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**PRACTICE WISDOM IN SOCIAL WORK: LEARNINGS FROM STUDENT SOCIAL WORKERS****Prof. Poonam Gulalia (PhD)***Field Work Co-ordinator, School of Social Work, TATA Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai-India.*

**Abstract:** The author puts forth the argument that the professional intuition of Social Workers is context specific and should be used to cultivate practice-wisdom. Drawing from Buddhist framework the study of practice-wisdom should be opened up for debate and dialogue as is being done in

various platforms and teaching-learning spaces. Additionally, tacit knowledge and intuition could be space through which to research the unexplored territory of practice wisdom in social work.

**Key words:** Parentless school going adolescence, Coping, Self-esteem

## **Introduction**

Reflection is a core concept in Social Work and despite its popularity there is very little research on how practitioners actually reflect in practice (White, Fook & Gardner, 2006, p.19). In Social Work literature, reflection is usually tied to the 'use of self' and 'emotional intelligence'. Some like Ixer(1999) have argued that there is no such thing as reflection countered by Casement( 1985) saying that the interior work which student practitioners do on themselves could be called 'internal supervision'.

My own journey as a practitioner, wherein, I have shadowed students on their respective fieldwork placements over the years has helped me to reflect and simultaneously learn new lessons intuitively along with that supplemented by practice wisdom. As stated by Schon (1983) professionals are to use reflection to deal with the uncertainty that pervades their work in the field, that which shapes their thought process & actions & the experience from which they learn. This being so we need to acknowledge that & work towards it. In the literature on the profession, Sheppard (2007, p.129) has argued that 'the reflexive practitioner shows a high degree of self-awareness, role awareness & awareness of assumptions underlying their practice'. It is the notions of reflection & 'use of self' which are sometimes used interchangeably with the purpose of understanding 'emotional intelligence'. Additionally, Ward (2010, p.64) has suggested that what practitioners have best developed is "... a personal quality which overlaps with professional skill to create an effective persona'. Although we have a unique persona the 'self' that is used by Social Workers in the making is not a unified, coherent entity but a fractured 'defended' self which is mainly concerned with protecting itself from anxiety (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

Taking this argument further, neuroscientists have begun to agree with Eastern philosophers that the self is 'a construction of the social brain.' In the reality of our personal lives too, the reality of the self is inescapable even when there is a divide on the question of what the self is between ancient & modern psychology. We need an interior storytelling to thread ourselves together because the self is an elusive constellation of intangible solutions. Borges, Louis (2015) in his parable on self is in agreement with Buddha that the indestructible is in us and is found only through the annihilation of the self and not through limited identity fragments.

## **Spaces of Contention and Conflict**

Being a long-term practitioner, this has made me believe that we require a working hypothesis to be connected to one's spiritual self. The field, time and again, offers opportunities to deal with conflict and contentious spaces. We see direct conflict occurring between the traditional emphasis on the human services & evidence-based practice at one level. With the purpose of demonstrating effectiveness, we have traditionally used data from the field to evaluate student performance as part of the evaluation criteria for fieldwork. The question which has arisen through in-house dialogue & deliberations & through one's own practice experience is that it is time for us to begin addressing the insights we have gained about the content of fieldwork, undertaken by students and a corresponding understanding of the professional and personal trajectories of the students.

One needs to accept that the end of the year evaluation which we attempt to undertake could be critically examined so that insights be gained to improve the human service professional being nurtured in this process. Emily Book had highlighted the deep tension in the field of human services between evidence-based practice & practice wisdom. In fact what is being proposed in Buddhist literature itself is evidence-based practice and requires thinking through so that it can be appropriately applied as indigenous practice.

### **Challenges of Latest Approaches**

In an attempt to meet the challenges of shifting 'traditional' practice towards newer approaches we need to acknowledge upfront that we need an emancipatory fieldwork curriculum such that the context and assessment parameters be negotiated with students so that the adult learner takes responsibility for their own learning (Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 2007, 8(2), 121-129). It has been adequately questioned that linear learning where 'knowledge & skills' are defined leading to learning outcomes in advance have a limited, narrow focus. In the negotiated curriculum identified by Fraser & Bosanquet (2006) the learning process is as important as the subject matter. In this space, the curricular statements are more in tune with framing the learning environment & with reflective practice. In the third space, which is the subject under discussion the curriculum serves as an emancipatory interest when the learner begins to stand alone and takes charge of the learning. The mentor's role changes wherein the latter participates in the learning endeavour as a collaborator (<http://ambedkarsocialwork.wordpress.com>).

### **The Process of Learning & Teaching**

In the process of learning and teaching, the role of values in Social Work, become extremely critical. We need to appreciate that every commitment one makes redefines who we are. Making a commitment is not about undertaking a new responsibility but about recognizing what already is there. It is a measure of one's respect for oneself. It also forms the basis of trust in a relationship. It being so, if we are confronted with a situation where students are unable to make a commitment in the field, one needs to question why it is so & address the root cause of the same. This is in tune with what is propagated in indigenous literature (*The Dhammapada*) wherein one begins to acknowledge that one needs to build a relationship with oneself which shares the same principles as building a relationship with another. The three principles which form the base of a triangular pyramid and which require reinforcement are to be consistent, to be conscientious and to be committed.

As one teaches & learns, one is repeatedly confronted with the push for performance with multiple reasons which have larger implications for practice. The inevitable overlapping space between classroom teaching & practice in the field has made it necessary that there be a concern for collaborations and integration of themes and interest areas. Keeping this need in mind, when one examines the curricular principles of social work profession, one zeroes in on the following:

- Produce graduates committed to the profession
- Ability to address diversity in its local context
- Stay connected with the practice community
- Remain hands-on & immediately relevant

- Create practitioners prepared for advocacy & leadership
- Teach evidence informed practice

Clubbing these curricular principles with critical practice can be emancipatory by locating individual experience within wider social structures thus attempting to challenge oppression through progressive welfare policies and practice. “ Contextualizing the same to the Indian situation, the objectives of critical fieldwork training in Indian social work education should accommodate and work towards increasing the capacity of students to:

- Develop skills and methodologies of working in partnership with communities, groups and individuals where there are differences in power in relation to caste ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability and other differences in status
- Develop the ability to recognize and value the expertise/ experience of individuals, families, groups and communities of Dalits, tribes, women aged and differently abled
- Develop an awareness of structural processes of social exclusion, discrimination, social disadvantage, prejudices and different forms of oppression
- Develop insights into how structures has constructed the self and identify and clarify one’s own value premise
- Develop strategies that challenge oppression, discrimination, exclusion, disadvantage and other forms of inequality/ injustice based on caste, ethnic class, gender and ability
- Evidence in practice, the ability to listen, respect and promote the views and needs of the oppressed within the context of engagement, either through social movements, social action, development organizations, service organizations or government departments and
- In the process of engagement, clarify one’s own role in /within the context as a change agent and strengthen commitment to the cause of the oppressed “(Bodhi. S.R.2012)

In the popular & scholarly literature, ‘impact’ is variously defined as innovation, effectiveness or accountability. The emphasis on impact is ambiguous in the operational sense because the nature of human service work is in itself indefinite & indeterminate at its very core (Hasenfield, 1983). Understanding this in conjunction with the adapted version presented in the UNDP ‘S Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation Results, (Sharma, 2007) reads: ‘impacts are profound paradigm shifts resulting in equitable & enduring well-being & dignity for all human beings & a thriving planet’. Additionally, “outcomes” are efforts that measurably change the conditions in which humans, all sentient beings, and our earth thrive’ (ibid). Our dire need to integrate field realities with classroom learning has been prompted by the need to build linkages between actions and results and less between outcomes and impacts.

The purpose of flagging this here is to reflect on the traditional approach of the profession on focussing on learning goals, learning plans and learning outcomes. The fact of the matter is that since there is no specific prescription for how to engage to generate results, whenever , wherever and however we decide to work for change, we actually begin to work with an inquiry to understand what stakeholders want to change and the results they wish to produce. We tend to create a false dichotomy between ‘doing’ and ‘being’ since they are not two mutually exclusive spaces.

## **Understanding the Personal and the Professional Boundaries**

The Social Work profession has a set of humanistic values which are essential to the profession (Bisman, 2004) which highlights the need to examine our own personal values and develop appropriate decision-making strategies while making difficult ethical judgements. We tend to confuse our own chemistry with our personhood, mistaking how we are for who we are. Cheng (2005) has reminded us that the discourse on values and ethics in present-day Social Work cannot be limited to straight-jacketed guidelines for imposing control over professional conduct. This being so, in an attempt to maintain standards, facilitation is sometimes at conflicting purposes (Hughes, 2004). Once power or lack of trust enters a learning relationship the openness required for questioning may dissipate or assume alternate modes. Wadsworth (2001) described different ways of providing guidance all of which were based not on supervision but on “stewardship without control” (p.420). This is seconded by Titchen’s (2008) facilitation through critical companionship which is perceived as constructive and empowering for the professional concerned.

Since we are diverse in many ways we need to be mindful of the value orientation of the student community and encourage them to take positions while addressing the personal-professional dichotomy. Besides the role played by mentors and experienced professionals, supportive challenge is also possible between and among peers. Students as learners can definitely learn differently from working together informally and from more structured peers (Harris, Ferrell, Bell, Devla & James, 2001). In fact it is the very value of challenging support in learning which opens up the possibilities for transformation (Taylor, 2008). Learnings from the field and from faculty colleagues have reinforced that being able to make informed choices and critically evaluating those choices are central to the development of independent professional judgement.

It is through these authentic ventures that we as professionals have attempted to revisit our learning and teaching spaces. Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000, p.82) describe authenticity as “taking responsibility” for ourselves through moments of “clear-sightedness” which enables a “realistic view of ourselves and our possibilities”-neither understanding nor overestimating them”. Additionally, reflective authenticity as a professional involves an engaged agency with a view towards a purpose and meaning beyond the self (Taylor, 1993). There is on-going discourse around the way people find meaning in life and construct their own identities through everyday engagement in their work (Gardner, 2009; Katz, Sutherland & Earl, 2005). If we are to discuss such ideas freely we would require that a consensus be developed about purpose, mutual respect, confidentiality and commitment so as to be able to openly share inquiry of practice learning experiences. It is these shared experiences which would then form a starting point with subsequent discussion over issues related to awareness, diversity, inquiry, creativity, values and meaning. From this exercise we would probably be in a position to draw out what sort of relationships support authentic learning and how they can be nurtured. Drawing from students’ learnings and experiences where students have felt challenged or uncomfortable, where there has been lack of communication or conflict can be explored. It is the underlying assumptions which could help identify from practice and from these discussions the need for follow up through workshops, de-briefing and thus enhance capacity-building. This would lead us to ask ourselves questions such as: What is the way forward for supportive learning and practice? What are the existing models for supportive learning?

## **When we are not Afraid of Leaving Fear Behind**

We are at crossroads once again in our lives. Having taught Biestek & Perlman for decades now, we are compelled to revert to the Indian and Asian texts and philosophical teachings which had for centuries promoted peace, compassion and well-being. When examining the teachings of anatta (non-self), one can clearly see that the Pali Cannon presents itself in consonance with the dialogues of Plato & Aristotle such that the teacher leads the audience through a line of reasoning and searches a conclusion that the audience agrees with. In the Pali Cannon reference to “I making” and “my making” (6) reinforces the Buddhist teachings regarding observations made regarding being obsessed with the process. As human beings one would like the self to be enduring and permanent and one would also understand through a study of the dhamma that ‘the elimination of all views-positions, determinations, biases, acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation, unbinding (AN8: 24) Borges, Louis (1899-1986) and Buddha both agreed on one thing that the indestructible is in us and is found only through the annihilation of the self and not through limited identity fragments. This resonates with Ambedkar’s views and experiences which are fearful of incorporating into the mainstream teaching methods of working with people.

The lessons thus being learnt are that we need to make a fundamental shift so that we reorient ourselves to our own Indian texts so that we begin appreciating that just as in the Buddhist universe we abandon educational and cultural structures, so also in our professional lives we need to learn from lived realities. Buddhist teachings are from inheritance of a pre-packaged cosmology and question the assumed knowledge which we have acquired from the Western texts. The illusions we have built about people, problems and places through the 4Ps are the direct result of the stories we buy into which are a direct result of the power structures which we call “truth”. Goldstein, while discussing the objectivity of situations wrote” the necessary incompleteness of even our formal systems of thought demonstrates that there is no non-shifting foundation on which any system rests. All truths are essentially manufactured. Actually, what we consider as objectively true is a socially constructed myth.

According to Schwartz (2001), a professional practitioner with practice wisdom should be able to feel or “just know” what the right course of action is in a specific context. Since professional intuition refers to an automatic response that arises effortlessly in a practitioner’s mind without immediate justification (Kahneman & Klein, 2009), it draws from our own Indian context of ‘*prati samvedita*’ (experiential learning). It is in a compassionate heart which is a space of endless possibilities coupled with intuition that learning opportunities become meaningful learning spaces. When working with students in the field it was essential to be able to enable them /expose them to real-life situations, be willing to be vulnerable and to allow the compassionate heart to respond accordingly. Often, being told that we had “bleeding hearts” made us emotional too. It was during the course of our journey that we learnt that we are not alone in accepting the “new learning but that “my courageous, wide-open heart is a space of endless possibilities. It is a non-dual space, where I am spacious awareness, in unison with my mind, emotions and body. I am moved to compassionate action in the dual world” (Sharma, 2017) It is in fact, the deep listening which informs our own thinking and helps open up possibilities for transformation.

This resonates with the felt need for providing opportunities for practising techniques which cannot be carried out elsewhere and stimulating a higher level of understanding, and valuing particular environment encountered in the field through which we can open up spaces for alternative fieldwork frameworks for learning. (Bodhi, 2011) He adds on to elaborate that the experiential engagement of students requires that we see both the linear and circular processes of observing and analysing concepts, issues and situations. By engaging in enabling students to para-phrase their feelings, thoughts & behaviours we tend to work towards strengthening their ability to make meaning of their experiences. This becomes more valuable in the light of the fact that students' unpreparedness in the field gets clubbed with inability to negotiate power equations which get manifested for them through organizational, professional and cultural filters. It reinforces the need to address the importance of addressing conflict, coupled with nurturing current prevalent conflict resolution skills.

### **Role of Compassion & Wisdom**

There is no doubt that Social Work is unique due to its irreplaceable practice wisdom (Chu & Tsui, 2008; Klein & Bloom, 1995). Gut feeling or intuition is the "heart's choice" of practitioners (Gigerenzer, 2007). This is collaborated when we say that intuitive practice actually includes the capacity to "be present with the client, immersed in experience and absorbed in the process" (Nye, 2012, p.127). In line with Aristotelian Ethics, Chu and Tsui (2008) contended that practice wisdom is crystallized as a result of intersubjective intuition and is "embodied in actions whose motivations remain in the background of consciousness" (p.49). The theory of reflective practice is not sufficient to make sense of how thinking in action occurs successfully. It needs to be supplemented with insights, lived experiences, senses, complexity and the sedentary nature of practice (Ferguson, 2018; Ingold, 2011). In fact as Social Work educators we need to build on this by helping practitioners to develop their capacities to contain themselves through good internal supervision such that anxiety and ambiguity can be tolerated and dealt with.

"So often, when we speak up from our compassionate, courageous heart against exploitation, discrimination or unworkable systems and norms, we are told that we are being emotional and our points of view are dismissed-sometimes intentionally"( Sharma, 2017 ). The truth of the matter is that even when we calm our minds and open our hearts to listen to people we can be simultaneously aware that we are constantly mentally filtering what people say and do. It is this deep listening which allows creativity to unfold and informs our thinking while opening up possibilities for transformation.

### **Case Studies & Learnings Thereof**

The pertinent question which plagued student Social Workers repeatedly has been " How do they continue to maintain a professional identity focussing on socio-economic justice in a world/space where there is expansion of bureaucratization of institutions and agencies and where social welfare benefits are otherwise getting reduced? "

In their fieldwork journey, students began appreciating those social suffering results from what political, economic and institutional power does to people. Factors such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status all play a vital role in rendering and enhancing already existing vulnerabilities which provoked them to ask basic questions of existentialism. ..." to live is to suffer, to survive is to



find meaning in the suffering.” Nietzsche (1985) spoke of the “inner emptiness, spiritual poverty, loss of faith in the future,’ all of which contribute to ‘noogenic neuroses’ or frustration of man’s spirits. This ‘loss of soul’ is flagged in the ancient Indian texts as suffering and healing. (Anand, 2011, p55). Neimark (2000) reinforces this by saying “healing is that which makes us whole, that which helps us to reach out to fullness of expression and purpose in life.....”.

In comparing the Western Concept of Psychological Healing with the holistic paradigm of Ayurveda, it is essential to highlight that the former involves the transcendence of the existing state of consciousness, a change in attitude and a broadening of one’s perspective. The latter suggests that the ‘energy’ level of human beings i.e. the inner emotional and spiritual world determines all that is expressed at the physical level (Svoboda, 1993). The Theravada text also collaborates this by stating that it is the attitude that we take towards our own suffering that allows us to endure. By shifting our consciousness we have the power to “reengineer’ our personal and collective realities.

“Suffering and healing are the two processes that define human existence, giving both meaning and momentum to ourselves. Social scientists have been attempting to explore when and how people suffer and what heals them. Since suffering is an experience that cannot be quantified it has escaped the realms of social science. ....” (Srivastava & Dalal, 2001). In the context of social realities, it is now acknowledged that there is plurality of social work functions, approaches and roles within communities and organizations. It necessitates practitioners to formulate, communicate and simultaneously exercise their judgement as a core to the professional and personal need. These judgements can range from significant decisions or suggestions which have meaningful consequences for individuals and others involved including “numerous micro decisions” (Munro, 2002, p.110) on which Social Workers work on a daily basis. Munro (2010) has further argued that it is the bureaucratization which has worked to de-skill Social Workers and has reduced “the scope” for professional judgement (p.1148). Taking the argument further, the researcher would like to argue that this exercise can be simplified if students are taught to revisit the skills of authentic learning and appreciative enquiry which are core to Asian texts. The “ lived experiences’ of students who hail from diverse backgrounds can add a wealth of knowledge if these form part of shared experiences with peers and mentors. The focus on “programs and content “(Webster-wright, 2009, 2010) would need to be diluted to give way to learning how skills can be enhanced which is an area of research which has been largely neglected. B/Taylor (2006) had highlighted that research into decision-making is limited despite the “increasing centrality of decision making” (p.1148) in social work.

So how do the social work practitioners gain & develop skills in the real world of practice? The requirements of social work practice can shape the content of what is learned by students through a practice curriculum. By developing such a curriculum it is possible to organize practice learning such that core skills, fundamental values and basic information is gained before the more complex ones are attempted. Given that students come from diversity of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and carry varied emotional experiences with them when they enter the field, it becomes essential to help them unpack such that varied methods of learning are provided and made available to them. In case, live practice with client populations does not help generate appropriate learning experiences, other methods of learning can be used. The fieldwork curriculum can incorporate and examination/ study of practice competence which can be structured and harmonized to fit with the pace of learning of each student. Generalizations and assumptions would need to give way to



flexibility while simultaneously valuing the continuity of consciousness which is the seedbed of identity and is also the seedbed of one's creativity.

It is the students' experience of a cohesive self which needs to be at the core of their leaning while keeping in mind that they could be disoriented/ plagued by inner contradiction and conflict. The field experiences of students have revealed that intervention in real life context takes place in four major realms- the personal space, the utilization of rights space, the emergency space and the professionally friendly space. In order to investigate peoples' thinking about reality and peoples' action upon reality generative themes become the focus of skill building. (FOOTNOTE: Generative themes consist of the relationship between an objective situation and the perceptions held of that situation by the people involved in it). Using Bateson's framework for transformative learning one explored multiple possibilities of learning from the experiences of students. Bateson's framework was used in consonance with Buddhist framework as they resonated similar themes in 'learning to learn' and represented an intersection of education, management learning, and transformative learning. The practical approach of Buddha as per Pali texts is to harness the mind and work towards cultivating the same. Students would ask their target groups, "and why would we do that?' Beneficiaries would answer: 'Because it's your source of contentment.... Keeps the struggle going. We need to not give up-politically, socially, diplomatically. "This is Buddhist expertise as it teaches our students not to be overwhelmed by the outside world. Despite the fact that philosophical, psychological and scientific models reinforce that life is external to us, the Buddhist framework of transformative learning teaches that we need to appreciate the meaning of individual and collective karma and make the body and mind the object of one's practice.

If we truly believe in compassion for all human beings, we need to accept that unconditional love for one and all is a state of total surrender in humility. We can merely BE unconditional love- we cannot give it or share it with anyone. It's a state of being which we need to cultivate which radiates on its own with no external trigger. If we are to be true to the field and to ourselves as practitioners, we need to develop strength of character which implies the ability to overcome resentment against others. We also need to develop mindfulness practice as a technique for focusing on the present-here and now. It is a method of training the mind and is as scientific a technique as any other.

One student in his fieldwork recording wrote: "Being in the state of higher vibrations through mindfulness practice doesn't mean that people will not encounter challenging experiences. It just means that the impact of such experiences will be less and will be felt less as a person on the spiritual path. His/ her emotional body does not experience the same level of extreme highs and lows that a person at the material level goes through. This makes it possible for him/ her to stay in the observer mode even in the face of challenges." These were the learnings of the students from the interactions with some community members. The student learner could understand the many layers of benefits acquired through mindfulness practice and saw how community workers continued to be calm, compassionate and productive while focusing only on the here and now. As evidence-based practice, Buddhism has worked as a scientific discipline for more than 3000 years and has helped expand empathy by being rooted in Buddhist philosophy.

Another student learnt from his target population that change is one thing which they can definitely count on in life. They suffered if they resisted change and they were able to teach the student that we can create positive imprints in everyday life if we merely take care of others. Their spirituality

and sense of purpose in life arose from the realization that each one has his/ her/ their journey and each one has to walk the path all by oneself. Even when students came with knowledge from external sources, the spiritual journey needs to start from within with each person knowing oneself, one's fears, one's insecurities, one's emotional baggage and one's beliefs. "We have to ourselves reflect upon our own conditioning and belief systems and what triggers us to bring out our patterns. We have to release them through our own inner work by being aware of our thoughts, emotions and intentions every single moment."(Beneficiary 3)

They echoed Thich Nhat Hanh when they said 'Go back & take care of you. Your body needs you, your feelings need you, your perceptions need you, and your suffering needs you to acknowledge it. Go home and be there for all these things.'

### **Working Towards a Negotiated Curriculum**

Students covered in the study were placed in a wide range of agencies including non-government organizations, civil society partnerships, government departments and field action projects. There is flexibility in the criteria used to select fieldwork agencies. The Council on Social Work Education, quoted in Royse et al (2007:5) that fieldwork should occur in settings that reinforce students, "identification with the purposes, values and ethics of the profession, fosters the integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge and promotes the development of professional competency." This can be understood in terms of the age old Buddhist framework of observing five precepts and following the Noble Eightfold Path.

In attempting to understand the preferable pedagogical approach for preparing students for the practice, we need to incorporate on-going reflection and supportive learning opportunities. Learning to be a supervisee is equally as important as learning to be a supervisor or a mentor (Baretta-Herman, 2001). Moreover, the theory of reflective practice is insufficient to make meaning of how thinking in action occurs. It needs to be supplemented with insights, lived experiences, the senses, complexity and the sedentary nature of practice (Ferguson, 2018; Ingold, 2011). Social Work education needs to build on this by helping practitioners to develop their capacities to contain themselves through good internal supervision.

Research has revealed that there is not enough data highlighting students' preparation for fieldwork and here preparedness is considered in a general sense( Gelman, 2004; Rosenthal Gelman & Lloyd, 2008; Gilson & Kelly, 2010) or none at all( Kanno & Koeske, 2010). ' Not knowing' how to apply knowledge into action along with being ill-equipped to do so besides feeling incompetent has influenced students' learning. This can be addressed keeping in mind that students need to work on their emotional intelligence besides conflict resolution strategies (O'Donghe, 2012). There is some literature which supports the development and rolling out of key areas for fieldwork curriculum in preparing students for fieldwork (Williamson, Hostetter, Byers & Huggins, 2010) but there is scope for further research in this area in our own given context. A 'learning-practice escalator' for each individual student has been suggested by Doel & Shardlow(2005) which could be tested by having a shared practice perspective or one based on theoretical orientation( Davys & Beddoe, 2012). In the Indian context we could be learning and unlearning. "In an attempt to restructure and reorganize organic structures, it becomes the Supervisor's responsibility to create safe spaces for dialoguing. With social reality as a standpoint and the self as a mirror of that reality, it is possible to bring some

element of congruence between belief structures within self and structures operating in the outside world. The resistance which arises is actually what needs to be dealt with....” (Bodhi, 2011).

This echoes in Buddhism which distinguishes between emotions which are constructive, such as *metta* and *karuna*, and those that are destructive: anger and jealousy. It encourages the cultivation of the former and can be safely used in education of emotions in an effort to civilize the agencies of humankind. When Buddha taught the Dhamma, sometimes he appealed to reason; at other times to emotions and imagination, using fables, stories, and poetry. If we are to do justice to the profession, we need to come to terms with Buddhist culture practised by many cultures including Maharashtrians, Sri Lankas, those from Thailand, Cambodia etc. This culture is self-sufficient, self-consistent and self-sustaining. It is based on eternal values, is verifiable by individual experience and its content does not change with context. To the thinking rational social work professional in the making, Buddhism as a way of life offers a rational, practical, and balanced way of deliverance with a universal message of social justice, hope and compassion, inspiring good-will and undertaking ameliorative acts as a pre-condition for realization of spiritual attainments.

Quoting one student recording; “The ultimate aim of Buddha-Dhamma is Nirvana which implies emancipation of suffering which we try and work towards through our placements in a limited way. The immediate objective, of course, is to help us understand and confront the daily issues which arise in our lives and to enable us to live in harmony with our environment and others. “

The student learning is that the Buddha-Dhamma is a guide to the daily lives of ordinary people- the very same people they go to and interact with during their fieldwork journeys. The target groups consider lay life as a preparation and training ground for its realization and it is the mind which predominates over matter. Also, that the observation and analysis which students tend to do is superimposed on the self-observation and self-analysis of the peoples they work with and engage with on a regular basis. Students learnt through regular engagement with target groups that the more we find out about ourselves by means of self-observation and self-analysis, the better will be our chances of self-improvement and shedding the emotional baggage which we have been carrying over the years. In addition, we need to ask ourselves some very basic questions related to our values which we study in the theoretical space. To what degree are we industrious, energetic, natural, kind, considerate, tolerant and patient? These are some of the basic qualities of a true Buddhist, the very core of Asian texts.

Another student wrote in his summary recording: “Change is inherent in our lives and that of others. Disappointments and disasters are inevitable- we should meet them with equanimity and a balanced response. It is from the evidence of our beneficiaries lived experiences that I learnt that this is right understanding and as a well-balanced Buddhist we too must make up our own mind, form our own opinions, and arrive at our own conclusions instead of waiting for our mentor’s to guide us and show us the path. We may seek advice but we must be prepared to stand alone and to walk our own path, irrespective of what others may think or say.

Yet another student wrote: ‘My clients had strength derived from other unseen resources. They did not need Freud or Counsellors to guide their ego or charge their batteries. Their entire store of wholesome actions, their qualities of character, the happiness they had derived from their meditative practices as part of daily living, made them self-reliant. I felt I had learnt the simplicity of life from my clients who remained increasingly self-reliant and self-sufficient. I have now begun to

learn the need to possess a calm, controlled and contented mind. It helped me adjust to fixed ideologies of my roommates, rigidities of my parents, long hours, and everyday worries with sheer ease. Quiet reflection and meditation helped me more than merely expressing my analysis of situations on paper and aimlessly dialoguing on everyday matters. My life seems to have gotten into perspective- much more than just achieving the objectives for which and with which the curriculum was designed, I guess.

My own understanding as a mentor of sorts is that as lay people we learn and grow in all aspects of the dhamma, whether we believe in it or not and learn to mould ourselves, our personality, training the emotions and disciplining the will in the interests of ourselves and others. When we teach the principles of social work as propagated by Biestek we dwell on acceptance and controlled emotional involvement, besides confidentiality and purposeful expression of feelings. This could have been easily been supplemented by the Buddhist policy of non-compulsion and tolerance which is born partly out of compassion and partly from an understanding of human nature and the nature of truth. When we try and share our wisdom with others, maybe the target groups, client populations, field contacts or agency personnel, we need to remind ourselves that wisdom cannot be imposed on others from the outside. It must grow from within the individual by developing from one's sensitivity and by refining one's human nature. Buddhism has taught the formula of conditioned arising (*pattica-samupadda*) and its reversal by human effort and personal evolution according to the quality of one's deeds (*karma*) and free- will within limits, besides cultivating four basic social and ethical attitudes: a) *metta*- a friendly feeling of loving kindness to all human beings regardless of race, creed or caste, b) *karuna*-compassion for all who suffer and to take practical steps whenever possible to eliminate or alleviate those sufferings, c) *mudita*-altruistic joy, to be happy in others happiness, in their prosperity and success, and d) *upekha*- equanimity, the maintenance of an even mind when faced with ups and downs in life. This is seen as the most harmonious way of living and is apparently the best method of relating Buddha's teachings to other religions.

### **Closing Thoughts**

From a Phenomenological Perspective the completion of any research work is not to suggest that the final word regarding the phenomenon under study has been spoken. The final report is actually a living text that invites the reader to engage in a dialogue from which new insights and understandings surface. The completion of the project is viewed by Phenomenology as both a point of arrival and a point of departure" (Welch, 2001, p.70).

With many people working for change, we find that the results or 'outcomes' are scattered and not as sustainable as we would want them to be. "It is with our own ability to generate new patterns that we bring the inner world of oneness and compassion to the outer world"(Sharma, Monica, 2017). We no longer need to compartmentalize the personal and the professional aspects of ourselves since we are on adventures of discovery with no prescriptions or set of rules.

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