



**Using Global and International Community Practice Case Studies to Enhance Critical Thinking about Domestic Community Participation, Social Power and Global Connections in United States Professional Social Work Education**

<b>Journal:</b>	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
<b>Article Title:</b>	<i>Using Global and International Community Practice Case Studies to Enhance Critical Thinking about Domestic Community Participation, Social Power and Global Connections in United States Professional Social Work Education</i>
<b>Author(s):</b>	<i>Lary Gant and Julia Paley</i>
<b>Volume and Issue Number:</b>	<i>Vol. 12 No. 1</i>
<b>Manuscript ID:</b>	<i>121004</i>
<b>Page Number:</b>	<i>4</i>
<b>Year:</b>	<i>2009</i>

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin’s School of Social Work or its Center for Social Work Research.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter) by the Center for Social Work Research at 1 University Station, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Journal subscriptions are \$110. Our website at [www.profdevjournal.org](http://www.profdevjournal.org) contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

Copyright © by The University of Texas at Austin’s School of Social Work’s Center for Social Work Research. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: [www.profdevjournal.org](http://www.profdevjournal.org)

Email: [www.profdevjournal.org/contact](http://www.profdevjournal.org/contact)

# Using Global and International Community Practice Case Studies to Enhance Critical Thinking about Domestic Community Participation, Social Power, and Global Connections in United States Professional Social Work Education

---

*Larry M. Gant, PhD and Julia Paley, PhD*

## **Introduction**

Community participation has become the hallmark of social welfare practices. From the World Bank's calls for "participation and civic engagement" to non-governmental organizations' community-based activities; from U.S. foreign aid's promotion of citizen participation in local governance to U.S. domestic policy's faith-based initiatives for delivering public services; from social work education in how to enhance community participation to myriad local meetings in the United States aiming to "involve" and "empower" the "community," "participation" has come to pervade best practices for delivering services and fostering development worldwide.

Yet recently there has developed a critical literature analyzing the effects and power dynamics of participatory activities. This literature has noted that the notion of participation is part and parcel of a neoliberal reduction in public services and devolution to more and more local institutions, all the while shifting the burden of service provision onto individual citizens and organized groups (Hyatt 2001). Some analysts note that civic participation does not necessarily achieve the goals that proponents expect it to fulfill, such as leading people to interact with a diverse set of fellow citizens, persuading people to be more actively engaged in politics, or advancing "democratic values" (Theiss-Morse & Hibbing 2005). Moreover, participatory processes may displace yet more democratic "decision making processes," solidify entrenched interests, and replace methods that had offered important benefits unachievable through participatory approaches (Cooke & Kothari 2001: 7-8). These perspectives have been noted in the social work literature (Craig & Porter 1997, cited in Lyons et al, 2006: 60).

Such critiques pose important challenges for

the profession of social work generally and the training of master of social work students specifically. They mean that students need to be taught to reflect critically on power relations embedded in their practice, and that practitioners in turn need to educate community residents in doing political analysis, and/or build on the analytical processes already present in the population. Such an approach entails an integration of critical thinking and professional intervention. It also requires an awareness of global context, and a way of situating processes in historical, economic, political, and institutional contexts.

In this article we discuss a curriculum we have created for two Masters in Social Work courses: "Policies and Services to Enhance Community Participation and Well Being," and its practice counterpart "Social Work Practice with Community and Social Systems." Over a two-year period we have merged these two courses in order to connect the theoretical issues regarding participation with the community practice elements.

## **Background and Significance: Community Based Initiative**

The Community Based Initiative (CBI) was formed in Fall 2000 as a collaborative, neighborhood-based approach to social work practice intended to link Social Work faculty and MSW students in the "Communities and Social Systems" practice area with organizations and projects located primarily (but not exclusively) in Southwest Detroit. Components of this collaboration include monthly meetings between CBI faculty and community organizations, course syllabi reflecting community issues and input of partner organizations, student research projects identified by community members and organizations, technical assistance for community partners, and collaborative grant-writing. CBI stu-

---

*Larry M. Gant, PhD is a Professor at University of Michigan—Ann Arbor.*

*Julia Paley, PhD is an Associate Professor at University of Michigan—Ann Arbor.*

dents have field placements in Southwest Detroit community organizations. Faculty hold CBI courses in Detroit. The CBI approach advances three components of community change: (1) strategies (approaches to mobilize individuals around issues), (2) skills (practical tools that can be used to enter the community, assess conditions, and formulate plans for program implementation), and (3) styles (the manner in which strategies and skill will be received or supported by community members and organizations) [Checkoway (1997)].

Three courses comprise the classroom portion of the CBI: "Evaluation in Social Work," "Social Work Practices with Community and Social Systems," and "Policies and Services to Enhance Community Participation and Well-Being." The evaluation course is offered in the fall term. The Practice course and the Policies and Services course take place in the winter term. Given that one followed the other on the same day, we began to think of ways to connect these two courses.

The two courses underwent a process of connection over seven years (2000-2007). During the first iteration of CBI (2000-2003), the two courses were taught as separate, unintegrated courses. Participation and volunteering were highlighted as essential for promoting community well being. In these years, Detroit served as a focal point for learning about local communities and for considering the impact of state and national policy. There was no sense of global context, nor much international content, save what was useful for understanding waves of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Middle Eastern migrations into 20<sup>th</sup> century Southwest Detroit.

Instructors in CBI's next iteration (2004-2005) connected themes of privilege, oppression, diversity, and social justice to the efforts to promote and enhance community participation in Detroit. The third iteration of CBI (2006-2007) functionally integrated both courses, although officially the two courses continued to have distinct catalogue numbers, syllabi, and instructors. Now the courses situated Detroit within global economic history and showed its connections to parts of South America and Africa. Theory and practice pieces interwove, through instructors' dialogue,

assignments that involved readings from both courses, in-class activities, field trips, and guest speakers. The idea of community "participation" became an explicit area of examination.

A major factor enabling this merger was the disciplinary training and international experience of the professors. One instructor was an experimental social psychologist and practicing social worker with 24 years of practice experience in the United States and Africa. The other instructor holds a doctorate in (cultural) anthropology, and has extensive research experience in Ecuador and Chile using Latin American popular education approaches. Both instructors were well grounded in participatory research, social movement activity, and international health in post-industrial cities.

In the remainder of this article, we do three things. First, we outline three major themes in our work: global context, critical thinking about participation, and integrating theory and practice. Second, we report on the results of a study of 26 students and how their thinking transformed over the course of the semester. Finally, we discuss the significance of the study and suggest implications for social work education.

### **Major Themes**

There are three key axes for our combined courses: global context, critical thinking about participation, and integrating theory and practice.

#### ***Global Context***

In recent years, economic globalization has been characterized by rapid transfer of capital, transnational corporations, fast movement of electronic funds and information, optimization of profit and minimization of production costs, and a relative absence of counter hegemonic ideological response to "market-driven impulses" (Reisch, 2005, p. 531). Such globalization changes relationships between people, government, and private sector. It becomes vital to comprehend the impact of economic globalization on community practice (Reisch, 2005; Delgado, 2000, Finn & Jacobson, 2003).

### *Detroit in Global, Economic, and Historical Context*

When Henry Ford initiated his automobile assembly line early in the 20th century, Detroit became a leader for changes that would occur around the world. The broad economic transformations called “Fordism” following the Great Depression and WWII built upon principles initiated in Detroit, most importantly the notion, later connected to Keynesianism, that workers were to be paid enough to purchase the goods they made. The automobile industry built Detroit -- “Motor City” -- into a burgeoning metropolis that at its height had over two million residents, world class urban education systems, and strong law enforcement systems. Just as its industrialization and automation pioneered technology and social patterns that led and foreshadowed processes throughout the country and world, so, too, Detroit’s decline preceded that of many U.S. cities. Its troubles began decades before the oil shocks of the 1970s catapulted most of the country into a reorganization of financial arrangements and sent jobs first to the U.S. south and later overseas in the new “global assembly line” (Kamel 1990, Gray 1986). The gradual relocation of automobile-related industrial plants from the city to surrounding suburbs increasingly drained Detroit of an economic base (Sugrue 1996, Steinmetz 2005). The departure of whites after the 1967 urban rebellion was followed by an even greater out-migration of whites and working/middle class African-Americans after the 1979 automotive crisis (Sugrue 1996).

Three decades later, the city continues to hemorrhage population, given the deterioration of education, housing, social welfare, and health care systems. Southwest Detroit is the only part of Detroit increasing in population, due largely to migration from Mexico, South America, and the Middle East. The city political system, reduced in economic power, has few tools beyond raising property taxes. Operating in constant deficit mode, the city government does what it can to provide essential services such as permits, street maintenance, trash collection, and utilities.

At the same time, Detroit continues to benefit from smaller industries and wealthy families

committed to rebuilding the city. Several midsize corporations have moved offices to downtown Detroit, and downtown entertainment venues and market rate housing development are anchored by two adjacent professional sports arenas. Detroit neighborhood development is guided by nearly ten neighborhood initiatives funded by private, public, and philanthropic stakeholders. On the brink between growth and despair, Detroit residents balance cynicism, nihilism, and anguish with guarded hope, cautious optimism, and belief that worst times are past.

In the first two iterations of the courses, Detroit was presented in isolation, contextualized implicitly or explicitly in the United States. This framework matched trends in U.S. social work education, which privileged U.S. contexts, often without naming them as such. However, it is impossible to understand Detroit’s rise, decline, and future without taking into account global economic history. Therefore, in recent years we have sought to situate Detroit in global context.

### *Global Context of Social Work*

International dimensions were common in the early years of professional social work in the United States. Social workers participated in the international peace movement during World War I, engaged in relief efforts and development projects following World War II, and advanced international education in the 1960s (Healy 2004:15-17). Subsequently, there has been a decline in international content in social work curriculum in the U.S. (Healy 2004:17-21), with only a gradual increase since the 1990s.

It is worth distinguishing “international content” from “global context.” “International” implies, variously, a comparison between places, or U.S.- and European-trained social workers practicing social work “abroad.” In contrast, “global” emphasizes the interconnections between locales. So, for example, there is a difference between a U.S. trained social worker going to Nigeria to work on HIV/AIDS issues (international) vs. that social worker working with global coalitions addressing HIV/AIDS (global). The idea of “international” risks reproducing binary perspectives that take domestic to be the “unmarked”

category and that use “international” to lump together as “other” very different places from all over the world. In contrast, the idea of “global context” is very much in line with what Lynne Healy and colleagues envision when they call for “Ending the International-Domestic Dichotomy” (Asamoah et al 1997). Ideally it means not taking the U.S. as the default, and instead looking at locales worldwide (including the U.S.) in relation to each other, and seeing the influence of global context on each.

A useful tool for reframing these issues is to take “international” sites not as recipients of practitioners’ aid, but rather as sources of intellectual and professional innovation. Latin America holds an especially important place in the history of social work in that it is a point of origin for the idea of “indigenization,” an effort to resist the imposition of US and European models of social work and develop alternatives derived from locally based practices. Such influences included liberation theology, and popular education developed by Brazilian practitioner and intellectual Paulo Freire. Latin America was also the site of the “reconceptualization” movement, which took two directions: “the radical, which rejected capitalism, and the moderate, which moved away from the three accepted U.S. social work methods of casework, groupwork, and community organization toward a holistic perspective. In both streams, social work took on a more macro and more historical perspective...” (Healy 2001:35-38; see also Jimenez & Aylwin 1992; Payne 2005:235). Social work affected by the reconceptualization movement avoided conceptually separating politics and service delivery.

In southern Africa, too, social work “address [es] structural inequalities [more] than... individual improvements” (Dominelli 2004:10). Early South African social work and social workers served poor whites and actively operationalized the Apartheid policy of the white National Party government, creating multiple tiers of social service with correspondingly diminishing support for white Afrikaners, Indians, coloreds and black South Africans (McKendrick, 1988). Not until the late 1980s was a competing strand race neutral.

In western and central Africa, colonial rule

constituted a government social service sector (Adejumaobi, 1999). As countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Zaire, Cameroon, and Kenya were liberated from colonialism in the 1940’s and 1950s, the importance of the state’s role in providing social services was articulated in the social philosophies of Nyerere’s “Ujamaa,” Kaunda’s “Humanism,” Nkrumah’s “Consciencism,” Senghor’s “Negritude” and Awolowo’s “Democratic Socialism.” Unfortunately, these perspectives were not complemented with comparable economic development, partly resulting in substantial political suppression and economic malaise across many African countries (Kabadaki, 1995; Oakley & Clegg, 1999; Meredith, 2005). In counter hegemonic response, much current social work practice in many Sub-Saharan African countries incorporates critically informed political, structural, and participatory development analysis (Dominelli, 1997; Munyae & Mulinge, 1999; Oakley & Clegg, 1999; Bar-on & Prinsen, 1999; Osei-Hwedie, 2001). It is revealing that one of two leading social work journals in Africa is entitled *Journal of Social Development in Africa*.

Teaching about countries beyond the United States in our combined courses is valuable, not only because it showcases other locales in which professionals can intervene, but because there social work is so closely related to social movements and to analyses of politics and power relations that it offers new lenses for thinking about situations that arise in community practice in the United States (Sewpaul 2006). A complementary aspect of global context entails historicizing U.S. social work. In that way, the U.S. becomes not the naturalized, unexamined model, but rather is situated in its particular history and set in relation to other countries.

### ***Pedagogical Tools/Approaches***

In class, we used experiential learning to bring places into relation with each other. . In this section we detail three ways of teaching global context: (1) cross-national comparison exemplified by HIV/AIDS games from Detroit and Chile, (2) global and historical transformations that affect places around the globe, manifested in the con-

## Using Community Practice Case Studies

---

struction of a world time line, and (3) connections and mutual influences explored in field trips and guest lectures.

### *(1) AIDS Games: Cross-National Comparison and Learning*

Students in our classes played two HIV/AIDS games. The AIDS LINGO game pioneered in Detroit, and designed for use by community health outreach workers, focused on technical vocabulary related to medical and biological issues. It is played like Bingo: the facilitator calls out words, and players put tokens on them if they appear on their card. In the process, players learn the meanings of the terms. The game board gives definitions for words such as “seroconversion,” “incubation period,” “asymptomatic,” “exposure,” “antibodies,” and “Elisa test.”

The HIV/AIDS game “Learning about HIV/AIDS: Everyone’s Task” developed by Educación Popular en Salud (Popular Education in Health) in Chile reflects a popular education and grassroots organizing approach. The package states, “For more than 23 years, EPES has trained health promoters and has developed educational materials together with poor urban women. We believe deeply in human dignity, in the intelligence of the people and their creative capacities. Our educational methodology takes into account the concrete experience of people and their communities and seeks to involve people in a collective process of learning and transformation.” Such a philosophy draws on “popular education,” “a process through which the popular classes present, analyze, and critique their own understanding of the world in relation to a broader aim of structural transformation.” (SIDE/CIES 1985 quoted in EPES n/d).

In this game, players respond to questions as they advance around the board. Like the Detroit game, this game, too, provides concrete information. But EPES’s game also includes questions regarding personal actions in practical circumstances, such as, “Can you acquire HIV by donating or receiving blood?” The game also features “deepening the information” cards with questions such as “What rights do people have who live with HIV or ... AIDS?” Finally, the game poses

open-ended and ethical questions. One example is: “A Health Group attends a meeting of the Neighborhood Council (*Junta de Vecinos*) to present its idea about carrying out an educational campaign about HIV/AIDS in the sector. The vice president of the council says that HIV/AIDS is a problem of homosexuals and that he is not in agreement with using the few available resources on a problem that only affects people who are unusual (*rara*). What would you say confronting this situation?” This sort of question broadens participants’ thinking to larger issues, and points to actions organized groups might take toward social change.

By playing the two games, MSW students in our classes engaged in cross-national comparison. They identified implicit premises of “informal” education in the U.S. – biomedical model, technical knowledge, individual responses – and contrasted it with popular education in the Chile game that generated group discussion, and led to organizing and social transformation.

### *(2) Timeline of Global Economic Transformations*

In addition to comparison, we sought to show ways different locales influenced each other, and ways they were impacted by shared global forces. We created a timeline spanning 1900 to the present and delineating events and processes in Detroit, the U.S., Chile, Nigeria/South Africa, and World. Visually and in their essays, students explained connections among locales.

In class, the instructors posted a long paper, marked off by decades, along the wall. Students received laminated photographs of major world events such as the Great Depression, the Chilean military coup, the Detroit invention of the Model T Ford, and the discovery of offshore oil reserves in Nigeria. Students tacked the photos in the correct place on the time line. The group narrated world history collectively, by students calling out events that they knew well, including ones from other parts of the world. The group discussed connections between the places, e.g., effects of free market economics following the 1970s oil shocks. They also explained ways places influenced each other, e.g., Nigerian oil used by the

Detroit auto industry.

*(3) Mutual Influences, Global Connections: Field Trips and Guest Speakers*

Finally, we examined the connections between Detroit and world history through field trips and guest speakers. For example, we visited the famous “Ford Rouge” plant, which at one time showed the world how to create a comprehensive manufacturing industry. At its peak, “the Rouge” manufactured all the parts necessary to make a car – from “ore to assembly.” Raw materials, such as rubber from Brazil, were brought in and used on site in production.

In the 1940s, the Ford Company began outsourcing automobile components such as windshield glass and car paint. These generated secondary auto supply industries in Detroit. Later, responding to changes in the international economy following the 1979 oil shocks, and international trade agreements, Ford strategically moved some of its automobile manufacturing to parts of Asia and Latin America including the *maquiladora* assembly plants in Mexico at the Texas border. Consequently, driving through Detroit, students see blocks and blocks of abandoned auto supply companies and empty factories.

In Detroit, these transformations in the global economy led to increases in poverty and reduction of the social welfare safety net due to loss of tax revenue that funded city services. Declining employment led to crime, domestic violence, and reports of alcoholism. Closure of auto plants led to severe environmental contamination (brown fields), which led to health consequences. The organizations and agencies we visited – such as Latino Family Services and Southwest Detroit Environmental Visions – grapple daily with these issues.

***Critical Thinking about Participation***

Given the economic restructuring that has transformed Detroit from an industrial giant into a troubled urban space beset by problems associated with unemployment, what is the role of social work, particularly macro practice, in this setting?

***Baseline Assumptions in the Field about Participation***

The two courses we inherited emphasized the social workers’ mandate to remedy social problems by (in part) promoting community participation. Indeed, the very course title -- “Policies and Services to Enhance Community Participation and Well Being” -- expresses that idea.

The course description reads: “*This course will survey the policies and services that promote a civil society and enhance human rights in the framework of American democracy. Emphasis will be placed on those policies and services which serve to enhance social participation, economic security, respect for diversity, voluntary action, and community and corporate responsibility” (emphasis added). The course objectives include specific reference to “social work practitioners [bearing] some responsibility for promoting participation.”*

Such an approach resonates with ideas in the profession of social work, which operates under the premise that “participation” is almost intrinsically a positive thing – and advancing it an ethical obligation of social workers. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics presents “Public Participation” as an “Ethical Standard” and states: “Social workers should facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions” (NASW 1999). Similarly, the “Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles” of the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IFSW 2004) calls for “Promoting the right to participation.” “Social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives.”

In accord with these professional trends, the policy and service courses took participatory action as a positive, progressive strategy for empowerment to be taught to MSW students as essential components of community practice. The course statements showed no critical thinking about participation, did not incorporate global economic transformations, do not reference spe-

## Using Community Practice Case Studies

---

cific political contexts, and do not situate policies, services, and practices historically.

### **Critical Perspectives**

Our critical thinking about participation is aligned with a growing literature in “critical” or “progressive” social work. “Critical social work challenges conventional assumptions about poverty, race, and gender, and the basic functions of a market-driven political-economic system. In addition, critical social work heightens awareness of the historical and contemporary relationship between social justice and social struggle.” (Reisch 2005; see also Payne 2005: 227-250.) This literature situates contemporary social problems within neoliberal economic policies that increase inequality (Teepie 2000). It notes that positive discourses of “empowerment” and “civil society” detract from analysis of the effects of inequality and may reinforce power differentials (Ferguson & Lavalette 2005). This literature often sees important reasons for social workers to ally themselves with social movements, a practice echoing historic connections to the anti-war, women’s suffrage, and labor movements (Reisch & Andrews 2002).

In this framework, participation is contextualized within the devolution of social services to local governments and the passing of responsibilities on to citizens. Participation needs to be analyzed, and situated locally, nationally, globally, and historically. In our courses, we challenged students to discern contestation over the meaning of participation, and to note alternatives being articulated. We also guided students toward identifying power dynamics – and viewpoints that are absent or silent. (Eliasoph 1998).

### **Pedagogical Tools/Approaches**

We used two major devices to introduce students to critical thinking: (1) carefully chosen readings, and (2) a “film notes” assignment.

#### *(1) Readings*

Contrast the following two quotes:

[1] “*The safety, welfare, and happiness of the men, women, and children who compose the American people constitute the only justification of govern-*

*ment. They are the ends for which all our resources...are merely instruments. The manner of life of our people, the problems they face, and the hopes and desires they cherish for improvement in their existence and the advance of their civilization should be the supreme concern of government.” (Emphasis added) (United States National Resources Committee (1937) cited in Newport, 2003, p. 11).*

[2] “*Together we must foster a spirit of service that lasts a lifetime, not merely a week or a weekend. As I have said so many times, the era of big government may be over, but the era of big national challenges is not. Service is a way to meet today’s challenges through our oldest and most cherished values.” (Bill Clinton, 1997, cited in Hyatt, 2001)*

Susan Hyatt (2001:205) explains the contrast best when she says, “*In contrast to that image of the citizen, whose social contract with the state once included the expectation that the state would take a major role in providing, among other services and amenities, a “safety net” for the poor, the “volunteer” is a new kind of political subject, one who is deemed better adapted to the particular requirements of the present form of neoliberal governance. ...*

*Given the widespread acceptance of the dictum that the era of big government is over, it is the volunteer who now stands at the ready as the citizen who has been liberated from the morally debilitating belief that the state should be the primary source of such services as schooling, policing, welfare and maintenance of the physical infrastructure, embracing in its stead the far more invigorating notion that people can and should take on the responsibility for providing many of these amenities themselves.” (Emphasis added).*

“Participation” is not merely a way to contribute to civic life and enhance community well being, but rather a mechanism that may facilitate and reinforce cuts in public services. Thus, social workers need to be aware of the broader impact of their actions and strategically plan activities that benefit residents amid existing political and economic dynamics.

*(2) Film Notes*

For the Policies and Services course, students conducted original research in Southwest Detroit on a topic of their choice (community development, immigration, health, etc.) with an eye toward analyzing the meanings and power relations related to the notion of “participation.” These took the form of “film notes” – analysis of and reflection on an imaginary movie they had made on that theme. The inspiration for this exercise came from George Steinmetz and Michael Chanan’s film, *Detroit: Ruin of a City*, and the accompanying “Film Notes and Commentary” (Steinmetz 2005). The papers showed sophisticated analysis applied to real situations.

***Integrating Theory and Practice***

Perhaps the most important contribution of merging our two courses was integrating theory and practice. An example of this integration is the case of Delray, a part of Detroit with deteriorated housing, toxic pollution from nearby manufacturing, and health disparities including diabetes, asthma, and cancers. Despite these conditions, residents fervently want to continue living in Delray. What should social workers’ response be? Do they work with residents to develop the community, knowing that to be there is not good for residents’ physical health? Or should they encourage residents to abandon Delray and recreate a community in a less environmentally toxic geography? Current community organization response in Delray encourages “participation” -- an exploration of what citizens and organizations can do by themselves to improve their situation. There has been no engagement of larger structures.

Studying Chilean health promotion in class exposed students to popular education models, ways that the concept of health can be broadened to include the environment, and roles social organizations might take to educate the public and hold government officials accountable. MSW students are encouraged to initiate discussions about pollutants, to understand the hegemonic and ideological forces now keeping those discussions off the agenda (Eliasoph 1998), to think about the role of “organic intellectu-

als” (Gramsci), and to use practice that facilitates these activities.

***Pedagogical Tools/Approaches***

*(1) Field Placements in Southwest Detroit through CBI*

The primary pedagogical arena for connecting theory and practice are students’ field placements in Southwest Detroit. Some students also go on alternative spring break and engage in summer placements that enable them to put their thinking into action. Students and professors report that ways of thinking learned in these courses deepen over time and emerge in practice.

*(2) Community Practice Assignments*

In the practice course, students prepare a document or product comprised of an examination, critique, and analysis of a past, current, or future community or neighborhood assessment and (resident) mobilization plan. While the issue or condition may be larger than the community, the student is to examine and review a specific neighborhood or community’s experience. The examples may derive from student experience, interest, or current practicum activities. Students analyze the activities through the theory and skills taught in both courses.

**Research Study Methods**

In this section, we report on the ways in which students responded to the curriculum of the joint courses and grew in their understanding over the course of the semester.

***Data Collection***

The primary source of data collection were students’ (n=26) completed pre-and post- open-ended questionnaires on their attitudes toward participation, analyzing power, and (global) connections between Detroit, Latin America, and Africa (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This method was supplemented by students’ completion of a standard course satisfaction questionnaire (30 items rated on a 5 point Likert scale), and students’ midterm feedback.

The researchers used a grounded theory approach for data analysis and interpretation (Strauss and

Corbin, 1990). Text was coded at three levels: open, axial, and selective. The open level involved identifying phenomena based on the properties and dimensions of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The axial level involved refining and differentiating categories resulting from open coding by relating sub-categories to a category. The selective level of analysis sought conceptualization based on patterns that emerged from participant reports. Constant comparative methods determined correspondence of new responses to existing categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Flick, 2002). After the responses were transcribed, the researchers individually read, reread, and coded the transcripts for key points and possible themes. The researchers met several times to discuss each other's analysis. By continually moving between the transcriptions and the interpretations within and across transcripts, a firmer and more solid organizing of the data emerged. The categories are organized around the three questions asked of students:

(1) *What is the connection between Detroit and cities in Latin America and Africa?*

(2) *Why would you benefit from learning how to analyze power for understanding practice of social work?*

(3) *What does participation mean – what are its strengths and weaknesses?*

This process resulted in findings organized under these three themes, which emerged in the responses to the three specific questions. As various themes developed, the researchers returned to the interviews to determine whether the analysis explained each case. In instances where analysis did not offer adequate explanation, the analysis was revised. Revisions involved renaming categories, developing new categories, and identifying alternative paths or processes.

We employed several strategies to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the research findings. We employed data triangulation and multiple-investigator triangulations (Denzin, 1978; Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). The data collection and analysis took place over several months, which fostered greater understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. We shared findings with several participants utilizing the strategy of mem-

ber check to corroborate the findings of the researcher interpretations. We used peer review consultation with several colleagues expert in qualitative methods about the findings as they emerged. Finally, we kept a detailed record of all the decisions guiding the research to facilitate replication (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The analysis provided is descriptive, and it provides a starting point for greater understanding of areas of change among this sample of students.

### Findings

*Question 1: What is the connection between Detroit and cities in Latin America and Africa?*

The 2006 pretests reflect (1) that Detroit residents had cultural heritage from Latin America and Africa (not an emphasis on labor migration) and (2) parallels and similarities between Detroit and Chile and Nigeria – e.g., both were experiencing poverty. There was not a sense that common global processes affected each place, nor of connection and interdependence.

Results surprised the researchers, as we thought students would imagine differences between the “first world” and the “third world,” especially given the domestic/international dichotomy prevalent in macro practice social work. Instead, students identified similarities between conditions in Detroit and Chilean and Nigerian cities, as illustrated in this 2006 pretest: “*The connection between Detroit and cities in Latin America and Africa is that in Detroit there are a large number of immigrants, many of which are from Latin America. In Detroit, there is a lack of resources for basic needs such as housing, education, employment, and healthcare. In many cities in Latin America and Africa, there is also a lack of resources of basic needs.*” (Student B).

In contrast, the 2006 posttests reflected the following ideas: (1) the same global forces are producing the poverty and other problems in the various places (Detroit and cities in Latin America and Africa), (2) there are interdependences and connections between places, e.g., jobs moving from Detroit to Latin America; or Nigerian oil used in Detroit industry, and (3) there is overall more emphasis on economic links. Some students also noted commonalities in forms of gov-

ernance and in the fact of community organizing/social movement mobilization.

*“... Detroit, much like Latin America and Africa, has undergone a great deal of change due to political and economic forces. At one time, Detroit was a thriving city with great potential, economic growth, and employment opportunities. Many immigrants moved to Detroit to work. But, due to globalization, many factories moved out of Detroit and into other parts of the world, including Latin America and Africa. When this occurred, many people were left without employment and in poverty. Despite overwhelming poverty in Detroit, and other American cities, the federal government continues to cut back on benefits to help the poor, including programs such as welfare. This is similar to what Chile experienced during the 70s and 80s, and still struggles with today. Pinochet’s dictatorship put into place the ideology of neoliberalism, the idea that government role should be limited and the economy will grow itself. ...[M]any (government) programs were affected ... and citizens no longer had access to basic necessities such as adequate healthcare, sanitary housing conditions and aid to poor families.”* (Student B).

*Question 2: Why would you benefit from learning how to analyze power for understanding the practice of social work?*

A review of the 2006 pretests and posttests revealed a lack of clear differences that would indicate transformations during the course. However, notable patterns emerged.

In the pretests, students provided very limited understandings of the importance of analyzing power in macro social work practice. Comments tended to be generalized. *“Power dynamics, particularly power imbalances, are factors in creating social injustices. Social work works to address social problems created by injustices such as racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.”* (Student B).

In the posttests, students revealed (1) greater emphasis on understanding power in order to change the situation, (2) use of specific concepts and terms presented during the course, such as hegemony, ideology, and neoliberalism, and (3)

integration of theory and practice, e.g., strength-based practice approach related to the theory material. *“Power dynamics are present at all levels of government, at all levels of human interactions. ... It is also important to understand how power and oppression works in order to be able to understand why our clients and surrounding communities are experiencing problems such (as) poverty, lack of education, homelessness, prostitution, criminality, etc. Dominant ideologies feed us the ideas that the poor are lazy, that communities of color are to blame for the overwhelming amount of social problems they face. This mentality of blaming underserved communities serves to eliminate accountability for supporting these communities. If as social workers we don’t understand this, it is easy to treat clients without compassion, and to approach our work from a weakness-based perspective as opposed to a strengths-based perspective.”* (Student B).

*Question 3: What does participation mean -- what are its strengths and weaknesses?*

In the 2006 pretest, students tended to give a single definition of participation. The main understandings were empowerment and “getting involved”: *“Participation means taking part in an action, activity, cause, etc. There are different ways to do this (or different roles). Strengths with participation are that the more people participate the more they feel ownership and dedication. Weaknesses can be not respecting all ways of participation and all the complexity that comes with more and more people participating.”* (Student C).

In the 2006 posttest, students were far more reflective about the meanings and uses of participation. Students noted that participation has many meanings that vary by context:

*“Participation has multiple meanings, depends on in whose interest it occurs, for whose benefit, and who defines the terms.”* (Student I).

They also noted the power dynamics involved: *“I never really saw a negative side of participation before this class. I still see the value of having many people actively involved in the decision making and agenda setting that affects them. However, now I also see how participation can be*

## Using Community Practice Case Studies

---

*manipulated to cause [people] to take on responsibility they shouldn't necessarily have to i.e. [government] asking local residents to "participate" in efforts to revitalize a city [without] actively helping in these efforts or setting up systems or structures that support this."* (Student C).

In developing a critical thinking approach, we did not underestimate the value of citizen participation. In fact, we discussed cases in which citizen participation was advantageous and effective. What we did do is encourage students to think about the ways in which citizen participation is urged, valorized, and contextualized. The post-test findings reflect an analytic approach and reflective practice.

### Summary and Discussion

Understanding the global economic context is crucial for social work students, particularly those in macro practice and community organizing, in order to create strategically appropriate responses to the processes in which the problems of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities are embedded.

In the area of global connections, post-tests reflected students' increased understanding of the impact of global forces and poverty, the interdependence and connections between cities and places, and the importance of economic links between communities and countries. In the realm of power analysis, findings reveal increases in understanding about the importance of power to change situations, use of specific concepts and terms (e.g., ideology and hegemony) taught during the course, and integration of theory and practice. Regarding critical thinking, students moved from a pre-test pattern of providing a univalent definition of participation to an articulation of multiple contextualized meanings of participation, and the importance of understanding power dynamics in determining and understanding participation. Students also tended to move from polemic, uncritical phrases to a sustained critique and analysis about these and other circulating discourses. They developed a habit of mind – use of critical thinking tools and reflective practice -- in analyzing social, political, and economic proc-

esses.

While most United States social work texts on community organization focus on local levels of practice (Reisch, 2005), there is a growing intellectual call among social workers in the United States for attention to be focused on global economic and political contexts (Fisher, 1994; Delgado, 2000, Rubin & Rubin 2005). Debates among social work community practitioners have led to a proliferation of ways of reframing community practice, including neo-Gemineschaft communities (Delgado, 2000), self-sufficient community centers, social capital development at community levels, and use of venture capitalism principles. Delgado holds that "community social work requires a systematic critique of current practice before any advances can occur" (2000, p. 218), and notes that the definitions of community assets and needs are "not neatly labeled packages that can easily be identified, categorized and utilized" (p. 218). Delgado notes extensively the importance of both global and domestic factors in community practice, e.g., "the shifting of jobs overseas to developing nations, an economy... ever more dependent on low-paying service jobs with minimal benefits, and a political will that can best be described as punitive toward low-income individuals and their families" (p. 215). These issues are particularly salient for cities, given their increasing solidification as centers of communication, finance, transportation, and education. Failures to address global contextual issues in community practice may result, as Delgado suggests, in "the professions' failure... [and] social workers' inability to reach out, engage, and serve population groups that have multiple jeopardies" (215).

This article has discussed the conceptual and structural integration of two masters' level courses – one in community theory and the other in community practice – and resultant instructional changes in a cohort of 26 macro practice students. Conceptual integration includes the importance of critical thinking and analysis of power relations embedded in macro practice, the multiple meanings of participation, and the importance of historic and contemporary global political and economic trends. Structural integration

includes the direct application of theory to macro practice in communities and neighborhoods in a Midwest postindustrial city. Research found significant transformation in students' thinking during the semester—thinking that will produce social workers better able to think strategically and meet contemporary challenges.

### References

- Adejumobi, S (1999). Privatization policy and the delivery of social welfare services in Africa: A Nigerian example. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 14(2), 87-108.
- Amit, V. & Rapport, N. (2002). *The trouble with community: Anthropological reflections on movement, identity and collectivity*. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press.
- Asamoah, Y., Healy, L. M., & Mayadas, N. (1997). Ending the international-domestic dichotomy: New approaches to a global curriculum for the millennium. *Journal of Social Work Education* V33 Spring/Summer (pp. 389-401).
- Bai, M. (2003). Drip, Drip, Drip. *New York Times Magazine*, June 8.
- Bar-on, A. & Prinsen, G (1999). Participatory planning: Counterbalancing centralization. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 14(1), p. 101-119.
- Checkoway, B. (1997). The Community Based Initiative. Unpublished manuscript.
- Christenson, J. A. & Robinson, J. W. (eds) (1980). *Community development in America*. Ames: Iowa State Press.
- Cooke, B & Kothari, U (eds) 2001. *Participation: The new tyranny?* New York: Zed Books.
- Craig, D., and Porter, D. (1997). Framing participation: Development projects, professionals, and organizations. *Development in Practice* 7(3), 229-236.
- Creed, G. W. (2006). *The seductions of community: Emancipations, oppressions, quandaries*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Costa, M. das D. (1987). Current influences on social work in Brazil: Practice and education. *International Social Work*; 30.
- Delgado, M. (1999). *Social work practice in nontraditional urban settings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Delgado, M. (2000). *Community social work practice in an urban context: The potential of a capacity-enhancement perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978) *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Dominelli, L. (1997) Social work and social development: A partnership in social change. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 12(1), 29-38.
- Dominelli, L. (2004) *Social work: Theory and practice for a changing profession*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Eliasoph, N. (1998) *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- EPES (n/d). *Popular education: Overview and issues*. Santiago, Chile: Educación Popular en Salud (EPES).
- Fellin, P (2001). *The community and the social worker*. Third edition. Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.
- Ferguson, I. & Lavalette, M. (2005) 'Another world is possible': Social work and the struggle for social justice. In Ferguson, I., Lavalette, M. & Whitmore, E. (eds.) *Globalisation, global justice and social work*. New York: Routledge, 207-223.
- Finn, J. & Jacobson, M. (2003). *Just Practice: A Social Justice Approach to Social Work*. Pesota, IA: Eddie Bowers Publishing Company.
- Fisher (1994). Let the people decide: Neighborhood organizing in America (updated ed.). New York: Twayne.
- Flick, U. (2002). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Gibbs, L. E., & Gambrill, E. D. (eds.) (1998). *Critical thinking for social workers: Exercises for the helping professions*. New York: Pine Forge Press.
- Gladwell, M. (2005). The moral-hazard myth: The bad idea behind our failed health-care system, *The New Yorker* August 29.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gray, L. (1986) *The global assembly line*. New Day Films (orig. PBS), 58 min.
- Gray, M. (2005). Dilemmas of international social work: Paradoxical processes in indigenisation, universalism and imperialism". *International Journal of Social Welfare* :14: 231–238.
- Grinnell, R.M. & Unrau, Y.A. (2005). *Social work research and evaluation: quantitative and qualitative approaches* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Oxford Press.
- Gujit, I. & Shah, M. K. (eds.) (1998) *The myth of community: Gender issues in participatory development*. Intermediate Technology Development Group Publishing
- Healy, L. (2004) "International social work curriculum in historical perspective" in Ramanthan, C. S. & Link, R. J. *All our futures: Principles and resources*

## Using Community Practice Case Studies

---

- for social work practice in a global era. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Healy, L. M. (2001) *International social work: Professional action in an interdependent world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hokenstad, M. C. & Midgley, J. (1997) *Issues in international social work: Global challenges for a new century*. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers Press.
- Hyatt, S. B. (2001). From citizen to volunteer: Neoliberal governance and the erasure of poverty. In Goode J. & Maskovsky, J (eds.) *The new poverty studies: The ethnography of power, politics, and impoverished people in the United States*. New York: New York University Press.
- IFSW 2004. Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles. Bern, Switzerland: International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW).
- Jackson, P. (1992). Maps of meaning: An introduction to cultural geography New York: Routledge.
- Jimenez, M. & Aylwin, N. (1992) Social work in Chile: Support for the struggle for justice in Latin America. In Hokenstad, M. C., Khinduka, S. K. & Midgley, J. (eds.) *Profiles in international social work* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers).
- Joseph, M (2002). *Against the romance of community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kabadaki, K. (1995). Exploration of social work practice models for rural development in Uganda. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 10(1), 77-88
- Kamel, R. (1990). *The global factory: Analysis and action for a new economic era*. Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1990.
- LeCompte, M. D., and Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research: Ethnographers Toolkit*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.
- Lincoln, Y., and Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lyons, K., Manioni, K. & Carlsen, M. (2006). *International perspectives on social work: Global conditions and local practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McKendrick, B (1987). *Introduction to social work in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Owens Burgess Publishers.
- Meredith, M. (2005). *The fate of Africa: from the hopes of freedom to the heart of despair*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Mitchell, W. (1988). Social work with communities. In McKendrick, B. (ed). *Introduction to social work in South Africa*. Pinetown: Owen Burgess Publishers. (106-151).
- Munyae, M, & Mulinge, M. (1999). The centrality of a historical perspective to the analysis of modern social problems in sub-Saharan Africa: A tale from two case studies. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 14(2), 51-70.
- Newport, G. (2003). Why are we replacing furniture when half the neighborhood is missing? *The Non-profit Quarterly*, 10(3), 10-13.
- Osei-Hwedie, K. (2001). Culture and the construction of social work practice in Africa. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3(1), 231-245.
- Payne, M. (2005). *Modern Social Work Theory*. Chicago: Lyceum Books, third edition.
- NASW 1999 *Code of Ethics Approved by the 1996 NASW Delegate Assembly and revised by the 1999 NASW Delegate Assembly*. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers.
- Oakley, P. & Clegg, I. (1999) Promoting participatory development as a strategy of poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa: a review of some current practice. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 14(1), 31-52.
- Popple, K. (1995). *Analyzing community work: its theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2001) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster; New Ed edition.
- Reisch, M. (2005). American Exceptionalism and Critical Social Work: A Retrospective and Prospective Analysis. In Ferguson, I, Lavalette, M. & Whitmore, E. (eds.). *Globalisation, global justice and social work*. New York: Routledge.
- Reisch, M. & Andrews, J. (2002). *The road not taken: A history of radical social work in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. (2005). *The practice of community organizing*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Sewpaul, V. (2006). The global-local dialectic: Challenges for African scholarship and social work in a post-colonial world. *British Journal of Social Work* 36, 419-434.
- Sewpaul, V, Lombard, A., Louw, L., & Noyoo, N. (1999). Social policy training and social work: the South African context. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 14(10), 5-18.
- SIDEC/CIES Conference (1985). Grassroots Organizations, Popular Education and Social Change: New Perspectives in Non-Formal Education. Workshop 5, Review Paper, School of Education, Stanford University.
- Steinmetz, G. & Chanan, M. *Detroit: Ruin of a City*

- Steinmetz, G. (2005) Film Notes and Commentary for "Detroit: Ruins of a City" [Drive-by Shooting: Filming Detroit - Interviews with Michael Chanan and George Steinmetz (2005)]
- Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Sugrue, T. (1996). *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sweet Honey in the Rock (1992 [1988]). Are my hands clean? From the CD *Live at Carnegie Hall*. Flying Fish Records.
- Teeple, G. (2000). *Globalization and the decline of social reform: Into the twenty-first century*. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books.
- Theiss-Morse, E. & Hibbing, J. H. (2005). Citizenship and civic engagement" in *Annual Review of Political Science* 2005. 8: 227-249.
- United States National Resources Committee (1937) *Our cities: Their role in the national economy*. Washington, D.C. National Resources Committee, Research Committee on Urbanism. United States Government print off.
- Urry, J. (1981). *The anatomy of capitalist societies: the economy, civil society, and the state*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature* (New York: Oxford University Press.
- tional United States perspective, is complementary, suggesting that any perspective on community in America must place emphasis on three key elements: (1) geographical area, (2) social rather than physical space, and (3) presence of interactive links binding individuals to each other, as well as to the larger society" (p. 15).
- 2) Our use of "critical thinking" is in accord with the "critical social work" literature. We are not referring to forms of logical argument as articulated in some texts, such as Gibbs & Gambrill (1998).
- 3) For an example of a mainstream social work text that contextualizes social work practice within economy, social stratification, and social systems, see Fellin, 2001.
- 4) For a contemporary reflection on "indigenization" see Gray 2005. On "reconceptualization" see Costa 1987.
- 5) AIDS Lingo, funded in part by the United Way. Developed by Shirley E. McIntyre, ACSW, coordinator, Neighborhood Service Organization, Community Health Intervention and Prevention, Detroit.
- 6) Juegos EPES - Fundación Educación Popular en Salud, "Aprendiendo Sobre VIH/SIDA: Tarea de Todos y Todas. Second edition in Spanish, 2005.
- 7) We focused on Nigeria in 2006 and South Africa in 2007.
- 8) <http://www.thehenryford.org/rouge/history.asp>

#### Notes

1) The idea of community is a long established mainstay of social work, as articulated in the phrases "Community Based Initiative," "Community Organizing," "Community Practice," and "Community and Social Systems." Recently in other fields a literature has emerged that problematizes and analytically examines the notion of "community" (Creed 2006; Amit & Rapport 2002; Guijt & Shah 1998; Joseph 2002). In future years we would like to build this re-thinking into our course curriculum.

For the purposes of this article, however, we find it useful to state a working definition. Nationally and internationally, a succinct definition of community is elusive. Although framed within the context of South Africa, we find Mitchell's (1987) definition and description to provide an apt summary: "A community is defined and best described by the following elements: (1) people (2) within a geographically bounded areas (3) involved in social interaction and (4) with one or more psychological ties with each other and with the place they live" (Christenson & Robinson, 1980, p. 6; cited by Mitchell (1988, p. 107) in McKendrick (1988). Delgado's (1999) summary, from a more na-