



International Network for School Social Work

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Contact mhuxtable@olympus.net

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Editor: Marion Huxtable

International Collaboration on School Social Work Research



Varathagowry Vasudevan, Director of Training, National Institute of Social Development, Sri Lanka

Osamu Kobayashi and Kazue Kanno, Associate Professors at the Department of Social Work, Tokai University, Japan

Initiating an International Collaboration

School social work is relatively new in both Sri Lanka and Japan. Educational institutions such as the National Institute of Social Development in Sri Lanka and the Department of Social Work and Faculty of the Health Sciences at Tokai University in Japan have the responsibility to prepare social workers to implement services in schools. International collaboration can help through sharing knowledge and contributing varied perspectives for working successfully in schools. Collaboration between the two departments began at the Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE) and was formally initiated in 2014 by Professor Koichi Yaguchi (former head of the Department of Social Work) in a memorandum of understanding committing them to work on collaborative research on school social work and to provide study tours for faculty and students.

International Seminar on School social work

The National Institute of Social Development organized a seminar on school social work in Colombo at which faculty from both institutes could study school social work practice and participate in a study tour. Professor Koichi Yaguchi and Associate Professors Kazue Kanno and Osamu Kobayashi participated in the seminar with Dr. Pamila Peris, Mr. W.M. Danapala and Mrs. Gowry Vasudevan representing social work academics in Sri Lanka. The need for research in school social work in Sri Lanka was identified and two small research projects were initiated:

“Analysis of school social work practice for children with social needs in Sri Lanka” (involving five school social workers in Colombo) and *“Children’s learning problems and school supports needed for parents in Sri Lanka”* (involving three socioeconomically challenged schools in Colombo). The purpose of both projects was to study and share knowledge of school social work and the role of the school social worker. The study that has been concluded to date indicates that social workers have a significant role to play for identifying the needs of school children when the school’s multidisciplinary team conducts an assessment.

The Benefits of the Collaboration

To date the various activities in this collaboration have resulted in:

- Sharing of knowledge, skills and techniques in social work practice
- Joint development of skills
- Transfer of knowledge and skills
- Exchange of ideas leading to the generation of new insights and perspectives
- Intellectual companionship
- A wider network of contacts in the scientific community.
- Understanding of the significance of interdisciplinary studies

Lessons learned

The collaborative seminar, study tour and research on school social work gave participants an overall insight into the methods and practices in school social work in both countries. It facilitated intellectual and cultural exchange between schools that foster opportunities such as the development of new modes of delivery including establishing the Special Education and Resource Centre for Inclusive Education Policy at the St. Thomas College in Mount Lavinia, Colombo. It also created many new opportunities for international academic collaboration among the faculties. It promoted institutional capacity for strengthening school social work teaching and practice. It enabled development of leadership qualities in team building and communication skills for innovation, creativity and cultural understanding among faculty members.

Research collaboration provided the rare opportunity for Sri Lanka and Japan, with significant cultural differences in school services, to learn about each other. Increased knowledge created greater understanding of the significance of the role of school social work in strengthening school children and families. Academic dialogue provided opportunity to improve research methodology in school social work and to learn from each other ways of conducting such research. The research has provided the opportunity to initiate ideas of multi-disciplinary assessment of school children, mobile service for school social work and the referral mechanism for school social work practice.

Some Considerations for the International Network

The International Network for School Social Work is seen as presenting opportunities for academics, practitioners, policy makers and administrators to engage in international exchange regarding school social work education, research and training. Contacts such as we have experienced between social work professors from Sri Lanka and Japan can help to develop a global infrastructure for learning about school social work and its practice. Joint research on school social work practice and strengthening teaching are the immediate needs that can be served by international collaborations for countries where school social work is in its infancy.