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**SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION - TEACHING HUMAN RIGHTS
THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS – EXPERIENCES – INVITATION TO EXCHANGE
ABOUT IT¹**

Graça André, Portugal

Hans Walz, Germany

*The concept of 'Social Work as a Human Rights Profession'
Reasons for the UN, IFSW and IASSW to proclaim the concept*

1.1 The necessity of an intercultural view of Social Work

We don't only work with children, youngsters, families, men, women, handicapped persons, senior citizens, criminals or mentally ill people, we also work with persons² of various cultures. Regarding this multicultural structure of our societies the fundamental necessity of an intercultural view becomes obvious. Another reason for the urgency of an intercultural Social Work is the world-wide globalisation which has a positive impact on trade and commerce, but also negative effects leading to growing social problems both local and global.

In his essay "Education after Auschwitz" (1966) Theodor W. Adorno shows historical reasons for the necessity of an intercultural view of education. In a first step he refers to

¹ The presenters of this workshop have worked together in the teaching and practice of Human Rights for many years. Graça André works for a housing project with migrant families in the Lisbon area in a partnership with the local neighbouring association. She teaches theoretical and practice disciplines at the Portuguese Catholic University of Lisbon – Social Work License. Hans Walz teaches Sociology, Ethics and Intercultural Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences (Engineering and Social Work) in Weingarten/South Germany. In his lecturing and writing he combines the concept of Human Rights with the concept of Sustainable Development for interdisciplinary and interprofessional dialogue and cooperation in theory and practice.

² In the terminology of the welfare-orientated perspective these persons are called 'clients'; Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (2000,161-166) suggests in the perspective of Human-Rights-Orientation the term 'social-citizens'/'SozialbürgerInnen'.

Germany, and later on of course also to other regions. So, regarding the mass murder done to the Jewish citizens by the Hitler-Regime Adorno demands the necessity of an intercultural education:

"The demand that Auschwitz must never take place again is the first aim of education. It is more important than any other aim, and I don't think that I should or must give reasons. Giving reasons would have something monstrous given the monstrosity that happened."

A science-based theoretical foundation for the necessity of intercultural orientated Social Work finally results from the change of perspectives of our world view, from an universalistic to a particularistic, from an exclusive, deterministic to an inclusive-holistic.

1.1.1 *The urgency of global orientated ('universal'³) ethical perspectives*

Sometimes it is very complicated to handle the problems of people from other cultures. Their situation can be so difficult that helping them or even the aim of self-help can not be achieved at all.

All in all we can focus on the following ethical questions whenever we are confronted with intercultural ethical conflicts and racial discrimination:

- Where can I make concessions without serious personal contradictions?

- What's important to me, even if it should not be important to the client? What seems to be problematic, but debatable?

- What can I do without? What is not respectable any more?

Of course, there is still the risk of answering these questions from a culturally-based or even biased point of view. Therefore it is important that Social Work becomes a world-wide net of solidarity not confining itself to little regional provinces. An orientation based on science and ethics can help to solve conflicts of culture and value. It can enable intercultural communication, the exchange of information and, of course, the debate between professionals even from all over the world.

1.1.2 *The proclamation of the concept and its publication in a 'Manual'*

The urgency for a world-wide communication about basic human values and about the violation of the Human Rights has grown in the last years with mobility, migration and globalisation. Members of

- "Centre for Human Rights" of United Nations in Geneva,

- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and

- International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)

have decided to consider Social Work as a Human Rights Profession. Silvia Staub-Bernasconi shows that such a concept is based on science and ethics and is therefore internationally debatable.

The self-concept of actors in Social Work, to work or teach in a Human Rights profession goes back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared on 10th of December 1948. This declaration is a recommendation, not a treaty. In 1992, when the United Nations proclaimed the Year of Human Rights, an essential step was taken towards its international confirmation. They proclaimed that the Human Rights are not only a universal obligation, but from now on they are regarded as a fundamental part of international law. To confirm their demand the "Centre of Human Rights" in Geneva published the manual "Human Rights and

³ We prefer the term 'global-orientated' instead of 'universal' dimensions because 'universal' is usually associated with its colonialist inheritance, whereas the term 'global-orientated' also shows the relation to the process of globalisation, which is responsible for the need of global-orientated ethical perspectives.

Social Work" together with the IFSW and IASSW. "A Manual for Schools of Social Work and Social Work Profession" (United Nations, 1994).

In their congresses in Lisbon in April/May 1995 the European sections of IFSW and IASSW accepted the recommendation of that Manual to realize the Human Rights in practice and education. Presented by Hans Ellenberger from the Association for Social Workers in Switzerland, by Faisal Azaiza from the "School of Social Work" at the University Haifa (Israel), the two of us (G. A. and H. W.) held a workshop about "Religion and Human Rights". At first we looked at the way social workers should see their profession as a Human Rights profession, and at the Ethic-Codex, published by the International Union of Social Workers in Sri Lanka in 1994. This way we learnt more about this Manual and could therefore use it in our lectures at our universities at home.

In the following chapters we are going to explain the fundamental significance of the Human Rights for social work.

1.1.3 Contents of the 'Manual'

The first part of the Manual contains basic questions and the philosophical background to the complex of "Human Rights and Social Work". As a consequence the following questions arise:

- Which rights are Human Rights?
- What is Social Work?
- How did the conception of Human Rights develop? And also:
- What is the meaning of philosophical values like "independence, liberty, equality, justice, solidarity...?" with the background of the Human Rights?

Part 3 of the Manual (43-82) is about suggestions how to realize "Human Rights and Social Work" in education. Other subjects are poverty, discrimination of sex, racism, religion, environment and development. Part 3 also deals with the specific problems of "vulnerable groups" such as like children, women, elderly people, handicapped, prisoners, refugees or migrants. The conclusion of this practical part is composed of eight examples of how to handle disregards of Human Rights in different countries in a professional way.

It is worth mentioning that this Manual contains fundamental documents and important suggestions for international communication between the workers in social fields. Because of this it can help to support their professional identity. This professional identity is based on a code of values which can give reasons for the scientific structure of the field.

The essential meaning of the concept

a) Universal human needs as fundament for Human Rights

Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (1995a; 2000a:155) was the first in the German speaking area to demonstrate the importance of the Human Rights for education and how social work can be seen in general. In her article "The professional self-image of Social Work – Ways out of modesty" (1995a) she shows, that Human Rights can give the possibility to Social Work to leave the alienation imposed by extern institutions which have the power to give orders to help, to an independent scientific order or rather to a theoretical foundation. Staub-Bernasconi develops the following basic thesis:

Human Rights are the local and global answer to the fundamental human needs. Responding to these human needs, Social Work can gain an independent scientific fundament for its self-concept. This means, of course, that in Social Work need-orientation takes priority over function-orientation.

To give reasons for this thesis, Silvia Staub-Bernasconi demonstrates that the development of social work in German-speaking areas is characterized by being too much bureaucratic, different from Social Work practice in Latin America during the Sixties with the reconceptualization of the methodologies. Because of this Staub-Bernasconi demands of social workers to take the needs of the concerned persons as the basis of their work – their needs and their resources, and not function and regulation.

b) Basis for an independent scientific concept of Social Work

According to need as a basis for Human Rights and also for Social Work, Staub-Bernasconi distinguishes between three categories of needs, following the concept of her colleague Werner Obrecht (1995):

- 1) Biological needs, for example to protect our body against violation
- 2) Psychological needs, for example to stimulate our senses – our eyes or ears – to perceive the world around us and to find our ways in it
- 3) Social needs, for example emotional care, love, friendship, self-respect, and dignity.

On the basis of the existing results of research it can be assured that these needs belong to everybody. Therefore a theoretical-scientific explanation for Human Rights exists and at the same time for the concept of its realisation world-wide.

Now we can conclude:

The orientation of Social Work

first by the basic human needs and

second by the Human Rights that respond to those needs,

has not the quality of "as you like" but the quality of urgency. In the international Code of Ethics for Social Workers from 1994 this urgency is proclaimed as follows: Social Work is not a profession with professional values "as you like", Social Work is a Human Rights Profession.

On the basis of this cognition and regarding to the self-concept of Social Work we can further conclude:

In whatever institutions social workers are employed – governmental, church or any other so called 'free' ('private') institutions – the obligation and the responsibility for a helping Social Work grows directly out of the needs of the social-citizens ('clients')⁴. All orders that come from institutions are indirect orders because in general they depend directly on the needs of the social-citizens.

Both are important – attitudes and contents of Human Rights Interaction between attitudes and contents

a) The anthropological understanding of Human Rights with the attitude to stand up in dignity and self-determination

In all reports about teaching Human Rights to Social Work students (for example in Fachhochschule Coburg, 1998; Pantucek, Vyslouzil 1999; Wronka, 1999) it is stated that there must be a continuous interaction between

training and reflecting the ethical attitudes of the Human Rights and

teaching the contents and articles of Human Rights.

We could recognise, that the basic attitude of 'Human Right' can become more transparent by looking at the anthropological meaning of the word 'right' ac-

⁴ cf. note. 2

According to the etymological roots of the terms 'di-reito' (Portuguese) – 'Recht' (German) – 'right' (English):

In etymological dictionaries (Kluge, 1989: 586) we find the following information about the original etymologic meaning of the word "right":

The term "right" goes back to the Indo-European word stem 'reg' = 'steer, direct, lead', to the synonymous Latin word 'régere' and the Greek word 'orégo' = 'I stretch' and finally to the old-Indian 'irajyati' = 'he/she arranges, leads'. So the word 'right' contains the meaning of 'to stretch oneself' ('to stand up'), 'to lead oneself and determine oneself'. This is the basis for the three central objectives of Human Rights – dignity, self-determination and justice.⁵

This etymological meaning of 'right' – 'direito' – 'Recht' (and similar in other Indo-European influenced languages) justifies the fundamental anthropological meaning of Human Rights:

Human Rights are the innate inalienable rights and fundamental liberties which belong to every individual. The individual has this right not as a gift from the government, no, the right belongs to the individual as human being. Therefore Human Rights must be considered fundamental existential categories of human being. You can get or lose some Civil Rights, but the right to be a human being is connected with every woman and man.

To express especially the anthropological dimension of Human Rights in a linguistically correct form, we prefer the following ontologically based formulation:

We as men – and in a more accurate way this means: we as women, men and children – don't have Human Rights, but we are our Human Right, that means the right to live in humane and sustainable conditions.

b) Gender-orientated and intercultural dimensions with the attitude of partnership

On the basis of this anthropological meaning of Human Rights we try to teach not only the contents of Human Rights in our lectures at the Portuguese Catholic University (G. A.) and at the Fachhochschule Ravensburg-Weingarten, (H. W.), no, we first try to make experiences about the attitudes of Human Rights by short sequences of trainings in working groups.

In consequence of the reflection on these attitudes we developed gender-orientated and intercultural orientated dimensions first in special seminars and now we try to integrate these dimensions in all lectures, seminars and trainings.

Networking between Human Rights and Sustainable Development

a) The concept of Sustainable Development from the UN-Conference 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

Human Rights are not to be understood as a fixed dogmatic block of articles and laws. Rather their basic ethical demands have to be developed; they must be realised in actual manifestations – global and regional and vice versa, again and again. We came to know the Human Rights in a first step – and step by step we have reached new generations in which there are included the right not to be excluded (multicultural dimension) and the right to have the best living conditions (environmental dimension). It concerns the collective rights – the Human Rights of third generation.

⁵ Human-orientated Justice does not mean that we must give all our clients exactly the same. It means that we must give each client what she or he needs to attain and maintain a way of living in dignity. Justice is not merely material justice. Justice must be orientated to needs and be given with 'love' and 'empathy'. Maybe this is a problem in the everyday social work; but such a subject-orientated or need-orientated way of working in the field of Social Work is the consequence of the concept claiming that the Human Rights are the basis of fundamental human needs. Therefore we must learn to act with different views of justice.

So the development could happen if we confront the pillars of Human Rights – dignity, self-determination and justice – with the global and regional circumstances of human co-existence. In consequence of this co-existence follows the urgency that all human beings are responsible to build their future by participation and co-operation:

The living conditions include the three most important dimensions of ecology, social life and economy. The significance of these collective dimensions for our common future was proclaimed at the United-Nations-Conference 1992 (14th of June) in Rio de Janeiro.

At this conference nearly all states of the world (178) committed themselves to realising the concept of 'Sustainable Development' – also called 'Agenda 21' (1992) which deals with the most important world-wide tasks in the 21st century.

The essential message of the concept of 'Sustainable Development' was already expressed at the so called 'Brundtland-Report' from 1987 with the classical phrase:

Sustainable Development "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This principle guidance of Sustainable Development was overtaken in principle 3 of the Declaration from Rio de Janeiro with the following demand: The right of development has to be realised in a way that the needs of today's and future generations to development and environment will be fulfilled justly.

b) The urgency to interdisciplinary and interprofessional cooperation with the attitude of responsibility by participation

We have recognised that the concept of 'Social Work as a Human Rights Profession' must be developed according to the needs of all human beings world-wide. In the concept of Sustainable Development these needs are seen in the context of ecology, economy and social life.

Especially regarding the facts,

- that most of the tasks of Social Work are so complex (theoretically and practically) that they can only be solved by interdisciplinary or interprofessional co-operation, and

- that most sciences and professions (e. g. technicians, economists, lawyers, architects) except Social Work are rather orientated to the concept of Sustainable Development than to the Human Rights,

it seems necessary to combine the anthropologically emphasised concept of Human-Right-Oriented with the more extensive ecological, social and economical concept of Sustainable Development.

The connection between the two concepts to the principal guidance of "human-orientated Sustainable Development" (Walz, 2000) can be a scientific basis for interdisciplinary and interprofessional cooperation in a global and local scale.

For example, in community projects (André, 1999-2001) and especially in a housing project in Lisbon suburbs a practical partnership was developed with social educators, nurses, doctors, teachers, garden-architects, lawyers, local entrepreneurs, politicians and social workers. Another realisation of this connection can be seen in continual multimedia projects (since 1997) at the Fachhochschule Ravensburg/Weingarten. In these projects teachers and students of Computer Science, Design, and Social Work are co-operating to create CD-ROMs with presentations under the perspective of Human Rights and Sustainable Development (Keller, Walz, 1998).

Empathy to the eastern traditions of Human-Rights-orientated values

Sometimes it is criticised that the Human Rights have Jewish-Christian and western traditions, and therefore they cannot be accepted in Asian regions. In a way this is true, indeed. We can see this by a short review of the historical origins of the Human Rights:

a) *Mainly western-occidental origins of the Human Rights*

If the Human Rights consist of such fundamental human values as dignity, self-determination and justice, you can expect that they must have been articulated already long time ago in historical documents. Such documents can be regarded as the roots for the development of the Human Rights. The scientist of Religion Hubertus Halbfas (1983: 37) enumerates the following origins of Human Rights:

- 1) The Codex of King Hammurabi in the 2nd millennium BC;
- 2) The 'Decalogue' in the Jewish-Christian Bible (Exodus 20)
- 3) The laws of Solon in Athens (640-520 BC)
- 4) The edict of the Buddhist King Ashoka (3rd century BC)
- 5) The Sermon of Jesus on the Mount in the Christian Bible (Mathew 5-7)
- 6) The American Declaration of Human Rights in 1776
- 7) The declaration of Human Rights in the French Revolution 1789
- 8) The Communist Manifest (Karl Marx 1847/48)
- 9) Mahatma Gandhi's (1869-1948) program of non-violence.

b) *Appreciation of an independent eastern origin of Human Rights*

Since the occidental-western influences in the development of Human Rights are predominating, there is often brought the argument, that Human Rights were forced on Asian people in a colonist manner. Surely, if we look especially at the dominant western resources of Human Rights, pointed out above, this argument can be justified. But today even Asian experts confirm that Asian traditions contain the human basic values: dignity, self-determination and justice. Therefore the Human Rights could be valid in future also for Asian people as a legal-ethical basis for a world-wide ('universal') society.

Eu-Jeung Lee (1998) from South Korea teaches politics at the University of Halle (Germany) as a scientist. She confirms:

"Even if the authoritarian politicians in Eastern-Asia want to deny it: Human dignity and criticism of power are central components of Confucian's doctrine". According to Lee a discussion between East and West is necessary, held with empathy about the respective traditions to democracy and Human Rights. As a consequence of this aspect, she gives the following comment:

The "simplified black-white perspective" between East and West has been predominant up to these days. This view hinders us from developing a real western-eastern dialog of Human Rights. As long as Human Rights and democracy are propagated only as western values, the West plays the role of a master. This reminds of the colonial past when particularly the West violated Human Rights and democracy. In the mind of the people in Eastern Asia the humiliation still lingers on. And this is the reason why it is so easy for authoritarian regimes to use national pride against the West. The western Human Rights policy against Asia should try to get empathy and an orientation which allows to derive Human Rights and democracy from the Asian culture and tradition itself.

The Iranian scientist of Literature and activist for Human Rights Faradsch Sarkuhi (1998) takes a very similar view about the relationship between Human Rights and democracy in the perspective of Islam:

"It's important to not look at the Islam ideologically. All people have to think about their own way of life in freedom and without fear and live it in an independent way. All of our mysticism says that there are many ways to reach the truth... We cannot copy everything from

the West... We have to find a solution that gives justice to our society. We need a modern interpretation of religion...

If the western intellectuals and of course also the governments understand the dialogue with us as a critical dialogue, then this would make sense. It is important that the West takes the Human Rights seriously, that they don't think only of their advantage..."

An Example: Supervision in the perspective of Human-Rights-orientated Sustainable Development – an experience with students at a Neighbouring Association

In the seminar about Strategies of Socially Inclusive Policies held in Prague (4th-9th of May 1999) the following conclusions were proclaimed: "...the building of communities in which everybody is considered as a member without any kind of exclusion must be the principal aim of the integration processes. So, the integration policies must reject marginalizing and segregating situations..."

A group of Social Work students of a Portuguese University have developed some projects at a local community concerning the aims referring to the conclusions drawn at the Prague Seminar. One of the students has organised a project which supports the local Neighbouring Association. The student improves the program activities with the representatives of the Association Social Bodies.

It is intended to support an immigrant population returned from ex-Portuguese African colonies into a complex process of integration at a social housing quarter and to stimulate them in direction to replying to their local, family, professional and personal needs.

We (supervisor and student) must be very aware with some important principles, such as, taking care of the integration of these persons considering their individual traits to be a complete citizen and refusing all the dangerous processes close to xenophobia, little self esteem, and – in a multicultural way – wrong perspectives among them.

The housing processes have been successful in so far as it has been possible to dynamise interchanges and co-operation among the neighbours even when they have arrived from different parts of the world and challenging their participation capacities.

Living in a neighbouring group requires good housing conditions but also (not less important) an adequate process of urban integration concerning a sustainable perspective of the local development because the life happens everyday in several dimensions and with responsibility to the future generations. We all – neighbours, students and supervisors – must join together and learn how to do it in the best way.

At this workshop session we will invite the participants to exchange with us about this experience.

Conclusion

The development of Social Work as a Human Rights Profession in combination with the concept of Sustainable Development leads us to the principal guidance of human-orientated Sustainable Development and to the following changes of perspective in theory and practice:

In sciences: from a deterministic and mechanistic understanding to a participating and more holistic understanding;

in our view of the world and the relationship between nations, cultures and religions: from colonialist and universalistic perspectives to mainly federalist, intercultural and inter-religious perspectives;

in our view of gender-relationship: from gender/sex neutral or gender/sex hostile to gender-reflecting and gender-related perspectives with partnership-orientated principles of guidance.

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