



## **Culturally Relevant Social Work Curriculum: A Ethical Imperative**

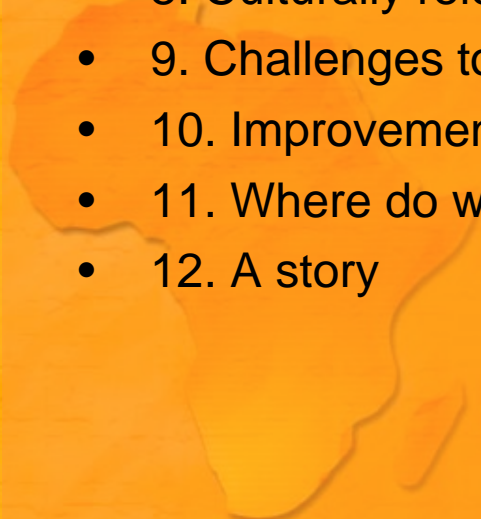
Dr.Linda Kreitzer

International Association of Schools of Social Work  
workshop entitled:

'Intersecting social work ethics in academic writing,  
training and field supervision for ethical social work  
practice'.

Nairobi, Kenya: January 13, 2017

# Presentation

- 1. My story
  - 2. Historical context of African social work curriculum
  - 3. Writers on the topic of African social work curriculum
  - 4. What is culturally relevant curriculum
  - 5. International policies
  - 6. What is ethics
  - 7. Cultural challenges
  - 8. Culturally relevant social work curriculum
  - 9. Challenges to creating culturally relevant social work curriculum
  - 10. Improvements in curriculum evaluation
  - 11. Where do we go from here?
  - 12. A story
- 

# My own background

**1994-1996** – Taught social work at the University of Ghana, Legon.

**2004** – PhD dissertation entitled 'Social work in Africa: Exploring culturally relevant education and practice in Ghana. Published in 2012.

**2005-2014** – Found, copied, printed and distributed the Association of Social Work Education in Africa (ASWEA) conference and presentation documents to a number of African social work programs. They are also online for all to read and download.

**2005 – 2015** – Attended and presented at African social work conferences.



# Historical context of African social work curriculum



- Traditional ways of caring for the more vulnerable in society.
- Colonial empires introduced social services which did not take into account traditional ways and were remedial.
- Missionary groups and charities also provided services.
- Introduction of social work training through the United Nations in the 1960's.
- Coincided with African countries becoming independent.
- First training in Kenya was in 1962 (Wairire, 2014).



# Historical context of African social work curriculum

- Creation of the Association of Social Work Education in Africa (ASWEA) – 1973-1989.
- Began questioning the relevance of western social work curriculum to the African setting.



# Historical context of African social work curriculum

- Dr. Memunka (1973) states: In my opinion the time has come for serious and critical re-examination of social work training in Africa...20<sup>th</sup> century Africa expects social work to be **creative** and **revolutionary**. In the context of the inter-disciplinary approach...social workers should be able to make a positive contribution as members of inter-disciplinary development teams...However, it is again necessary to reiterate my earlier concern that **unless the profession of social work is prepared to take a new path, social workers will for a long time to come remain ineffective in developing countries (ASWEA, 1973, Doc. # 6).**



# Historical context of African social work curriculum

- In 1977, Dr. Murapa, in Document 12, states the following:

“African instructors, being from the most part products of western education, have proved either incapable or unwilling to engage in **extensive** and **creative** revision of the existing textbooks, curricula and approaches to make them **relevant** to the social and other developmental problems and aspirations in Africa”.



# The issue through writing

- Yimam
- James Midgely
- Yvonne Asamoah
- Kwaku Osei-Hwedie
- Lengwe Mwansa
- Nigel Hall
- Mel Gray
- Alice Butterfield and Tasse Abby





# The issue through writing

- Roderick Mupedziswa and Refilwe Sinkamba
- Vishanthie Sewpaul
- Helmut Spitzer, Janestic Twikirize and Gidraph Wairire
- Linda Kreitzer

I once asked a group of social workers in Canada what they would come up with if we deleted our present curriculum and created a new curriculum. What would the result be?



# What does culturally relevant mean? - Culture

“The whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social groups...it includes modes of life, the fundamental rights of human beings, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 1982, p. 1).



# Culture

1. Dynamic and not static. Needs to change with the times.
2. Can be positive and negative to human beings.
3. It is about the past, present and future.
4. It is learned and doesn't come naturally.
5. In Kenya, there are 42 tribes with subtribes therein (Wairire, 2014).



# What does culturally relevant mean? - Relevant

Appropriate to the current time, period or circumstances; of contemporary interest.

1. Contemporary
2. Addressing social issues of the time.



# Culturally relevant social work curriculum

- Social work courses that are contemporary and which address social issues of the time that are relevant to the cultures of the country. It involves continual evaluation of cultural practices in light of international declarations, International Social Work definitions and ethical principles, African Charter of Human Rights, national constitutions and traditional cultures.







Policy  
Practice



Positive  
Cultural  
Practice

Social  
Justice,  
Inclusion and  
Ethical  
Practice

# Cornerstones of policy governing social work Practice

- International Declaration on Human Rights
- Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- International definition and ethical principles of Social Work
- African Charter of Human Rights





# International Declaration of Human Rights

- Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.



# Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

- Article 1
- Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law.



# African Charter on Human Rights

- Also includes collective or group human rights.



# Three international bodies of social workers

## – Definition of Social Work

- Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.



# Ethics

- Ethics deals with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions (Dictionary, 2010, para. 4).
- Social workers have an important ethical role to play with the Kenyan new constitution of 2010 in supporting “human dignity, equality and freedoms from discrimination” (Wairire, 2014, p. 94).



# Examples of cultural challenges

1. Poverty
2. Sexual and Gender minorities
3. Albinism
4. Refugees



# Culturally relevant social work curriculum

- Starts from a social development theory.
- Addresses social issues contemporary to that country. Know your history and culture.
- Challenges our own values, biases and prejudices concerning the way we view others.
- Uses appropriate research methods when doing social work research, for example Participatory Action Research, Appreciative inquiry...
- Works with positive local cultural interventions that enhances the well-being of the individual, community and country. For example vyamas in Kenya.
- Use African social work articles and books in the classroom instead of relying on western articles.



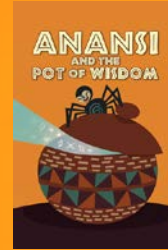
# Chinua Achebe

- “There is that great proverb – that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter – Once I realized that, I had to be a writer”.



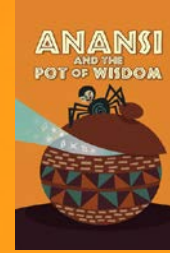


# Anansi story



- There is a story of Anansi who was given all the wisdom in the world in a clay pot by the Lion King. Anansi had to promise to share this wisdom with all of the world. Of course Anansi said yes and took the pot home. At home Anansi looked into the pot and saw depths of wisdom he did not know about. He decided not to share the wisdom with anyone else. So he put all the knowledge in the world into a pot, hung the pot around his neck and was climbing a coconut tree so that nobody else could have access to knowledge. He hung the pot right in front of him so he was having some difficulty in climbing the tree. His son, Ntikuma, was standing by watching Anansi climb the tree with difficulty. He suggested to his father to

# Anansi story



- put the pot of knowledge at his back for that would facilitate the climbing. Anansi did not like being told by a child what to do but did so anyway and found the climbing easier. However he slipped and the pot smashed down to the ground and all of the wisdom in the pot flew to all parts of the world. People collected the wisdom and shared it with friends and family. The point of the story: **Nobody can claim to know everything and so must be open and ready to acquire new knowledge. Sharing knowledge is what makes a person wise.**

# Culturally Relevant social work curriculum

- Addresses power relationships in the context of social issues;
- Appropriate field education;

## **In the classroom**

- A safe classroom;
- A teaching style that is more conducive to a communal society;
- It supports the building of relationships with all peoples of the world.



# Challenges to creating culturally relevant social work curriculum

1. Our own cultural practices;
2. Our religious, cultural values that are opposed to inclusion and basic human rights;
3. Laws that are discriminatory.
4. Western knowledge is the best knowledge;
5. Brain drain;
6. Time, low pay, resources;
7. Lack of commitment to regular evaluation of curriculum from the bottom-up;
8. Lack of writing.



# Improvements to curriculum evaluation – Small steps

1. Evaluate in light of the international policies of the United Nations, African Charter and Social Work international bodies.
2. Use continental articles that address social work issues in Africa.
3. Commit to staying in Africa to develop the profession of social work and practice; address identity crisis.
4. Critique social work theories, philosophies and practice in light of African philosophy, traditional practices;



# Improvements to curriculum evaluation – Small steps

5. Use of local African case studies;
6. Develop your Association and a Code of Ethics to reflect African culture.



# Where do we go from here? It is about relationships.

- It is an ethical imperative that social work curriculum teach from an ethical, human rights perspective that is inclusive of diversity, cultural shifts, values and traditions and that is inclusive of all human beings. This demands a continual evaluation of values and beliefs at the individual, community and nation levels.
- It also includes a continual evaluation of social work curriculum



# Do you want adapted old shoes or new shoes

- Mecca was a very fortunate West African man. He had a job that drew envy from his fellow villagers. He worked for a White man who was very generous. Indeed, the White boss was so nice to Mecca that he gave him a special gift: a pair of used shoes. Mecca was very excited. This was his very first pair of shoes. The shoes had a little problem, though. They were too tight to fit Mecca's untamed feet. But, he was still determined to wear them. So, he drilled holes in the corners of the shoes such that his pinky toes would stick out as he walked. He was very proud. He marched through the village showing off his new acquisition to friends and neighbours and praising the White man for his infinite goodness" (Ndura, 2006, pp. 92-93).





# References

- Asamoah, Y. (1995). Africa. In T.D. Watts, E. Elliott & N.S. Mayadas (Eds). *International Handbook on social work education* (223-40). Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Butterfield, A. & Abye, T. (2013). *Social development and social work: Learning from Africa*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dictionary (2016). *Definition of ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/ethics>
- Gray, M. & Coates, J. (2008). From 'indigenization' to cultural relevance. In M. Gray, J. Coates, and M. Yellowbird (Eds). *Indigenous social work around the world. Towards culturally relevant education and practice*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Hall, Nigel (1990). Social work training in Africa: A field manual. Harare, Zimbabwe: Journal of Social Development in Africa.
- Kreitzer, L. (2012). *Social work in Africa: Exploring culturally relevant education and practice in Ghana*. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary.

# References

- Midgley, J. (1981). *Professional imperialism: Social Work in the Third World*. London, UK: Heinemann.
- Mupedzswa, R. & Sinkamba, R.P. (2014). Social work education and training in southern and east Africa: Yesterday, today and tomorrow. In C.Noble, H. Strauss & B. Littlechild (Eds). *Global social work: Crossing borders, blurring boundaries*. Sydney, NZ: Sydney University Press.
- Mwansa, L.K.J. (2010). Challenges facing social work education in Africa. *International Social Work*, 53,1,129-36.
- Ndura, E. (2006). Western education and African cultural identity in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: A case of failed globalization. *Peace & Change*, 31,1,January, 90-101.
- Oswei-Hwedie, K. & Jacques, G. (2007). *Indigenizing social work in Africa*. Accra, Ghana: Ghana Universities Press.
- Sewpaul, V. & Lombard, A. (2004). Social work education, training and standards in Africa. *Social Work Education*, 23,5, 537-54.

# References

- Spitzer, H., Twikirize, J.M., & Wairire, G.G. (2014). *Professional social work in East Africa: Towards Social Development, Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality*. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers.
- UNESCO (1982). *Mexico City declaration on cultural policies*. World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mexico City, 26 July – 6 August.  
<http://www.wwcd.org>
- Wairire, G.G. (2014). The state of social work education and practice in Kenya. In H. Spitzer, J.M. Twikirize, & G.G. Wairire, (Eds.). *Professional social work in East Africa*. Oxford, UK: African Books collective.
- Yiman, A. (1990). *Social development in Africa: 1950-1985*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury.

