includes all good and charitable works (Nguyen, 2002). For many in academic settings, social work is understood as a purely a theoretical body of knowledge imparted through lectures. As social work develops, its definition will evolve and change to incorporate new knowledge, skills and values. These new knowledge, skills and values will, in turn, will reflect in the creation of new policies and programs. It will not remain static and must address the issues generated in the post “Doi Moi” era.

In the South, the Women’s Studies Department of the Open University in Ho Chi Minh City, which is a semi-private university, was the first to provide diploma training in social work in 1992. In 2001 the Women Studies Department extended its initial two-year diploma to a four-year degree course and introduced a “practice” component to what was formally intended as an applied community-based social work program.

In the North, the University of Labour and Social Affairs (UOLSA) in Hanoi began to offer 3 year social work program in 1997 with the support of UNICEF and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In 2005, UOLSA was granted university status and began offering a Bachelor degree in social work. A number of training institutions such as the Women’s Union Training School and the Youth Union Training School have also incorporated social work and community work in their training programs.

The Hanoi National University began its social work training in 1996, using an academic path through mandatory subjects in sociology. By 2010, there were 33 institutions offering social work programs throughout the country. Currently the National University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi is offering a Master degree in Social Work with the first cohort projected to graduate in 2011. This intensive program is financially supported by UNICEF and has used international scholars to teach some of the courses.

Since the mid-90s, short-term social work training has been provided for professionals in human service organizations such as the Child Protection and Care Committee (CPCC), the Vietnam Women's Union, the Youth Union, and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). These workshops and courses have provided skills-based, hands-on knowledge to thousands of grass-roots workers (Durst, Nguyen & Le Hong, 2006).

Social work as a university discipline is only beginning to be recognized and valued. The new social work education curriculum (B.S.W.) holds equal status with other university programs at the Bachelor level. The B.S.W. is a four-year curriculum with 210 units: 84 credits for background knowledge such as politics, Marxism, and foreign language, and 106 credits for professional knowledge and skills. The curriculum is constructed into two consecutive levels: general studies under a common programme with some subjects stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) such as politics, Marxist, Ho Chi Minh Ideology and a second level of courses specific to professional training.

To develop professional educators, CIDA funded a major project to finance social work education at the Master's level. At the time, there were only 15 teachers with professional social work education and most of them were in the south of Vietnam. From 2004-2007, nine students have graduated with a Master of Social Work from the University of Regina and two from the University of the Philippines. Most of them are working towards the development of professional social work (Durst, Nguyen & Le Hong, 2006).

On April 3, 2010, the Vietnamese government approved MOLISA (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs) to officially classify social work as a profession (DTI, April 3.10). This action is a significant step in formally moving social work beyond "charity" and establishing a modern social welfare network. It means that social work graduates will have career opportunities in the civil service. The ministry is hoping to establish at least one part-time social worker in each commune or ward by 2015. The government has allocated \$130 million (USD) for the training and development of social work staff (DTI News, April 3.10). University of Regina graduate, Le Hong Loan, emphasized the role social work has in "turning Vietnam into an industrialized and modern country" (DTI News, April 3.10).

What is not understood is how does a western concept of social work fit into a Vietnamese social/political system based on very different values and worldviews. The Figure 1 highlights some of these competing and conflicting cultural and historical orientations.

Figure 1
Comparative Analysis of the Competing and Conflicting Cultures

Vietnam	Canada
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialist (Communist) Central Government • Violent 30 year War • Underdeveloped economy • Homogenous society • Rural and young population • Family and communitarian values • Buddhist philosophy • Education by memory and rote learning • Obedience to authority • Social problems caused by non-conformity • Early social work influenced by French psycho-analytic models • Charity orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary De-centralized Government • History of peace • Developed economy • Multi-cultural society • Older and urban populations • Individualism and Self-sufficiency values • Judaic/Christian philosophy • Education by experience and critical thinking • Free thought valued • Social problems caused by social isolation and structures • Social work developed from multi-theoretical models • Human rights and social justice history

(Durst, Lanh & Pitzel, 2009).

As the figure above illustrates, the two nations have very different orientations to the ways in which they understand society. These differences influence and shape social welfare and include cultural views of poverty, empowerment, equality and self-determination. Vietnamese society has suffered under a violent 30 year war and is now unified under a socialist centralized government. Canada became a nation through compromise and negotiation of its early British and French colonies. From its beginning, it was a multicultural society, whereas, Vietnam is mainly a homogenous nation with some minority groups that are marginalized and on the fringes of Vietnamese society. Vietnam is young and rural in nature which contrasts with Canada's urban and older population. There is a strong emphasis on conformity and obedience to authority. Social workers need only to direct and instruct their clients to behave in approved ways. In Canada, social problems are understood in the context of social isolation and unfair structural inequities. As a result of these differences, views on social welfare and social work are different. How to address social problems are different again. In Vietnam, social workers have an orientation to direct clients and use their expertise to solve client problems. With a cultural principle that values obedience to authority, Vietnamese clients assume that social workers represent government authority. They possess power and control over them and have the capacity to make change. Hence, even if the worker wants to facilitate "empowerment", the clients seem resistive. In contrast, Canadian social workers emphasize empowerment and are less prescriptive. Clients are more ready to understand that they need to assume power and control over their lives. Interestingly, there are very few formal "counselling centres" in Vietnam and most of those are operated by "foreigners" such as UK or USA nationals who volunteering their service under international development agencies.

While attending a celebration of Vietnamese social work, the writer witnessed a student skit depicting poverty. The poor teenaged mother laid on the floor as the social workers "rescued" her. Clearly, the students acted out their roles as acts of charity for the disadvantaged without a broader structural sense of social justice or equality.

In another example, this writer was asked to give a presentation on “counselling” to a group of Vietnamese social work educators. In the presentation, this illustration was given:

If you have a problem with your Honda motorbike, you take it to the mechanic and pay to fix the problem. You expect the mechanic to disassemble the motor and repair the broken part. When you pick up the motorbike, you expect it to work correctly. However, the same is not true if you take a trouble teenager to a counsellor. It is not possible to take her apart and repair her. The problems must be worked on as in a partnership.

The audience of social work educators seemed uncomfortable with the idea of client empowerment and the counsellor’s role of facilitator. They felt that the social work counsellor should be able to instruct the teenager and fix the problem.

How do these Vietnamese graduates transform their professional education into a profession that fits their homeland? How do they take social work values such as advocacy, empowerment and non-judgemental acceptance to a culture that emphasizes obedience to authority and societal conformity? In addition, Vietnam is economically poor and cannot simply afford expensive social welfare systems. This article barely addresses this complex and contrasting orientations to social work and social welfare. More research is needed to explore how culture and history interplay in the development and practice of social work and social welfare.

Field Education: Linkage between Theory and Practice

In every profession the practitioner faces the task of combining theory and skill. In common with other professions, especially those works directly with people such as teaching, medicine, nursing, and other health professions, social workers learn to integrate theory and skill practice by undertaking practice in a controlled and supervised setting. In social work, this process may be referred to by terms such as field practicum, internship, field education, field practice and field placement. “Social work education around the world places a great emphasis on the placement of students in the field of practice as part of their professional studies. This element of professional training in social work is considered by many people to be central to the process by which students become qualified practitioners” (IASSW/IFSW, 2004).

Field Education is defined as “a part of the social work student’s formal educational requirement, consisting of ongoing work in a community social agency. The student receives close supervision by agency personnel and has the opportunity to integrate, use, and apply classroom content to practical experiences” (Barker, 2003). Hence, Field Education is an experiential form of teaching and learning that takes place in a social service setting. The objectives of field education are the development of practice competencies and the preparation of a reflective, self-evaluating, knowledgeable and developing social worker. Field education provides students the experiential opportunity to integrate theory, knowledge, values and skills.

In reality, practice is a set of actions and behaviours by the social worker. Clients are not directly affected by theory; rather, they are influenced by what the worker actually does – by the specific actions taken by the social worker (Sheafor & Jenkins, 1982; Sheafor, Horejsi, & Horejsi, 2000). One can see that field education is not just “work” experience, but it also provides the student with the experience of doing social work. Additionally, the student is expected to consciously apply this experience in a systematic way. Stakeholders in this process include student, faculty members, and field teacher/instructor in the agency.

In countries where social work is in an early stage of development, the role of field instructor will need to be undertaken by practitioners who are not formally qualified in social work, but who are informed about it and have a positive attitude to the growth of the profession. The

other option is to provide supervision from qualified but university based instructors. Hugman, Durst, Le Hong, Nguyen, & Nguyen (2009) discuss the advantages and limitations of both of these strategies to provide field education.

In Canada, the field education in the form of practica plays a central role in the student's education. It is normal to see up to a third of the credit hours devoted to field education. In Vietnam, MOLISA requires only 9 units of social work (6 units) and community development (3 units) of practice. The students do not spend a lot of time in practice and they move from agency to agency. For example, a student might receive some experience in "clinical-individual practice" in one agency for only 2 weeks, then move to another agency to gain experience in "group work". The students rotated through the agencies and receive specific practice in each agency (Durst, Lanh & Pitzel, 2009). In Canada, most students receive a generalist experience in the five areas of practice including individuals, families and groups, community development, social policy, social research and management. Often, the student experiences all of these practice domains in one agency and stays in the same agency for the duration of the practicum.

In regard to field education, programs such as the University of Labour and Social Affairs (Hanoi) have some serious limitations. In the first years, the social work department has few social work instructors and each instructor manages large groups of 45-50 students in the field (Durst, Lanh & Pitzel, 2009). It is difficult for the instructor to monitor the students and follow their progress. In Canada, faculty depend heavily on field instructors located in the agency. Because of the lack of qualified social workers in the field settings in Vietnam, such arrangements are not possible and the faculty instructor is responsible for providing the field supervision from outside the agency.

In Canada, field education comprises a major component of the social work programs, upwards to over one third of the credit hours but it does not receive the same status of the academic component. At the most universities in Canada, the field coordinator is classified as a professional and lower level academically than teaching faculty. At the University of Regina, the field coordinators were in academic positions (Associate Professor) but have since been lowered to "instructor" class. The role of field education in Vietnam is just formulating. Vietnamese scholars have little understanding of field education and its importance in social work education. Many faculty members see it as "training" and not a critical part of the social work education.

The shortage of suitable practica is a problem in Canada but is even more acute in Vietnam. There are few quality placements and sometimes students feel the placement is preparing them for child care or custodial care and not social work. One student asked, "Are we trained to work with children after school?" With so few cases, some students have to share a client and this can cause additional stress for both the client and the students (Durst, Lanh, & Pitzel, 2009). As the profession develops, opportunities and experiences in field education will improve.

The development of the social work profession and its education are facing many challenges. The social work curriculum in Vietnam is following the international standards of best practice as defined by the "Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training" (IASSW/IFSW, 2004). However, the standards are based on a western concept of social work. The challenge is to find culturally sensitive approaches from theory to practice, and practice to theory suitable to Vietnam context and culture. The indigenization of social work in Vietnam is a process and will not happen overnight. The challenge is there and Vietnamese social work leaders and educators are taking it on.

Concluding Thoughts

The need and value of social work has become recognized in former and current socialist countries such as Vietnam, China and Russia. As social work is being introduced into these dramatically changing countries, there are numerous issues to be addressed. In Vietnam, the development of the profession is seen as positive among the new social workers and educators. Increasing social problems have contributed to the complexity of the situation. Vietnamese social workers with their determination and commitment are considered to be the labouring mother in the rebirth of social work. International organizations such as UNICEF and Save Children Alliance have been instrumental in advocacy work for the recognition of social work in Vietnam.

The quality and extent of social work education and training is rapidly developing. It is important that any assistance to the development of social work in Vietnam takes account of traditional practices of caring and mobilizing support. Even if never traditionally called *social work*, such traditions grow out of the foundation of the Vietnamese society and are required in the further development of culturally appropriate actions/models. The strength of the family and the traditional safety net of the extended family should be taken into consideration in the development of a social work model for Vietnam.

The renewal or re-birth of social work in Vietnamese society has occurred because of its usefulness in helping to ameliorate human and social problems. Furthermore, its philosophy, values, principles and methods are increasingly accepted in many different aspects of development work. There is no contradiction between social work values and the present socialist orientation of Vietnam. In its socialist orientation, Vietnam stands for national independence, culture identity, social justice, and democracy. There are many challenges in to overcome, but in the present context there are many factors supportive of social work.

Value commitments and ethical principles are at the core of social work and there is a global commonality of these values. Social work in every country stands for respect for the worth and dignity of all people. Social work shares a concern for vulnerable groups with particular attention to the poor and identifies efforts to end discrimination and move towards an egalitarian society. Therefore, the commitment to social reform and change is a universal value of the profession. Value differences are most likely found between communally- oriented societies like Vietnam and the individualistic-oriented Western societies. It would be interesting to contrast the developments in Vietnam with countries such as China and Philippines that are further along in the social work development.

“A curriculum is not built in the sense that a building is constructed and the task finished. A curriculum is developed but never finished” (Council on Social Work Education, 1960, p.1). Social work educators need to constantly review and rethink their curriculum to ensure the relevance of their program to the society in which the students will practice. Professionals need the practice skills necessary to adequately respond to the increasing demands of society and the complexity of client’s needs. Educators need to strengthen opportunities for continuing education to maintain and advance the knowledge and skills of their profession.

Social work, in Vietnam, offers a significant contribution in re-building the country and facilitating its role in the international community. Social work in Vietnam will not be the same as its cousin in Canada but have its own flavour shaped by history and culture. Those who participate in its rebirth are honoured to be a part of historic groundbreaking developments. The road is long and steep, but those challenged are worthy to the tasks ahead.

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