

Back to the future: Evaluating a project to disseminate practice learning and teaching in Ukraine

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Summary: This article reports on an experience of training social work practice educators in the Chernihiv law College in northern Ukraine. The purpose of the visit was to examine whether the UK values critical to UK social work training were able to transfer to other cultures. During their visit, the authors taught a five-day module on practice learning and used research tools of questionnaire, structural interviews and focus groups to collate and analyse data that sought to examine the transferability of values. Positive changes to practice teaching were brought about as a result of their visit.

Keywords: practice teaching, values, transferability, eastern Europe

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Introduction and Context

In September 2000 the authors were invited, via the TEMPUS European Development project, to visit the Chernihiv Law College (now an 'Institute' – we use both terms – see below: 'Conclusions') in northern Ukraine to teach on a five-day module at Masters' level. This was designed to help those delivering social work education in their Oblast (region).

Anglia Polytechnic University was a partner in this project, and continues through TEMPUS to be a partner with Higher Education Establishments in Ukraine. One of the authors had undertaken a similar visit in Kyiv (Kiev) three years previously. Both the authors had extensive experience of practice teaching and learning in the UK as practice teachers and lecturers. One had been Chair of the East Anglian Organisation for Practice Teaching (EAOPT), and the other had been Chair of the National Organisation for Practice Teaching (NOPT). One was a training manager in a large statutory agency, and the other was a university Practice Learning Coordinator with working connections in the voluntary or non governmental organisation (NGO) sector. The authors had previous extensive experience of working and teaching in tandem, from a common value base. This mix of experience and skill was the main reason for the invitation for the authors to undertake this visit.

Our visit represented the final TEMPUS input at Chernihiv Law College. Unlike other large cities in Ukraine, notably Kyiv and Lviv, Chernihiv had very few teaching visits from UK social work educators. However, some of the College's social work lecturers had undertaken their professional training on a TEMPUS supported course in Kyiv.

The major content of the five-day module focussed on practice learning and the development of assessment and work-based learning systems. However, 'woven' into the content, at the request of the group, were sub-themes of adult learning theory, teaching methods, teaching techniques and presentation skills. TEMPUS aims to disseminate social work education throughout Europe, and contemporaneous and immediate evaluation of the teaching block demonstrated its success to those ends, and that the participants valued the learning.

Following our initial visit in 2000, the Director of the College expressed a strong interest in our returning, after an appropriate time span, to evaluate the effect of our input on their teaching and learning

systems and to assist with planning further developments. In 2002 we were successful in obtaining a grant from Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) via the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This allowed us to fund a small research project to assess the impacts of our previous visit. In addition, we were testing the validity of short-term development projects against our hypothesis that longer-term local 'partnership' working would be a more effective way to initiate and support professional developments.

We considered such research important for those involved in social work education in the UK and other European countries, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of working in newly independent post-Soviet countries that have recently experienced great structural change at social, economic and political levels.

Our research posed the following questions:

- Do our UK systems, values and practices transfer to other cultures?
- Were the stated aims of TEMPUS with regard to 'dissemination' of practice appropriate?
- Have we managed to sow fertile seeds rather than impose potentially inappropriate or damaging systems?
- Have our learners been able to develop their practice as a result of our visit?
- What, if anything, is needed next?
- If TEMPUS (and similar projects) are about facilitating change, what evidence of this has there been in the context of our visits?

This paper will reflect on our initial teaching visit and presents the subsequent research findings. It is an account of how two experienced social work educators (but with very limited research activity) learned from their experience when they went 'Back to the Future' in Ukraine.

First Visit: September 2000

Our first visit to the Chernihiv Law College, in September 2000, as previously stated, was via the TEMPUS Development Project. We were invited to deliver a five-day intensive module focussing on the following subject areas:

- Adult learning theory
- Practice learning values
- Practice learning – Who? What? Why? Where? When? How?
- Identifying and developing learning placements
- Training, developing and supporting practice teachers
- Models of practice learning / roles and responsibilities
- Placement planning, induction, learning agreements, endings
- Power relationships, teaching, learning and assessment
- Standards, evidence (triangulation, Direct Observation) and failing students
- Learning and teaching techniques / presentation skills.

The whole process was supported by building on the knowledge and experience gained by one of the authors through a similar previous teaching visit to Kyiv.

One of the issues which we addressed was that of constructing the agenda for our teaching. Bridge (2000) describes a similar experience of teaching in Eastern Europe, and suggests that the ownership of agenda setting should rest with the group of learners, and that the teachers should be responsive to this. However, previous experience of one author was in trying to 'pick up the pieces' following a previous teacher who had used this process, abandoned given structure, and inadvertently 'pinched' all the ground to be covered the next week, whilst leaving a curriculum gap in a certificated course! Our module too was part of a certificated Masters programme. Thus we were clear that the content, negotiated between college, TEMPUS and ourselves, had to be delivered.

From this starting point we were determined to reconcile the two factors of given curriculum and 'starting where the learners are' (Knowles, 1980; Rogers, 2002).

Whilst the research findings indicate that the learners' agenda was

more keyed-in to actual tasks of their working lives, it was easily agreed and accepted by the group that the given curriculum was essential. Indeed this provided a coherent structure to the module and, therefore, to the larger programme as a whole.

The prevalent learning and teaching environment in post-Soviet higher education institutions is on the whole traditional in nature with classic didactic lectures as the norm. The concept of 'androgogy' (Knowles, 1980), i.e. the teacher as a facilitator of learning, was somewhat alien to the group. Conversely, our mode of delivery was very interactive and therefore we had to be particularly sensitive to the group's reaction to our rather different teaching style and learning methods. In this respect as a 'teaching team', although our practice backgrounds were very different, we have been heavily influenced by the work of Brigham (1974), Freire (1972), Morrison (1993) and Rogers (2002). As a result we share a common value base that is firmly committed to adult learning principles and that these are universally transferable, indeed this aspect has formed one of the major hypotheses of our research.

Two major learning domains of the group were to enhance their presentation skills and learn new teaching methods. The group consisted of college social work educators, practice teachers and service managers from both state and voluntary sectors. These were individuals who were in key positions that would enable them to 'disseminate' new ideas and practices, one of the key objectives of the TEMPUS Project and other similar programmes. We therefore felt it essential that we demonstrated a full range of teaching techniques and used a variety of resources that would be easily understood, transferable and readily available in Ukraine. This latter point of resource availability is particularly important given the general lack of funding allocated to resources in higher education.

Our overall teaching strategy mirrored that of Catherine Sawdon (Doel et al, 1996) who suggests a 'tool kit' of action techniques for social work practice teachers, her taxonomy is easily transferable to class teaching situations, she suggests following groups of techniques:

- Hardware such as IT, audio, video, OHP, etc.
- Written and printed materials
- Graphic material, such as charts, diagrams, pictures, cartoons and illustrations
- Experiential – role-play, sculpting, simulations, etc.

All of our teaching was undertaken via interpreters. Therefore using graphic materials and experiential techniques became significant when delivering the learning. Given the general lack of resources we were unable to use information technology based approaches such as PowerPoint. Indeed there was even a lack of flipchart paper and pens – what little was available we used sparingly to provide permanent records of issues and activities that could be typed up for later use. We had prepared some overhead projector acetates, mainly pre-translated, for factual and visual presentations. In the main, however, we used a chalkboard for simple data, presenting models, inter-active work and dispensable feedback, giving us a different teaching discipline from our usual styles. This was a positive use of simpler technologies.

In our first session with the learning group we formulated a shared agenda that reconciled the given curriculum with the group's learning needs. This was achieved via a group exercise where we charted their stated learning needs and 'wove' these into the 'fabric' of the set programme. Our use of such metaphors was a persistent thread throughout our teaching. Metaphors were used as a vehicle for sharing and elaborating our experiences and as a medium for common understanding. We are indebted to our friend and colleague David Sawdon, who has skilfully demonstrated use of metaphors in NOPT Annual Workshops, and on training events.

When using metaphors we were careful to check for common understanding, given differences in culture and language. The visual aspect of many metaphors enhanced our ability to transcend language barriers. Indeed, the process itself of checking meaning between learners and teachers further embedded the learning. As a result, the method of using metaphors became common learning currency offered by teachers and learners. A prime example of this was discussing marginal or failing students who had not previously presented learning issues. We use the metaphor of a swan: very serene, apparently calm on the surface of the water; but frantically paddling below to make headway against the current. Our group members were quickly able to relate this metaphor to learning processes.

What Surprised Us!

Initially we were somewhat taken aback at the influence of the prevalent model of didactic teaching (ref). At times there was a reluctance to engage in group activities. However, when 'encouraged' to undertake some collage work in groups, attitudes did change dramatically. After this experience they were able to reflect on the value and purpose of this method and having to work alongside those with whom they had at times disagreed professionally. We initiated an exercise that resulted in the group identifying a common value base with regard to practice teaching and learning. Consequently we explored links and comparisons with NOPT (2000) Code of Practice for Practice Teachers and the value statements in CCETSW's (1996) rules and regulations for the Diploma in Social Work. This process, exploring a common value statement that could be used with Practice Teachers and students was a risky strategy (what if we had nothing in common?). In reality, it provided a firm foundation for learning – and certainly supported our hypothesis that social work values can be universal. Our experience here echoed that of Cornwell, et al. (1999), particularly around student centredness.

We were also anxious about raising issues relating to anti-discriminatory practice. However there was a remarkable commonality at a conceptual level, demonstrating some 'deep' prior learning on the part of the group. Our experience in this respect somewhat differed from that of Bridge (2000).

One author was pleasantly surprised at the group's willingness to address teaching and learning issues. This contrasted sharply with a similar visit to Kyiv three years earlier when a group resisted this, wishing to concentrate on learning social work practice.

Overall we were very impressed with the group's levels of enthusiasm to learn despite the often difficult circumstances within some of their working environments. Quite often they were low paid, not paid regularly and experienced very adverse working conditions. One individual who worked in a prison was regularly operating in a climate of violence and anti-social work culture. Despite this he was committed to providing appropriate and worthwhile learning experiences for social work students.

The research

The research was conducted using three different tools:

- Evaluation Questionnaires (for participants in the original learning programme)
- Structural Interviews (for individual participants in the original learning programme)
- Focus Groups (for groups of people with similar roles – for example, lecturers/tutors, practice teachers, student social workers)

This use of different data collection instruments allowed us to collate and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to draw some empirical conclusions whilst also being able to generate narrative and creative feedback and ideas for future development. Robertson and Dearling (2004) describe how potential insights provided by either model of data collection can be missed in the other, and that much social research demands a mixture of methodology, as we used.

The Evaluation questionnaires

These were designed so that learners could reflect on their learning from September 2000 and see how much impact this learning had had on their practice in social work education since then. This was elicited in two sections – firstly the learning objectives of the ‘given’ teaching agenda, and secondly the learning objectives of the agenda compiled by the learning group. Additionally, the questionnaires were also designed to evaluate how effective a number of the aspects of teaching had been for respondents as learners.

Scores were ranked on a four point scale (1 = not effective, 4 = very effective). Thus the median (‘satisfactory’) score was 2.5.

For each of the three sections, respondents were asked to provide short narrative comments on the three learning objectives/aspects that they found most useful/effective.

The structured interviews

These were designed to go into more depth with a smaller number of individuals from the original learning group – to discuss how learning from that week may have affected the participants' practice in social work education since, alongside other changes and developments.

Whilst it was out intention to use this format with original group members in their workplaces, it proved difficult to see them on their own as complete management and staff groups wanted to speak with us. Additionally, we soon discovered that a few of the questions were not generally pertinent (e.g. section on use of Learning Agreements, as there is a prescriptive Government-led system).

Therefore in practice we used the structured interview framework as a tool for leading discursive interviews with a number of people – drawing out what is happening in the field of practice teaching and learning in Ukraine, strengths, weaknesses and aspects for change/development.

Focus groups

The focus groups were set up for groups of people with similar jobs/roles in the practice learning arena.

Four topics were suggested for each of the groups, which met for one hour. The groups used a model of 'strengths/weaknesses' and 'keep/change' (Doel et al, 1996) to examine these topic areas. We did not take part in the discussions – but facilitated, recorded, kept time and led a debriefing session afterwards.

This gave us a good qualitative picture of what is working well, what needs to change, and building up a development agenda for the future.

Ethical issues

We had identified some ethical issues in undertaking this research:

- Anonymity and confidentiality – local, college, publication of material;
- Reporting back – accountability;

- Power of interpretation process
- Ensuring common understandings
- How do we ensure we do not get 'the answers they think we want to hear'?
- Setting the framework with the college (as an interested party).

We shared these issues with our colleagues in Chernihiv Law College and with all participants in the research – exploring best ways to minimise/counteract any problem areas. Throughout we endeavoured to maintain a learning culture of openness, honesty, freedom to express any views – positive or critiquing – in order to both evaluate effectiveness and to develop an agenda for future activity.

Evaluation questionnaire: Part 1

Overall the rating scores with regard to the usefulness of the set agenda were high for all areas, ranging from 4.0 to 3.1, the most useful in the subsequent work undertaken by the respondents can be grouped as:

- Social work/practice learning values
- Learning and teaching techniques
- Presentation skills
- Assessment issues.

Whilst all areas were rated relatively highly those with the lower scores, when related to usefulness in subsequent work were:

- Failing students
- Relationships, power and learning agreements
- Training, developing and supporting practice teachers.

However, undertaking the research provided us with further contextual knowledge. Such knowledge highlighted some of the assumptions that we had brought to our first teaching visit and therefore to the content of the research questionnaires. We ascertained that structurally, learning agreements and the development of practice teachers are not within the domain or influence of our learners' practice. We also found that there is not

a culture of failing students in practice (although they may fail academically). As a result these content areas were obviously of great interest to our learners, but perhaps not so relevant from a current practice perspective. However, the interest shown in 2000 was a good indicator to raise possibilities when discussing a developmental plan for future work.

The UK experience of academic and professional practice being integrated both holistically in assessment is at the beginning stage of development in Chernivhiv, academic assessment being prevalent. We introduced the concept of a practice curriculum in our initial visit but our research highlighted that our learners not been able to implement such a learning system to date. However, in a recent visit (July 2004) the development of the Practice Teacher as a formal assessor of practice has been put on the agenda for future joint work.

It was to our particular surprise (at the beginning of our research visit) that the concept of learning agreements was not more highly ranked, given the interest and enthusiasm for this particular topic we had encountered from the original learning group. Again, this has remained 'on the agenda' as an aspect for possible future development.

We also learned that there is not, as yet, a regular practice teachers' training course in the region, indeed formal systems for supporting and training practice teachers are only at the embryonic stage. At present formal meetings between all local practice teachers and the college staff take place every three years! However, our research has indicated that the links between individually assigned tutors, practice teachers and agencies is very strong. As a result of our second visit, the college is considering organising a more frequent developmental forum. Indeed it became apparent through discussion with all parties that these three topics remained important, and could be the focus of future joint activities as practice learning systems develop in the Chernihiv Oblast region.

The four most highly rated areas perhaps reflected the practical aspects of delivering work-based learning, which is not entirely surprising as we did ask what had been most 'useful' in their work. The lower rated ones focussed on certain systems and processes which, as became evident to us, were largely in the control of others, for example College and Government Ministry.

The high rating of the values content supports our original hypothesis (prior to our teaching in 2000) that practice learning values, adult learning principles and social work values have some universality and practical transferability.

In our initial visit in 2000, we were delighted at the group's willingness to develop and to test out new learning and teaching techniques, and presentation skills. Little did we guess at just how much change this learning would facilitate. On our research visit in 2003, we heard how the social work school at the Law College in Chernihiv had changed its teaching methodology and how a new Social Work Education Programme in another college had designed its teaching methodology in line with the approaches learned on our module. Even more startlingly, we saw in action how a rural school 40 kilometres away had changed some of its teaching culture from a didactic to an interactive approach, due to working in partnership with one of our students.

We were shown collage work, symbolism, drawings and diagrammatic presentations produced by social work students in the college, since our previous visit. One of the lecturers had been inspired by the module to set up a 'Student of the Year' competition where a short-list of five students shared their talents in front of 400 other students and staff (and two researchers from England!) by using drama, quiz and project presentation – quite an innovation for the college.

Evaluation questionnaire: Part 2

These objectives were set as a result of an 'idea-storming' exercise on the first morning of the original module in 2000, as part of agenda setting for the week. Therefore some of these objectives were of quite personal/specialist interest to individuals/small numbers within the group.

Thus, as the evaluation showed, there was more variation between the perceived usefulness of these objectives than of those in the 'set' agenda, although the scores were still high (range 3.9 to 3.0).

The 'most useful' comments showed more marked clustering; but the depth of a number of individual comments demonstrated just how important it had been to take on these personal learning objectives. Examples included: 'Due to this knowledge we developed more tight links with NGOs'; 'I use statistics (information from the UK) in my lectures'; 'A volunteers programme was implemented in the orphanage in Chernihiv'.

The highest ranked objectives were:

- New methods of social work education in higher education
- Groupwork with clients
- Governmental Agencies and NGOs – roles and responsibilities
- Social work and social policy in the UK
- Information about voluntary organisations in the UK

The higher ranked areas were perhaps relevant to most of the group, in contrast some of the lesser ranked areas reflect more specialist interests, e.g. working in prisons. The average rating was 3.5 (out of 4), indicating that most of the learning was highly applicable to practice, either directly or through transferred learning.

Objectives ranked lower were:

- Statistics (information from the UK)
- Management of social work
- Practical work in the UK
- Case study working with those who work with prisoners

Although the scores for these objectives were somewhat lower as a group score, some achieved high scores for individuals to whom the topics were work-relevant, particularly 'management' and 'working with prisoners'.

Evaluation questionnaire: Part 3

Unlike Parts 1 and 2, where evaluation was targeted specifically to post-course utilisation, this section was designed to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the teaching on the 2000 module. We had requested, but did not receive, an analysis taken (in Ukrainian) at the end of our teaching week in 2000. We were told that this evaluation had been very positive, which tied in with a group exercise, undertaken on the final day of our teaching to evaluate the immediate reflections on achievement of the learning objectives.

In this third part of the Evaluation Questionnaire, we asked how effective fourteen aspects of our teaching had been for the individuals as learners. All aspects were rated very highly, with scores ranging from 4.0 to 3.7, as below:

1. The information given	3.9
2. Adult learning principles demonstrated in the teaching	3.9
3. Modelling of social work values in the teaching processes	3.8
4. Valuing the contributions of the learners	3.8
5. Incorporating the learners' learning needs into the module agenda	4.0
6. Comparing aspects of social work and practice learning in the UK to those in Ukraine	3.9
7. Teaching as a pair	3.9
8. Teaching using interpreters	3.7
9. Using different models of teaching	3.9
10. Learner participation in the process	3.9
11. Use of humour in the teaching	4.0
12. Overhead projector slides	3.9
13. Handout material	3.9
14. Organisation of the module	3.9

Given the similarity of scores, it is difficult to differentiate these areas for evaluative purposes. However, the 'perfect' scores for 'incorporating the learners' agenda' and 'use of humour' were borne out by the authors' anecdotal evidence. Similarly, we were not surprised at the slightly lower score for 'teaching using interpreters'; which was primarily a (very successful) method of overcoming a barrier, rather than a teaching method in its own right.

The Structured interviews

The structured interviews were designed to highlight how the learning from our original teaching week may have affected practice learning in social work education in Ukraine since, alongside other changes and developments. Our hosts (Chernihiv Law College) were also keen to obtain feedback from their placement providers regarding ongoing relationships and in particular to identify areas for further developmental change. We originally intended to interview several members of our 2000 learning group; however due to their geographical spread this proved to impractical. We therefore focussed on interviewing key individuals from placement agencies and key academic personnel in

the college. The focus of the interviews centred on current practice, its strengths and issues for developmental activity.

The interviews were designed to elicit qualitative information to expand on the data provided by the Evaluation Questionnaires, and to incorporate other perspectives (than our original learners) into the research. We designed a framework of question areas, knowing that it would emerge that different areas would be more relevant for different interviews. These 'templates' were used for questioning and recording purposes, with particular areas expanded upon during interviews where appropriate. The methodology was that described as 'semi-structured interviews', (Punch, 2005, p.169) in which common threads could be expanded in individual responses.

Thus the structured interviews provided two major areas of information to add to the reflective and evaluative feedback we had received from our learning group:

1. Information (and therefore understanding) about current systems, power relationships, and practice: strengths and weaknesses.
2. Issues and areas for development and a potential agenda for change and future partnership working.

Nine structured interviews were undertaken, five in social work agencies, three with Chernihiv Law College staff, and one with two ex-students who had graduated in 2002. Whilst the interviews had been intended for single person responders; most of the interviews involved more than one person, as staff groups got very interested and active in the process!

Findings

1. *Information*

- There was no evidence of formal agency policies or procedures about practice learning. However, learning outcomes and the agency/college agreements were used as procedural guides.
- The Chernihiv Law College has procedures in a programme handbook and a placement handbook. These are referred to in the contract/agreement about the placement, which emanates from the college and is agreed by the agency.
- There were no separate learning agreements, although some

respondents, from both college and practice, felt that this was an area to be developed. There were a number of references to the Ministry procedures for practice placements, and that there was no room/need for separate agreements within this framework.

- There was no evidence of formal interim reviews; but respondents appreciated the visits of tutors, who supported with general guidance.
- The 'final report' was in the form of a placement diary, compiled by the student and verified by the practice teacher, which then became the basis of an academic piece of work by the student.
- There was no formal training for practice teachers. Respondents from all positions felt that the meeting once every three years between college, agencies and practice teachers was a good developmental forum.
- One respondent (practice learning coordinator from Chernihiv Law College) said that in September 2000 it had been harder to find placements; but that now placements were asking for students.

2 *Ideas for development*

- Several agency respondents felt that more resources were needed, including 'motivators' for agencies to take students.
- One agency respondent felt that there should be a move from 'observational practice' by students (passive), to more 'technical practice' (doing).
- There were a number of respondents who wished to see more meetings between college and agencies to provide ideas and suggestions for development.
- One college respondent wanted to ensure that students were used as learners within agencies, not as cheap labour.
- One college respondent wished to practice teachers being actively involved in assessing and marking of competence.
- One agency respondent felt there should be a specialist Practice Teacher role, and several commented that they were practice teaching in their own time, as it fell outside their contract.
- Additionally, two respondents felt that practice teachers should be paid for the task.
- Four of the respondents felt that there should be formal training for practice teachers.

These structured interviews gave some factual detail, which was useful

to us as external workers and to the college particularly. They have also supported and added to the other research methods used in indicating agendas for future action by all parties. A number of the respondents at the time mentioned to us that the interview process itself had given them ideas, and helped to crystallise their thinking around these issues.

Feedback from all agencies was very positive about their relationships with Chernihiv Law College, and about the commitment to practice learning. The theoretical knowledge that the students brought with them from college was held in high esteem. In particular, there was praise for the staff at the College, and as to how they approached and involved the agencies in the processes of practice learning.

Focus groups

We chose to run some focus groups as part of the research in order to get qualitative data, from a variety of stakeholders. This was to be less structured and therefore more likely to engender creativity and to bring in areas that we might have omitted due to our lack of sophisticated understanding of local systems, culture, language etc. It was a clear and deliberate message that this action research was about supporting our Ukrainian partners in having power to determine and plan their own agenda and solutions.

Punch (2005) describes how focus groups should be relatively unstructured, to 'stimulate people in making explicit their views, perceptions, motives and reasons'. Thus whilst the researcher has a pre-planned list of topics and questions, she or he becomes a facilitator or moderator rather than an interviewer, relying on the process of group interaction to gain a richness of data. This is how we designed the focus groups, having sets of topics as starting points for each type of group.

Three focus groups were facilitated; with lecturers and tutors, with students (from three different cohorts) and with agency representatives (including practice teachers and students). Apart from identifying the impacts of our original teaching visit, Chernihiv Law College were enthusiastic about gaining the views of their stakeholders regarding practice learning systems, processes and relationships. They also wished to use this feedback in their bid to gain Institution status, and also identify any changes that could be made.

Impacts of the teaching visit, September 2000

There was a consensus of opinion that:

- More active and creative teaching methods had been used.
- Practice teachers had understood the value of adult learning theory in underpinning their teaching.
- Small groupwork had been initiated as a teaching method at the college.
- Consciousness had been raised regarding the importance of practice learning.
- Individuals had re-examined and reflected on their learning and practice.

Perceptions of the college (from agencies and students)

- The students who undertook their placements were of a high quality.
- The college was considered to be a centre of excellence for preparing specialist workers.
- There was good liaison and contact with the college staff, who were in the main accessible.
- The college was prepared to work in partnership, and generally agencies felt this was an equal relationship at a personal level.
- However, systems, paperwork, handbooks etc. were college generated and controlled.
- The students were provided with a wide practical experience, which enhanced their job prospects.
- Generally, the students' presence motivated agency workers.

Potential for change

- More agency participation in the development of handbooks etc.
- Regular development / training and support sessions for practice teachers.
- Development of practice teacher training and formal qualification.
- More information about students before they arrive, this would

enhance the process of matching students to placements.

- A more rigorous assessment of practice. Particular interest was expressed regarding the development of assessment tools and resources.
- More higher-level management placements were needed.
- Placements needed to be longer.

Overall the data from focus groups complemented the data obtained from the evaluation questionnaires and structured interviews. Again, the perceptions of the focus groups were re-assuring to the College in terms of stakeholder perceptions, and contributed to the ongoing process of development and agenda setting.

Conclusions

The authors initially posed questions regarding the validity and usefulness of international initiatives in social work education such as TEMPUS. Our research findings indicate that adherence to and implementation of adult learning principles and values provided a firm foundation for learning. This learning was in many instances transferable to the future practice of those who participated. Also highlighted were the unforeseen positive consequences of our visit, in particular how our teaching and learning techniques were adapted to a primary school setting. On our return in 2004 we learned that Chernihiv Law College had achieved Institution status and we were thanked for our contribution to this process.

We believe that longer-term partnership is essential and viable as Chernihiv Law College (now Institute) had received minimum input via TEMPUS regarding practice learning. Indeed our original teaching visit was the only one; as a result further developmental areas were identified i.e. the setting up of forums for academics and practice teachers, practice teacher training and the development of more comprehensive and rigorous practice assessment systems. Given that the UK's experience has evolved over many years with relatively large resources, Chernihiv Law Institute sees the importance of utilising such knowledge and experience in order to develop their own practice learning systems at pace in response to the major social, economic and political changes

they are currently experiencing.

It was interesting to note, in the light of recent policy shifts in the UK, how much positive emphasis was placed by the agencies on the need for practice teachers and assessors to be professionally qualified. In this respect we too agreed with this valuing of social work qualification in the teaching and assessment processes.

In our opinion, based upon the findings of this research it is essential that the vast reservoir of knowledge and expertise developed in Western Europe continues to be made available to our Ukrainian (and other) colleagues. Sadly our teaching visit was the final practice learning TEMPUS project hosted by Chernihiv Law College.

The larger centres of learning such as Kiev had more substantial and comprehensive social work education projects; the intention was to 'cascade' this knowledge to other areas of Ukraine. In some respects this was successful as a number of academic staff at Chernihiv Law College were social work graduates from Kiev's Mohlyar Academy, thus the dissemination of academic social work knowledge was being achieved. However, there had been little input on practice learning prior to our visit; inevitably the status of social work knowledge outweighed that of practice competence and skills. Our visit of 2000 was therefore a catalyst to enable our Ukrainian colleagues; both academics and practitioners, to begin to move forwards in integrating practice competence with academic achievement in a more systematic and structured manner.

We initially approached our first visit to Ukraine with excitement and apprehension. As stated earlier, we were firm in our commitment to social work values and adult learning principles. However, we were mindful of the fact that these values and principles may not have transferred across cultures. We were pleasantly surprised and pleased as we identified common ground in values and learning principles, and parallel processes relating these to practice teaching and learning. Our social work values, underpinned by CCETSW (1996), IFSW (2004), BASW (2004) and NOPT (2000), were resonant with our learners' identified values and principles. This was again confirmed when the authors undertook a similar teaching visit to Baku in Azerbaijan in August 2004. The same teaching techniques and methods were successfully employed within the same values framework. Our learners from across Azerbaijan received our input with the same enthusiasm as had our Ukrainian colleagues.

Given the differences in our three cultures, our experiences and

research have underpinned our hypothesis that there is indeed a universality of values and educational principles that may be applied to social work education.

We intend to test this out further in the future!

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