SUB THEME 2:

Different Approaches to QA and their Impact on Efficiency, Effectiveness and Sustainability

TITLE:

"Getting it Right for Social Work in the Arab World" - A Different Approach to Accrediting Social Work in the United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

In teaching social work in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman, the authors will interrogate the pervasive question within academic circles and the wider public discourse, on 'whose values should define what is right and what is wrong?' in social work education. This is a critical period in the history of the UAEU where the first professional social work education and training programme being offered will be subjected to the rigor of the accreditation process. Currently most, if not, all social work programmes are evaluated against western social work accreditation frameworks and QA processes. It is imperative that at the outset of this accreditation process, the Islamic prophetic traditions and culture, uniquely characteristic of the Arab world in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), provide the ideological context for the impending accreditation process. A quick perusal of global accreditations of social work programmes reveal intense scholarly debates about dynamic curricula, necessary resources, ideology, administrative needs and processes and structure of programmes. There is little doubt, despite the recent debates on the processes, that, the primary goal of accreditation is to ensure quality programmes and competent preparation for practice. In this paper the authors will argue that while subscribing to this academic rigor, a paradigm shift in what constitutes culturally sensitive social work education and training will be imperative. It will demonstrate that the values and ethics rooted in the ideology of the Arab world will determine and influence academic and practice paradigms. This will be done by evaluating and contrasting current international accreditation methodologies with the socio-cultural realities of social work education and practice in the GCC and Arab World and proposing a framework that *is contextually culturally relevant*.

Introduction

According to Calderwood, Harper, Ball & Liang; social work is a value-based profession (refer, Healy, 2001; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1999; Calderwood, et al, in press). That is; "*everything social workers do must be with professional values in mind*" adds, Kirst-Ashman (2003: 30). But, as Campbell asserts, "*the pervasive question, either within academic circles or as part of the wider public discourse, is; whose values, anyway, should define what is right and what is wrong*?" (2003). This question becomes especially relevant, when authors like Spano and Koenig (Compare, Spano and Koenig, 2007 and Spano and Koenig, 2008) naively expect others to apply "Western" Social Work *Code of Ethics* and values to other cultures and Worldviews, like the Arab University Social Work Class without taking into account Arab students' dissimilar perceptions of "what is right and what is wrong?" For example, a Western, even perhaps 'Anglo-American', view of education is that it should be non-political and non-religious (Woodrow, 2001). But, as Woodrow opines; *"for many cultures and societies (like the Arab culture), the interweaving of education with politics and religion represents the ideal, a holistic and comprehensive view of the world and others"* (2001, - author emphasis). Woodrow goes on to situate his opinion, by stating; "*certainly Islam would reject the "Western" view of education of separation as not reflecting the importance of dedicating to Allah the whole of one's life-actions"* (2001). The purpose of this paper is to aware Western social work instructors, practitioners and program accreditation bodies of "What We Got Wrong on the Arab Social Work Student" in dogmatically adhering to social work professional values based in Western Social Work *Codes of Ethics* advocated by authors like Spano and Koenig (refer; "What is sacred when personal and professional values collide?" (Journal of Social Work Education, 2007). The authors, contrary to Spano and Koenig (refer, JSWE, 2007 and 2008), propose a culturally sensitive model for social work education, practice, and professional accreditation couched in what Anthony Weston calls *Mindful Ethics*. In citing the work of Weston on Mindful Ethics, Campbell, notes that, '*ethics asks us to live mindfully: to take some care about how we act and even about how we feel*' (2003: 12).

Development of the Social Work Profession in the Arab World

Ragab (1995, cited in Al-Krenawi, and Graham, 2003) traces the historical development of social work as a profession in the Arab world as a by-product of both French and British colonialism. According to Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003), Egypt played an influential role in the development and expansion of the social work profession in the Middle East and Arab world. In 1935, Egypt became the recipient of a predominantly American model of social work education and practice. Beginning in the 1960s, other Arab countries designed and implemented their own social work education programs (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman) often with the assistance of Egyptian-trained social work educators (Al-Krenawi, and Graham, 2003).

Anecdotal information reveal that, historically, social work was seen as a sub-discipline of sociology in the Middle East – a viewpoint still prevalent in the discourse and thinking of many Arab social science educators at Middle Eastern Universities. This is seen in that post-1960 and till recently, social work was traditionally taught by sociology faculty as part of sociology curricula at prominent Universities in the Middle East. In many instances social work was programmatically divorced from sociology curricula only in the last few years. Unfortunately, record has shown that this was largely a token change as social work as then and now, still is predominantly taught by social science faculty recruited from Middle Eastern countries with undergraduate majors in a field other than social work. A cursorily glance at the qualifications of "social work" faculty as well as social work course descriptions at Universities like Qatar University in Doha (www.qu.edu.qa), Sultan Qaboos University in Oman (www.squ.edu.om), Kuwait University in Kuwait (www.kuniv.edu), Ain Shams University in Egypt (www. asunet.shams.eun.eg), and the Lebanese American University in Lebanon (www.lau.edu.lb), will aware the reader that this is largely still the norm. In the opinion of one of the authors; Villa**,** Chairperson of Department of Social Work, United Arab Emirates University, this structurally entrenched phenomenon, leads to a social work profession being taught and practiced in the GCC that's inherently a "bastardized form of sociology" (personal interview, January 2009). In the end Arab social workers graduate from GCC Universities with a degree in Social Work that does not meet the demands of their Arab clients, the communities

they serve and society as a whole. They find themselves in the unfavourable position of practicing a "schizophrenic" form of social work with a knowledge base predominantly situated in sociological theory with little or no real social work skills to help those who come to them for help.

Arab Worldview vs. NASW *Code of Ethics*

The importance of understanding the culture and worldview of Arab social work students and how it differs from a Western Worldview is corroborated by literature (compare Haj-Yahia, 1997; Rosen, 2005; and Lewis, 2006). Westerners and Arabs have very different views about what is right and wrong, good and evil, logical and illogical, acceptable and unacceptable, opinions Lewis (2006: 400). They live in two different worlds, each organized in each own manner. In the West, social work education and practice is predominantly couched in, and guided by the professional values stipulated in the National Association of Social Workers' *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1996, revised in 2008). According to the NASW *Code of Ethics*, Social workers should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics (NASW, 1996, revised in 2008). For the authors, this Ethical Standard raises two important questions; firstly, "*what is recognized knowledge*?" and, secondly, "*recognized by whom*?" Even a cursory review of social work literature will make the reader aware that there is a lack of consistency in the literature about the definition of "values" and what exactly constitutes "social work professional values" (refer, Calderwood, et al, in press). Spano and Koenig, in their paper: "What is sacred when personal and professional values collide?" (JSWE, 2007), for example, opinions that; "*at this particular moment in our history, the social work profession finds itself embedded in a larger societal context in which public debates, some call culture wars, are reflected within professional dialogues"* (Stetson & Conti, 2005; Walsh, 2000, in Spano and Koenig, 2007).

Spano and Koenig's paper inadvertently adds to this "culture war" by advocating that the NASW *Code of Ethics* (1996) should; "*provide the framework or screen through which professional social workers' personal worldviews must be drawn to determine their acceptability in social work practice*" (2007). Elsewhere, the mentioned authors, propose a Six-Stage Model to

address tensions between personal worldviews and the NASW *Code of Ethics and state that; "our approach starts with the assertion that the Code of Ethics provides a broad framework for professionals to adhere to in their practice."* (Spano and Koenig, 2007). Furthermore, in discussing *Stage 5: Professional decision making* of their Six-Stage Model; Spano and Koenig, mention that;

> Professionals must make decisions about what needs to be done to be faithful to their professional ethical responsibilities. Decisions in practice can never be made solely on the basis of the professional's personal values. Instead, decisions must be made in a way that is consistent with the *Code of Ethics,* and when personal values conflict with professional values, the *Code of Ethics*, as understood within the knowledge base of the profession, should take precedence. (Refer, Spano and Koenig, 2007).

If one should apply Occam's Razor to the assumption; "when personal values conflict with professional values, the *Code of Ethics*… should take precedence" various possibilities for error becomes apparent. Firstly, Spano and Koenig's argument makes the NASW *Code of Ethics* <u>the</u> primary document that sets parameters within which professionals must operate as they delineate their personal worldviews within the context of their professional roles. Thus, opinions Adams (2008), in critical response to Spano and Koenig's paper; *"the Code of Ethics is elevated to a position outside and above competing worldviews.*" – placing it squarely in the narrow ideological field of Orthodox secularism (author emphasis). Secondly, Spano and Koenig's thesis lends itself to a validation of a closed view of society in response to the incursion of so-called radical values and personal worldviews – which is surely antithetical to the open society envisaged by most theorists as vital to a mature civic culture (adapted from Sajoo, 2001). Thirdly, it would seem that Spano and Koenig sees no contradiction in issuing a summons on behalf of "Western" social work ethical values that pointedly ignores other multicultural components like the Middle Eastern worldview, in general, and Arab social workers experiences in particular. At the same time, they appear oblivious of what Sajoo calls the "new realities of global citizenship and culture" that enlarge social work praxis beyond traditional frontiers of nationality and geography, in this case - social work practice in the United Arab Emirates (refer, Sajoo, 2001 – author emphasis). The idea that social work practitioners, and per implication social work educators and accreditation bodies, can divorce personal beliefs, values and worldview from professional values, and expecting professional values stipulated in the *Code of*

Ethics to supersede the other, is understandable and even predictable. Sadly, this Western, even perhaps 'Orthodox secular', view of social work *Code of Ethics*, when scrutinized through the cultural realities and Qur'anic traditions of the Arab social work student, is naïve and narrow. For example, in their paper; "Turkish Students Attitudes on America", Kelleher, et al, state that; "*there are fewer universal commonalities in the human thought processes than most people think*" and, "*the naive but normal practice is to project one's own mindset onto other people"* (Fisher, 1997:24–37 in Kelleher et al, 2003).

Modern pedagogy accepts that students and faculty construct the classroom's social reality as, often tacitly, "*negotiated with others and distributed between them*" (Bruner, 1990: 105 in Kelleher et al, 2003). Kelleher et al (2003) go on to cite Fisher's work on international negotiations that reinforces the need to make cultural preconceptions prominent in the consciousness of those working with people in other societies because, "*the way we perceive is much more locked in than we realize.*", (page: 250). In his own teaching experiences in the UAE one of the authors found, despite his intentions to acknowledge the culture of the host society, his Western perceptions of social work education and professional values applied to the Arab social work classroom was much more locked in than he initially realized. The following story may help sharpen this contrast to the West;

> *Recently, in a Social Work Capstone class, I made use of Bloom's Eight Elemental Human Experiences to introduce my senior social work students to the concept of self-reflection. Each student had to write a self-reflective narrative about their human experiences and relationships over time. One student approached me after class and started talking to me about her mother and younger disabled brother. She mentioned, in confidence, that she thought her mother physically abused her little brother during the day. Being a good social worker, and compelled by the NASW Code of Ethics, I told her in no uncertain terms to report the matter to the police. Her response surprised me…she said; "in Islam it is haraam (meaning it is forbidden) to talk about the sins of your elders to others". I doggedly stuck to my proverbial 'Ethical Code guns' and for the next twenty minutes or more I unsuccessfully tried to convince her to report the matter to the police or Welfare Services. Finally, I came to the realization that I could not compel my student to break with Islamic prophetic traditions in lieu of a Western Social Work Code of Ethics. Only then could I move beyond my professional value-based views, and explore Arab culture-sensitive alternatives with the student.* (Author Self-reflection - December, 2008).

Here the work of Rosen offers some insight to the above cultural experience between the "Western" social work instructor and Arab social work student. According to Rosen (2005: 43)

for the Arab, social consequence is crucial, because: "*God loves those who hide their sins*," says the prophetic tradition. Rosen hastens to clarify his statement, by adding: "*this is not because Muslims favour hypocrisy but because they believe that actions harming the social order are more dangerous than personal failings to a community of believers*" (2005: 43). In his work, Haque refers to the concept of "Islamination", meaning; "*the processes that are utilized to construct and recast the total corpus of human knowledge so it conforms to the key concept in Islam*", (Haque, 1998, 107). For the Arab social work student, all knowledge, including social work theory and practice, then is subservient to and consonance with the Qur'anic revelation (adapted from Haque, 1998, 107). Unless one gains a deeper understanding of how these two mindsets differ, one group will end up with an unfavourable impression of the other. Thus it is imperative to acknowledge that there will be some uneasiness and cultural dissonance experienced by Arab social work students expected to adhere to Western *Code of Ethics* in their practice with Arab clients (adapted from Lewis, 2006).

Social Work Accreditation Standards and Quality Assurance vs. Social Work in the GCC

In this section, the authors provide an overview of what the accreditation process entails for programmes that are accredited in such countries as the USA, UK, Australia and Canada. In doing so, they frame socio-cultural scenarios that differ from traditional western practices and viewpoints. Notwithstanding the culture specific context of the education and training programme the authors espouse accreditation as a necessity in the UAE to bring it on par with global standards and practices upholding the social work profession. Supporting this stance we concur with Midgley's (2009: 119) assertion that accreditation is "a professional exercise to ensure an adequate preparation for practice" where the accredited status is "affirmation of educational quality" (Watkins, 2009: 112). The reasons for accreditation is intrinsic to reflexive social work practice. For these purposes the process of accreditation is conceived of as being twofold: a) To develop a competent education and training programme by ensuring that the objectives of the programmes when implemented are achieved; and b) the programme offered is

contextually, culturally relevant and meets the codes of practice in keeping with the overall objectives of social work.

There are several activities and steps in the accreditation process (refer: Council for Social Work Education (CSWE – USA; UK - General Social Care Council). To illustrate the magnitude of the task of accreditation, an example of the requirements of the British statutory accrediting body is provided below:

> In order to offer a social work degree course, universities or colleges must first apply for and receive GSCC accreditation. This document sets out the details and criteria of the accreditation process. It includes the standards of governance, validation, recruitment, teaching and assessment you will be expected to have in order to offer the social work degree and the process required for monitoring, review and inspection (General Social Care Council, 2002).

Similarly the American counterpart also stipulates exacting procedures with little or no room for deviations from the statutory processes. Common to both the American and the British contexts are the sequential progression of tasks and procedures for accreditation. Social workers are prevented from practicing without the necessary licensure if they graduate from a programme that does not have the status of accreditation. Currently in the UAE, licensure or registration with a professional association as is evident in some countries is not possible without accreditation. Two authors (representing an EU and a USA university) of this paper have been on both ends of the accreditation process, namely as members (even Chairs) of Accreditation Panels as well as being faculty (Programme Directors) of programmes applying for accreditation. The rigor of the processes are therefore, not unfamiliar. The three respective phases in the accreditation processes are: pre candidacy, candidacy and accreditation. Students registered for programmes in the first two stages of a programme's status are awarded their professional qualifications retrospectively. Pre-accreditation is granted initially to a programme acknowledging that a programme is in the process of meeting the benchmarks. In this phase documentation (detailed accounts of the proposed programme), self study reports and university sanction for the programme is required. The candidacy phase focuses on the benchmarks of the

site visits which assesses and evaluates the provision of resources for the achievement of the programme objectives (some of these are listed hereunder). The accreditation phase requires direct contact with students to assess student learning and the overall achievement of programme objectives. This accreditation process is validated by statutes which not only makes provision for who should constitute the advisory body but also how and what powers the Board shall enjoy (refer: CSWE & GSCC). An example of such a statute is provided by the General Social Care Council – UK:

> Under The Care Standards Act 2000, we have powers to make rules under which courses of social work training will be approved, and to produce lists of approved courses.
> The Care Standards Act (Part 4 Section 63) states:
> 'A course for persons who wish to become social workers shall not be approved under this section unless the Council considers that it is such as to enable persons completing it to attain the required standard of proficiency in relevant social work.' (2002:8)

The process of accreditation is generally undertaken by "a third party and certified by the government through an advisory committee under published guidelines" (Yonezawa, 2008:76). The advisory committee representative of the educational sector (university), fields of service (social work practitioners) and government (policy makers) are responsible for this certified evaluation known as accreditation. The establishment of such advisory bodies follows closely with established structure and policies espoused by all the stakeholders. In contrast, in the UAE, social work "has not come of age", the existing structure and framework for third party evaluation is a developmental process yet to be reached. An important consideration in the system design of the structure and guidelines for accreditation of social work in the UAE is the link between the wider framework of government policies (which is intrinsically rooted in Islamic ideology), style of university management and the fields of practice.

The wide discretionary powers of the advisory body include, but are not limited to, approval of:

- Curriculum design – learning objectives/outcomes, philosophical framework, curriculum content, assessment procedures including external examiners

assessments and reports, balance between theory and practice, relevance of prescribed texts

- Resources and resource allocation –
    - Faculty – appropriately qualified and trained faculty to undertake teaching, and supervision of field practice and research. Emphasis is on faculty with social work training and experience, and with limited responsibility for those with no social work background
    - physical (designated classroom space and laboratory);
    - computer and access to electronic media;
    - library – texts books and data bases, e-references and course materials and handbooks;
- University/Field Partnership -
    - access to training sites (fieldwork placements)
    - faculty/student ratio for field supervision and tutorship
    - funding – field site visits, guest lectureships by practitioners, field/university seminars

Related to curriculum design is the delivery of courses, format and context. The culture of learning has traditionally been one of teacher-centred learning. The teacher centred approach, is resonant of the role, status and relationships of adults and minors in Arab society. Ali, Liu and Humedian (2004) elaborate on the concept of 'respect' in Muslim culture, where parents are consulted for all important decisions because the family structures are hierarchical and interdependent. In the classroom this translates to the educator being the adult as the expert in his/her field. Differences of opinions are seldom uttered in class "in public". Although such practices may account in part for the prevalence of the didactic process of learning in the Arab world than it is still evident in most graduate levels of education and training. Age old traditions require more than

tertiary level attempts to change deep cultural traditions. The most recent developments in education are outcomes-based education, where outcomes stress the significance of student participation and a student-centred learning (refer Kennedy, 2007). This break in traditional practices of teacher-centred learning has yet to be fully recognized, not only in the Arab world but in most traditional societies of the world. However, it is a greater challenge when such practices have deep cultural roots. The culture of learning is compounded by the diverse backgrounds of faculty members. As discussed earlier in the paper, social work was first heavily influenced by faculty recruited from Egypt, but more importantly with sociological backgrounds which detracted from what traditional and postmodernist social work educators would argue are the cornerstones for the profession, namely social work values, practice wisdom and skills orientation. Since Sociology hardly fits the criteria for being an applied discipline, one would have to speculate about the existence of and adherence to a code of ethics. Specifically with regard to the social sciences, classroom learning is effectively transferred to the field when there is "active learning, through encouraging dialogue and the development of practical competencies and expertise among students" (Yonezawa, 2008: 76). The reflexive nature of the praxis of social work supports such learning through carefully planned and monitored supervision undertaken by appropriately qualified faculty. Where this is lacking it would be difficult in the knowledge economy not to perceive this as negative equity.

Social work field training is contingent upon two interdependent systems, one located within the university and the other a collaborative partner in the field. In addition to culture and tradition, values and religious beliefs and practices, in this case Islam, the university administration and management are the other influential determinants which dictate how the practice components of a programme work. The resources both financial and human are integral to the achievement of the academic achievements, generally and, in particular, the professional requirements of social work. In social work education and training, the field component is critical to the success of the student's preparedness for their role as social workers. This implies that the expectations of training of the students are no less than students taking on actual workloads under the supervision of experienced and knowledgeable social workers. Inevitably the fields of services and the university

share a responsibility for the education and training of social work students. An effective partnership between the university and the field is supported and nurtured through an elaborate network of community resources. In a society such as the UAE and most of the GCC countries, the foundations for such relationships tend to be built around the notions of "selective dissemination" and a need to know basis, not all the relevant information is readily available. The basis for sharing such information is resonant with what is fundamentally a social work skill, building a trusting relationship with the key informant and faculty. The culture of learning is similarly reflected. Fieldwork being a fundamental requirement and the hands on experience as Teigiser (2003:) stated "will continue to be the centrepiece in fieldwork education". The experiential component of social work education and training in the Arabic context is somewhat framed by practice of "limited access" primarily on the aforementioned grounds of selective dissemination. In such instances, open access to the public other than service users is highly scrutinized as well as the fact that student's ability to avail of these learning contexts is dependent on rigid codes of conduct and mobility. In the absence of external assessors of the programme objectives, reliance on the field for this yardstick may be more heavily weighted. The challenge would be to recognize tradition and culture and to work within this framework to develop a mutually beneficial partnership. Albeit the process is time intensive, its benefits would have far reaching implications for the accreditation process in particular and for the profession of social work in general.

Central to the process of underscoring the UAEU's flagship status of offering the first accredited social work programme, will be the need for a "culture shift". A social work programme that will define, according to its specific socio-cultural and political context, practice paradigms, populations served, problems addressed, procedures employed for field instruction as well as the range of practice settings. Consequently, all of these will impact on matching assessment strategies to training goals and objectives. The authors concur with Dana (2000) and Kurasaki, Okazaki & Sue, (2002) that the conceptualization of individual and cultural differences must be viewed as a multi dimensional construct of the total learning process. As a result, the historical, socio-political and cultural factors

as well as the individual's views and feelings should form the cornerstone be critical in the assessment processes.

The preamble to the actual accreditation process would be to rework the code of ethics, which to date is the popularly used one by the NASW, consistent with the language of the Arabic culture, for example, word such as individuals in a collective context would need to be redefined for its context specific application. Arabic culture espouses what most western societies would like to see gaining momentum again, namely that of collective responsibility especially in the field where collective responsibility is the preferred approach for social issues. As many Muslim societies are prime examples of this collectivistic characteristic (Almeida (quoted by Ali, Liu & Humedian, 2004), social work can draw on these for reference.

In conclusion the most significant task for the development of an accredited programme in the Arab world would be to define social work according to its ideals and goals. A global definition was proposed in by the IFSW General Meeting in Montréal, Canada, July 2000 and adopted in 2002 at the Joint International Conference of International Associations of the Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers in Adelaide, Australia. This definition below was the result of extensive deliberations amongst social workers globally and while some might still debate its relevance and applications, it nonetheless appears to be widely used and referred to:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFSW, 2002).

Of significance is the definitions' reference to human rights and social justice. In an article entitled: *Islam 101: Understanding the Religion and Therapy Implications,* the authors, Ali, Liu & Humedian (2004: 636 citing Lippman)) tracing the historical background of Islam draw attention of its commitment to the principles and practice of justice and equity. Reference is made to the Prophet Muhammed who was concerned

“with the treatment of the elderly, poor, and women” ...In response to this he mediated on “ways to assist Arabian society to return to a system that promoted social justice and equity”. This is akin to what the definition espouses. However, how this is interpreted and operationalized in practice will be contingent on cultural interpretations and its relevance for social work practice.

Social work is already being practiced in the UAE, albeit, an accredited social work programme is lacking. This is indeed a courageous step towards meeting the humanitarian goals espoused in the definition of social work and the ideology of Islam. Combined, they provide the framework for a contextually culturally specific programme but within relevant theoretical frameworks and practice models.

Accreditation of the United Arab Emirates University is currently being sought using the Western models as the preferred standards to which to aspire. As discussed in this paper, the western models may not be the most applicable benchmark for accreditation of the university and/or individual programs in the UAEU and GCC countries. What needs to happen when benchmarking against these prescriptive standards is the necessary conceptual thinking to ground accreditation within the context of the cultural traditions and political structures of the host country. If this type of planning and conceptualization does not occur then there is the risk of superimposing standards that do not fit the needs of the students and/or society.

At first it seems as a good strategy to fit the university within the standards of another country and then find out that the goodness of fit is not possible. A better strategy is to use external standards as guidelines from which to develop country specific standards that address the realities of society in which they are located. As stated before, the task is not easy and not always timely, but the end product would be the development of standards of accreditation that respect and inform the consumers and citizens of the UAE.

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