

# Towards the authentication of an academic culture in a social work programme offered at a training institution: A value-driven approach

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# INTRODUCTION


- The notion for this paper derived from collected work on indigenising social work in Africa (Osei-Hwedie & Jacques, 2007), based on papers delivered at a Joint University Committee conference (the forerunner of ASASWEI), held in Botswana in 2001.

■ This conference concluded that it was expedient for South African social work educators to develop more indigenous teaching material based on the best current thinking of what was warranted, and relevant in addressing the needs of communities in South Africa.



A process of authentication was proposed towards the creation of an indigenous model of social work education in the light of situational and context specific social, cultural and political dynamics.

■ In this paper, we reflect on our school of thought towards authentication of the social work programme offered at the Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University.

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- This is based on the premise that not only does the social work curriculum require adaptation and renewal through a process of authentication, but that a prerequisite for this process would entail
- hybridisation
  - of both a salutary academic culture
  - and curriculum

■ First, a process of authentication is explained

■ Second, an example of an inventory of cultural dimensions is presented which we took into consideration in a process of authentication.



■ Third, we reflect on a value driven approach, as the undergirding for the operationalisation of the identified cultural dimensions.

# PROCESS OF AUTHENTICATION

- Authentication can be defined as a process of identification of authentic and genuine roots in the local system, which would be used for guiding its future development in a mature, relevant and original fashion.
- Authentication can be achieved in the following process:

# PROCESS OF AUTHENTICATION

- Through recording of practice experience by social work practitioners and educators in various settings.
- Collection of data about local needs, problems and culture.
- Social Workers should work towards building domestic models for social work.

# PROCESS OF AUTHENTICATION

- Fundamental changes in social work education should be realised and academic programmes re-examined and re-structured in the light of newly accumulating practice experience.
- Authentication of social work education programme requires social work educators to focus on the following:

# PROCESS OF AUTHENTICATION

1. Social Work educators should teach local South African knowledge which cater for specific needs of South Africa.
2. Academic research should aim in generating research which can contribute to renewing social work education and practice.
3. Community service should be done through creation of vibrant interaction between the department or school of social work and communities.

# ELEMENTS OF AUTHENTICATION

The following elements of Authentic learning are proposed:

- Authentic Context
- Authentic Learning Activities
- Expert performance
- Multiple perspectives
- Collaboration
- Articulation


■ How do we operationalise the process and elements of authentication?



# INVENTORY OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

- Based primarily on the work of Hofstede model (1980, 2001)
- Also Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall and Hall (1990), Schwartz (1992), Bond and Smith (1996), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004), and House et al. (2004).



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- The following dimensions should be taken into consideration as frame of reference
- in all academic activities,
  - with staff and students,
  - and is the point of departure in creating an authentic academic culture.

# Power

– E.g.

- Competencies and achievements-based?
- View power negatively as a source of oppression and/or corrupting people?

# Decision making

– E.g.

- Left to the one who is best qualified?
- Left to the person in charge?
- Autocratic, centralised and an individual process?

# Individualistic versus group-centredness

– E.g.

- Strive to preserve social harmony?
- Serve individual interests?
- Serve group priorities?

# Communication

- Assertive and proactive?
- Compliant and reactive?

# Interpersonal relationships

– E.g.

■ Self-interest?

■ Interests of others are important?

# Negotiations

– E.g.

■ Prefer formalised social interactions?

■ Prefer informal social interactions?

# Achievements

– E.g.

- Performances based on extrinsic rewards?
- Performances based on intrinsic motivation?



# Time orientation

– E.g.

- Precise concept of time and punctuality?
- Flexible or relative concept of time?

# Approach to work

– E.g.

- Focused and emphasis on hard work?
- Take proud in work?
- Just get work “over and done”?

# Rule based

– E.g.

■ Tolerant of rule breaking?

■ Flexibility in application of enforcement of rules?

# A VALUE DRIVEN APPROACH TOWARDS AUTHENTISATION

- Its an integrative and comprehensive approach,
- A practical, analytical and decision-making frame of reference
- Staff and students can use it to guide actions, resolve problems, and make determinations.
- (Pohlman, 1997; Pohlman, Gardiner & Heffes, 2000)

# Employing a value driven approach includes:

- A commitment from staff is needed for the development of a value driven culture in the school/department;
- Students must be empowered and must also buy into the value driven culture of the school/department
- Staff periodically requires renewal and reinforcement of values to keep the values dynamic and to keep students on the same track

■ The determined values should be integrated

- in all learning material,
- all teaching methods
- and all actions

Values of the Dept of Social Work, Stellenbosch University  
Case study:

## Excellence

- The Department is characterised by excellence in its teaching and learning, research and social impact.

## Accountability and integrity

- We are accountable and act with integrity in all our actions according to the Ethical code of conduct of the South African Council for Social Service Professions.



## ■ Human dignity and respect

- We promote human dignity through self-respect, respect for other people, and respect for the physical environment.

## ■ Innovation and criticality


- We think and act in new and critical ways as a response to the challenges posed by both the local and global social, economic and political environment.



## Ownership and leadership

- We take ownership of our own development and well-being in order to lead, inspire, motivate, and positively influence others in turn.

# OPERATIONALISATION OF VALUES BY MEANS OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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- Building meaningful relationships
- We believe that the quality of mutually rewarding student-staff relationship is one of the determinants of the success of our programme offering. Creating and nurturing a reciprocal respectful, non-judgmental, safe space is demarcating our hallmark.

## Listening

- Our communication is characterised by authentic and attentive listening to each other in order to create individualised understanding, support and cooperation.

## Focussing on strengths

- We focus on strengths and capabilities instead of highlighting deficits.

## ■ Being a thought partner

- Our interactions are not hierarchical, and are perceived as a collaborative partnership, challenging each other towards critical thinking.


## Enhancing reflection practice

- We promote reflective dialogue in order to review, obtain feedback and redress, where necessary, our teaching and learning endeavours.

## Connecting with resources

- We expedite the process of knowledge and skills development by bringing together students and communication structures, stimulating activities, developing and channelling resources and ensuring access to expertise.



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- Inspiring towards lifelong learning
- We inspire ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated personal and professional development in order to enhance social inclusion, active citizenship, self-sustainability, competitiveness and employability.

## Ultimately


- The dimensions as frame of reference
- Values of the Department
- And principles
- Contributing to student attributes

# GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

- *Thought leaders*
- *Engaged citizens*
- *Well-rounded individuals*
- *Dynamic professionals*

# CONCLUSION

- Decolonising and indigenising of a curriculum are imbedded in a value-driven approach and authentication of a propitious academic culture.

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- Promoting the scholarly integration of theory and practice
- Our aim is ultimately to be on the forefront with scholarly integration and dissemination of cutting-edge theory and practice.

- This academic culture requires rigorous efforts to promote values that are responsive to social development, human rights, social inclusion, and the needs and aspirations of local communities in our teaching, research and social impact.
- This process is still on its way...
  - e.g. Incorporate the values of the Dept in the learning material of first year students