



SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA: EXPLORING CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN GHANA

by Linda Kreitzer

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VI. Creating Culturally Relevant Education and Practice

In my opinion the time has come for serious and critical re-examination of social work training in Africa.... Twentieth-century Africa expects social work to be creative and revolutionary ... 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. (Mumenka cited in ASWEA, 1974c, Doc. 6, p. 32)

A social work theory must therefore respond to the contemporary social construction of reality both by clients and workers and their social environments; if it fails to do so, it will be unsuccessful. (Payne, 2005, p. 20)



A. Introduction

The success and effectiveness of the profession of social work in Africa remains uncertain. Considering my personal teaching and research in Ghana, the issues arising from African and international conferences concerning African social work, and the diversity of recent scholarly articles and books on the topic of culturally relevant social work education, there is reason for both optimism and discouragement of the progress of the profession in Africa. It is discouraging that internal and external barriers identified in this book have impeded social work from becoming African-centred and these barriers continue to exist today. It is discouraging that in parts of Africa, western social work education is still considered superior, not because it has been critically evaluated, but because being educated in a western curriculum and teaching style allows social workers to move to the western world, escaping from the challenges of living and working in their own countries. It is discouraging that resources are so scarce, that, in many African countries, social workers still do not have a textbook to call their own and rely on second-hand books from the west to teach social work. Constantly adapting practices from a western textbook that don't relate to African history, tradition, and culture is something that students shouldn't have to do. It is particularly troubling that many articles about African social work still are not available to African social work students to read and study due to technological difficulties and copyright issues. It is discouraging that social work associations have not critically looked at their codes of ethics and rewritten them in a way that reflects their history and culture. Finally, it is discouraging that many of the issues brought up in the ASWEA documents of the 1970s and 1980s are still issues today.

Despite these continuing challenges, I remain optimistic and am encouraged by what I have read and by the creativity produced through my own research and through the writings of African colleagues and discussions with them concerning the issue of culturally relevant social work education. African nations are definitely gaining their identity in the world. The pioneers in social work in West Africa were great thinkers and were eager to blend western social work education and practice with traditional African values and practices. This can be seen in the GASOW and ASWEA conference documents described in chapter I. South Africa

is also going through an important and critical process of redefining its social work education in the post-apartheid era. Recently, the International Association of Schools of Social Work held its conference in Durban, showing the international social work community that Africa has an important voice in the profession worldwide. I am encouraged by the openness and honesty exhibited by my group of PAR researchers in Ghana who were willing to look critically at the social work curriculum at the University of Ghana and come up with ideas about how their curriculum could be more effective. Even more impressive is their passion for the profession, their concern that it is still on the periphery, and their commitment to the professional association in Ghana.

The primary focus of the book to this point has been to identify the current and historical issues challenging social work in Africa. Simply identifying problems, however, is of modest value unless it leads to the creation and implementation of effective solutions. The unique makeup and personal commitment of the Ghana PAR group provided an opportunity to do just that. This chapter focuses on the PAR process and ideas identified by the group and our suggestions concerning how to implement practical solutions to the challenges identified.

B. Recognizing the need for change

Mumenka, who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, challenges the profession to take a new path in order to be relevant to modern society. What would a creative and revolutionary social work education in Africa look like? “Education should be the means by which people reclaim their African identity and affirm their independence from colonial ideologies and practices” (Ndura, 2006, p. 94). If Africans had to begin again, where would they start and who would be included in creating a curriculum that met the needs of Africans? “Social work education agenda cannot be dictated by foreign or domestic experts, but must be grounded in the realities of the practitioners and educators coming from diverse geographical and social locations” (Tsang, Tan, & Shera, 2000, p. 156). Mwansa (2010) and other African social workers mentioned earlier all agree that something needs to change. “Social work in Africa has unlimited opportunities to deal with human needs ... the focus is on the rediscovery of indigenous

knowledge for both teaching and practice purposes” (p. 132). In starting from the traditions and culture of each African nation, what will emerge is a culturally relevant curriculum that may or may not keep western education and practices. The issue of culturally relevant social work curricula is being debated in Africa and this is where changing curriculum begins. It begins by Africans in the profession accepting that there needs to be a revisiting of the past in order to move forward in the future and a critical look at what is being taught and practised presently. “Social work has to be redefined as being able to unleash its potential and create innovative responses to current social problems rather than constituting a maintenance profession” (p. 133). The process of decolonization begins with a rediscovery of the history and culture of Africa and the profession.

1. Rediscovery of history and culture

Maathai (2009) speaks of the need for all Africans to rediscover their history and culture. This is true with the profession of social work. How society took care of its people before colonization, the influence of colonialism concerning social work practice, the evolution of social work in Africa, and its present state in Africa need to be examined by social work educators and practitioners. The challenge is building the confidence in educators, many of whom are presently holding on to the western education, and empowering them to move on to create new programs. As far back as the 1970s, there was concern that it was just easier to go with the western curriculum than to spend the time and energy to create new programs (ASWEA, 1974c, Doc. 6, p. 11). However, the ‘civilized’/‘uncivilized’ mindset, still ingrained in the human psyche of many educators, is difficult to let go.

One way of reclaiming the African spirit of empowerment is to research, discover and appreciate their own cultural background. Such programs could be in the form of discussion groups organized and run by local communities.... Most importantly, such programs should be a major part of the academic curriculum at all levels of instruction.... It needs to be transformed in order to engage students and teachers in a

process of knowledge construction that reflects and validates the differing perspectives that characterize multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nations. (Ndura, 2006, p. 98)

In the 1970s a new school of social work was set up in Mali to replace the old existing ones that were out of touch with society. Emphasis was on encouraging Malians to “return to their own origins and evaluate their potential with a view to developing [an appropriate education] wisely” (ASWEA, Doc. 6, 1973, p. 60). Planners went to the villages “in order to get a better understanding of local institutions and conducted a house-to-house survey in the suburbs of our urban centres” (p. 61). As a result, a new program was created that was “in perfect harmony with the targets set by the country’s economic and social development plan” (p. 63). In Tonga, Mafile’O (2004) critically researched some of the differences between western social work theories and knowledge and those of the Pacific Islands. As a result, changes have been made to the curricula to incorporate Pacific Island values into social work practice. Recognizing the need to rediscover and appreciate cultural traditions and historical influences in social work can lead the way to critically looking at the present curricula in order to go forward with curricula changes.

The PAR research group started the research using the above process of rediscovering the past, looking at traditional practices in order to think about changes in the curricula. This took the form of a variety of skits that the group did to remind the group of how things had changed in Ghanaian life from pre- to post-colonial times (see Appendix 1). As the research progressed, the group was challenged to look at the past and how many historical influences had shaped social work in Ghana. The following is a list of acknowledgments that the group wrote that reflects this ‘rediscovery of the past’ and shows the conscientization process that took place during the research process:

- We acknowledge the negative and positive influences of colonialism and its effect on the Ghanaian society. On the negative side, loss of identity, labelling everything of African origin as primitive and fetish, abuse of non-human and human resources, and creating dependency has affected African development and creativity.

On the positive side, colonialism brought formal education, the social work profession, and a new understanding of the rights of individuals including the handicapped in this society. One group member states: “Now we have to sit down, see what colonialism has left us with and see how we can Africanize the system that they have left and see what ways we can make it more applicable in our situation.”

- We acknowledge the continual influence of western society on Ghanaian culture and practice. As a nation we live in many different worlds at the same time. As a group we feel that both the western and traditional approaches to solving social issues have been embraced by the country and this should be reflected in social work training.
- We acknowledge that culture is dynamic, constantly changing, and sometimes intangible. It encompasses the past, present, and future. This is reflected in continual changes in social issues and these changes need to be addressed in social work training. Regular evaluations of the courses should be part of the Department of Social Work’s continuing assessment of its program.
- We acknowledge that Ghanaian culture has its differences from and similarities to other cultures. The importance of consensus in decision-making, expressing emotions externally, community, saving face, and hospitality are principles identified as important in Ghanaian culture.
- We acknowledge the importance of understanding traditions and cultural practices in society and how they evolved in light of social issues. Social workers need to know the cultural aspects of the people and communities they work for.
- We acknowledge the work of the social work pioneers in Ghana in introducing and strengthening the profession of social work and its training.

- We acknowledge that the introduction of social work in Ghana was developmental in nature but over the years has become remedial with the individualization of services. The dwindling political interest and funding in social welfare services has been a factor in the decrease of service delivery, and new ways of providing social welfare services need to be created. This, however, is not to negate the fact that social work has been active in Ghana for many years. The citizens and government have not always recognized this contribution.
- We acknowledge that the past twenty years in Ghana have been difficult economically, socially, and politically due to changes in governments and debts incurred through structural adjustment programs, and this has affected the public perception of social work generally. Social work as a profession has not been accepted in Africa up to now. It lacks social acceptability. It has been on the periphery of Ghanaian society and this has affected the progress of social work training and job placement. There needs to be a concerted effort to change people's perceptions of social work in Ghana. This could entail a strengths-based approach to practice that empowers clients, builds upon their strengths, and encourages growth of their inner abilities and creative spirit.
- We acknowledge the importance of learning from other African countries concerning their social work education and practice. A lot can be learned from communication and dialogue between countries on the continent. We also acknowledge that our own social work training and practice could be more user-friendly to students and clients and society at large.
- We acknowledge the continual lack of resources that have plagued the Department of Social Work since the 1980s and appreciate what has been accomplished with minimal finances and minimal staffing, which often affects one's motivation to work creatively. This includes teaching that is done outside the Department of Social Work, for example, administration of social services. This is taught by business people in the School of Administration, who

know little if anything about the social work profession. This stifles creativity in the classroom when the lecturer is not clear on what social workers do.

- We acknowledge that there was a strong traditional society in which to develop a social welfare system traditional to Ghanaian culture before colonialism, and the positive aspects of this tradition should be taught in all courses in social work. Work should be completed at the academic and practitioner level, developing social work interventions that are based on traditional cultural practices that may be pre-colonial but are still relevant in today's society. Work with the Institute of African Studies would help with this endeavour.
- We acknowledge an imbalance of western social work knowledge and practice in social work training in Ghana and encourage training to be more traditional to Ghanaian society. We acknowledge that African knowledge is not primitive and uncivilized and is just as important as western knowledge.
- We acknowledge the difficulties within the University of Ghana with regards to salaries and conditions of lecturers, specifically, the very poor pay and conditions of lecturers and the strict requirements for being employed as a lecturer. The profession of social work is a very practical profession and years of practice need to be acknowledged and rewarded by the university when hiring lecturers.
- We acknowledge that for a society to develop there must be dreamers. We acknowledge that social workers are like artists in that they create ways for positive change to occur in society. Therefore the importance of creating a class environment through participatory teaching methods that encourage dreamers and visionaries within the profession is necessary. This includes using art, group work, group projects, community-based projects, and role-playing to critically look at an issue. In practice situations, Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques can be used to initiate

change in the whole community. Several people use this in their work with children, youth, and adults, and more training could be provided for this type of hands-on assessing and implementation of change.

- We acknowledge the importance that research can play in developing social policy, and research needs to be encouraged in agencies and at the university level. However, financial constraints and time often prevent research from happening for university lecturers and agency staff. Research can be used to verify what kinds of interventions are useful and which are not. It can also define social problems in Ghana and identify interventions for these problems. We acknowledge the appropriateness of Participatory Action Research as a research methodology in Ghana. We all come from different backgrounds and experiences and the group process is an effective way to bring these differences together for creating change. It promotes a democratic and creative way to facilitate research that allows people to be involved, thus counterbalancing the research fatigue syndrome found in many communities today.
- We acknowledge the importance of the revised bachelor's curriculum and the new master's program and the significant impact these will have on the future of social work training and practice in Ghana.

These acknowledgments reflect the outcomes of the conscientization process that emerged from the group concerning their own understanding of Ghanaian society and social work in Ghana. After rediscovering the history and culture and the past influences concerning social work in Ghana, a critical look at the curriculum is the next step in the process of curriculum change.

2. Critically evaluating present curricula

Payne (2005) views social work as a social construction that needs to change with society and the world:

So theory is constructed in an interaction between ideas and realities, mediated through the human beings involved. How clients experience their reality affects how workers think about their practice theories; agencies constrain and react to both and together they make some social work. The social work they make influences what social work is and how it is seen elsewhere. A social work theory must therefore respond to the contemporary social construction of reality both by clients and workers and their social environments; if it fails to do so, it will be unsuccessful. (p. 20)

If social work is to be effective in a particular society, it needs to respond to social and cultural contexts. In other words, social work curricula need to be sustainable (stability, continuity, and sustainability) and need to be dynamic (responsive, dynamic, and creative) (van Balkam & Goddard, 2007). The beauty of social work is that it can adapt, change, and develop with the environment in which it is working. However, if social work curricula need to change according to the needs of society, a regular evaluation of their effectiveness in that society is important.

For Fook (2002), a critical reflective approach to change “holds the potential for emancipatory practices ... in that it first questions and disrupts dominant structures and relations and lays the ground for change” (p. 43). Smith (2008) agrees: “To achieve social change, social work education thus needs to critically engage with post-colonial and post-apartheid socio-political realities of inequality, oppression, racism and cultural hegemony, and facilitate critical conscientization” (p. 371). The PAR research group asked these kinds of questions throughout the process and answers were sought but were not always found. For example: 1) what cultural practices, institutions, and beliefs in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras are reflected in social work today; 2) how much of the colonial structures and practices can we see in social work education, welfare, institutions, and government and non-government organizations;

3) in pre-colonial Ghana, did we have the knowledge available to create a social welfare system that met the needs of Ghanaians; 4) what institutions, organizations or society does the Department of Social Welfare serve; 5) if we were given the task of starting a culturally relevant social welfare system, how would we do this? Finding the answers to these questions is crucial to the future of social work education and practice. Ndura (2006) suggests more questions that help focus the issues:

Another way of reclaiming the African spirit of empowerment is questioning Western motives.... Why is Western literature elevated to the center stage of the educational experience while African languages and literatures remain under-explored? Why is Western financial assistance used to hire Western expatriates instead of preparing local educators for local schools? Why are most school textbooks imported from Western nations? Why do Western governments provide financial and military assistance to warring African ethnic factions? Why do Western nations grant asylum to persecuted Africans and yet make it almost impossible for those in exile to reunite with their families? Why do Western institutions deny so many African academic credentials when they were educated under Western philosophies and standards? Reclaiming the African spirit of empowerment will become a possibility only when the Africans begin to raise such questions and lift the veil of blindness that has obstructed their true independence from the colonial master's stronghold. (pp. 98–99)

Answering and critically reflecting on these questions and continual dialogue among academics, bureaucrats, community leaders, and practitioners will create new theories and interventions that are culturally relevant and that will respond to the needs of people in African society. This dialogue has happened over a period of time with the ASWEA and GASOW conferences, among African social work writers, and more recently in western social work publications. Gray et al. (2008) understand the importance of this dialogue, giving examples from different parts of the globe of how social work educators and practitioners are dealing with

the issue of culturally relevant social work education and practice. Osei-Hwedie & Jacques (2007) edited a book concerning the indigenization of social work in Africa with lively debates from Osei-Hwedie and Arnon Bar-On on the issue of whether it is indeed possible to have African-centred curricula. Once the past has been revisited for cultural and historical rediscovery and a critical look has been taken at the curricula from historical influences, then a new kind of curriculum can emerge.

One of the pioneers of social work in Ghana, Dr. Blavo, stated that “Social work has not yet been born in Africa.” This is a surprising statement in a country where formal social work education has been offered since 1945. What is that statement really saying? Is it saying that the profession is still trying to be born, has it been born and still trying to walk, or are we walking around banging our heads against the wall trying to fit a western concept into a culture where it may not fit? When I ask myself these questions, I think of two metaphors: 1) a square peg trying to be pushed into a round hole, and 2) a new-born baby still attached to the umbilical cord of its mother. African social work academics, students, and social workers need to come to terms with the possibility that the many western social work approaches don’t fit. They need to quit trying to teach inappropriate practices, cut the umbilical cord with western social work, and begin growing on their own. Once this new form of social work develops, it may be appropriate to take what is useful from the western social work knowledge and practice but create a new and vibrant child (profession) that will grow up to meet the needs of its own people. Mwansa (2010) suggests that as the “continent enters a postmodern phase some of the knowledge will be useful if it is reworked to fit local needs. Most educators are dependent on material to which they are accustomed and this spiral of dependence on foreign information for education and training continues unabated” (p. 133). With a rediscovery of the history and culture of Africa and a critical reflection on the present curriculum, how can African-centred curricula emerge in a diverse and complex continent like Africa?

C. Using the Ghanaian context for a case study on curriculum change

The opportunity arose, through my PhD research, to go back to Ghana and work with students, practitioners, educators, and community leaders in the area of culturally relevant social work curriculum. After years of teaching, studying, and learning in Ghana, the need to critically examine and revise social work education and practice became clear to me. It was also clear to me that Ghanaians needed to take the lead in critically looking at their own curricula, recommend changes, and take action accordingly. The purpose of the research was to give space for Ghanaians to critically reflect on the need for curriculum change through their own rediscovery of history and culture, evaluate the present curricula, and suggest concrete changes in how to adapt or start again in regards to culturally relevant African social work education and practice.

D. The process of identifying culturally relevant curricula

Participatory Action Research provided the framework within which Ghanaian practitioners, academics, and government workers could critically look at social work in Ghana, assess current social work education and practice, evaluate its effectiveness, and instigate appropriate change. Although most of the group had not experienced this type of research, it proved to be meaningful and educational. A few group members commented on the process:

When we started the project, like others have said, this is a unique way of data collection, which is not the same as what we are used to. One interesting thing about it to me is the way we dialogue in the group.... We always discuss things in some detail and sometimes very hot and by the end of it we have consensus.... The research project has given us the opportunity to contribute our ideas as to what should be done to the curriculum to make it suitable to changing needs.

This group has enabled me to critically examine some of the things that we have been thinking through as social workers.... This research has been a process where we all dialogue together, agree on and we have to reach a consensus in making decisions and for me it has been very interesting to know the other side of research where you have to involve people in dialogue.

We started with a weekend in the mountains to get to know each other and to challenge our perceptions of the world. One of the most important exercises we did was the map exercise.

Understanding who we are in the world, how we perceive the world, and how we are perceived by others was a consistent source of discussion in the research group. As part of the preparation for the project, a perception exercise was introduced. Four maps of the world were put up on the wall; the Mercator Map (traditional map), the Peters Projection Map (a map showing the Mercator Map as a product of colonization), the Upside Down South Map (the north is in the south and the south is in the north); and a traditional African map (using western terminology). The research group members were asked to visit each map (in groups of three) and answer the following questions: 1) Does this map seem correct to you; 2) Does this map seem different from the map you are used to and why; 3) Whose worldview is being portrayed in this map, and 4) What does this exercise say about our perception of the world? (See Appendix 2 for more details.) The learning that took place in the exercise was extraordinary. In challenging the group to “look outside their own frame of reference,” subtleties of their perceived identity in the world came through which are important to highlight. For many, the initial response to the Upside down map was that it was wrong.

But as people reflected on the different maps, they realized that the world is a sphere and, whichever way you turn it, it doesn't change the position of any country or place. Here are two key insights expressed by group members after the exercise was completed:

No matter where we come from in the world, no matter the continent that we are in, we think differently depending on

where we stand. You interpret from how you view things. So the world over we should not kind of look down upon certain people and their values and what they think how society ought to be run.

If we take that map for the fact that it was presented differently and you look at it and say it was wrong, who decides what is wrong and what is right? Does it mean because a certain white man somewhere does it and it is right? Or do we have to look at it critically and then criticize it and just say “no” because it is coming from this end therefore it is right?

What the group began to do was to recognize and question their own socialization and belief system and learn to critically examine what they actually believe and where that belief system comes from. Who decides what is true and where this knowledge originates? All of us have been socialized to believe that the Northern Hemisphere is developed and more civilized and the Southern Hemisphere is developing and is still primitive. Psychologically, this is very important and affects how we look at ourselves, our profession, our country, and our continent. When the map is turned upside down, it goes against our familiar way of thinking. Why is this so? What events took shape that condemned the African continent to a self-destructive cultural identity from which it is still trying to recover today? Who decides how Africa is perceived as a continent? We can look at the world from any point of view. Africa can be at the top and the others can be down, but the dominant viewpoint has continually put Africa as down, underdeveloped, primitive. We interpret from how we view things. The world doesn't change. It's our view of the world that changes. Why was this exercise important? Conscientization¹ occurs when people are challenged to think differently. People tend not to like to think differently because to think differently and to challenge one's beliefs is uncomfortable. What the group understood, in the end, was that there are different viewpoints to reality, and no one way of looking at the world is more correct than another.

After the weekend, the group met twice a month. At the first meeting of the month, the group talked about the evolution of social work in

Africa, and later in the month, they talked about African and Ghanaian culture. The meetings usually had a guest speaker who talked about the particular subject. These speakers were pioneers of social work in Ghana and professors from the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. Each session was opened with a time for reflection on what the group members had learned from the last session. The group also critiqued the different course outlines obtained from professors who taught in the social work department. Throughout the process, the group had time to reflect and critically think about what had been discussed in previous meetings. Each meeting was recorded and transcribed. Group members were encouraged to read the transcripts and come up with themes from the transcripts. Data analysis occurred as part of the group process as well as individual analysis throughout the research.

What follows are the important findings of this case study from Ghana concerning culturally relevant social work for Ghana.

E. Ghanaian Research findings

The research findings will be addressed in two different sections. The first are recommended changes to the present curriculum as well as recommended new courses that could be offered to address the needs of Ghanaian society. This includes a discussion on field practica. The second section addresses other issues that arose from the research process. They are not necessarily related directly to curricula but have an important effect on how social work is taught and practised in Ghana. These include: 1) social work's relationship to Ghanaian society; 2) the professional association; 3) institutional structures; and 4) intercontinental relationships.

1. Changes to the present curriculum

Each group's first task was to identify different jobs that social workers do in Ghana and to identify a range of issues that social workers in Ghana respond to in their jobs. This was important so that the group could then focus on the curriculum to see if there were any gaps between what was taught and what social workers are responding to in their work. Social workers worked in government and non-government organizations,

the prison service, orphanages, education service, industry, community development, social welfare, and hospitals, to name a few. Their work included: 1) Employment issues – unemployment, child labour, poverty alleviation, prostitution, micro-financing, armed robbery/crime, lack of employable skills, and labour unrest; 2) Family issues – domestic violence, childlessness, irresponsible parents, the *trokosi* system, marital disputes, family welfare, care of the elderly, and disabilities; 3) Child issues – child labour, street children, child defilement, the *trokosi* system, and child trafficking; 4) Teenage issues – school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, gender issues (both male and female), and prostitution; 5) Education issues – school dropouts, girl-child education, and illiteracy; 6) Health issues – HIV/AIDS, female genital mutilation, guinea worm, maternal mortality, and provision of potable water; 7) Environmental issues – pollution; 8) Mental health issues – drug abuse; 9) Community issues – conflict resolution and mediation, community empowerment, and conscientization; 10) Migration issues – refugees and urbanization; and 11) Housing issues.

The research group analyzed the curriculum outlines to see if any of the above issues were being addressed in the classroom.² Once analysis was completed, a document outlining changes to the diploma, bachelor's, and master's degrees was published for the Department of Social Work and for the public to review and consider. The critique of each course will not be detailed here, but similar themes emerged from all three levels of degrees and will be summarized here. What is important to understand about these changes is that they emphasize a shift from the western-style social work practice to ideas of how the curriculum could be more African in content and in which African-centred social work practice would be encouraged. As Smith (2008) states: "Educators of social workers have the responsibility of stimulating this process of developing critical reflection and consciousness" (p. 374). There were no social work books giving the Ghanaian or, for that matter, an African perspective on social work. The following categories show the many areas we felt could change concerning the curriculum.

Language and course titles. Language is an important tool for cultural understanding and teaching. Some of the most important things that we experience are described through language. Using culturally appropriate language that speaks clearly to the student is extremely important.

One guest speaker stated: “We look for the essential elements in our language and we think these elements are the defining features of this particular language.” To name something is to express ownership of it. In the colonizing world, “naming was to think about the world, one might say, on one’s own terms” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 35). Some of the course titles needed to be updated to reflect African language and culture. I gave an example earlier of being asked to teach “Framework for Social Diagnosis” and “Framework for Planned Changed,” titles from earlier American and British social work books. African-specific terms should be used to reflect the course names. This could be done in a creative manner by asking students to come up with new titles for courses that reflect their society.

History and philosophy of social work. Although this is a course in itself, the group felt that any history and philosophy taught in any class needed to be African-specific. Too much emphasis is placed on teaching western social work history and western philosophy. A more balanced approach should include how social work has developed in Ghana and other parts of Africa including North, South, East, and West Africa. The evolution of social work in Central and South America, as well as Asia, would be helpful for African students as these continents have been through colonization and have suffered the effects of the present economic order. The countries of the Americas have also looked critically at the past in relation to social work education, an example being Nicaragua (Wilson, 1992), and Asian countries are also engaging in this process (Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2008).

Gathering bodies of knowledge that are African-specific may feel like a daunting task, and many articles on African social work are in western journals and are hard to access in Africa. A good starting point is looking at the United Nations Surveys and Monologues mentioned in chapter I and in the ASWEA and GASOW documents. These documents, as well as the United Nations Surveys and other United Nations documents on social work, should be taught as part of the history of social work in Africa. There are also books written about the history of social work in South Africa (Earle, 2008; Gray, 1998; Patel, 2005), and I am sure each African country has some sort of document relating to their local history of social work education and practice. Apt & Blavo (1997) explain the history of Ghanaian social work in their article on social work in Ghana.

Documentation concerning activities of social welfare institutions in African countries is important and ASWEA has two documents outlining these institutions and their purposes (see chapter I of this book). Recently, a small project, funded by the International Association of Schools of Social Work, the African Association of Schools of Social Work, and the University of Calgary, have collected ASWEA documents, copied and bound them, and sent them to African social work libraries in order to make them available to professors, research students, and students for their own learning. In addition to making these documents available, there is concern that pioneers of African social work are very elderly and their stories and experiences will be lost once they have died. Research, video interviews, and historical documenting need to be completed to record these stories of how social work developed in the different African countries and the experiences of these pioneers before it is too late.

Another concern that the research group identified was the fact that many African universities teach philosophy from a European perspective. African philosophy has an important part to play in social work training. "African philosophy should be able to respond to the problems and human conditions in modern Africa. It should also clarify the concepts, beliefs and values that we hold, use and live by, through sustained discussion and dialogue" (van Wyk & Higgs, 2007, p. 62). van Wyk and Higgs go on to say that "through philosophy we can study pronouncements of persons, create texts of indigenous philosophical discourse which can then be further interpreted and discussed; this provides insight as to how individuals shape culture and society, and leads to a better understanding through a clearer idea of any society's internal intellectual dynamics" (p. 63). They also caution that there is not one universal African philosophy but these can be different depending on culture. A need to connect African philosophy with social work values and practice is crucial in strengthening African identity in social work. If theory is influenced by the social, political, and economic realities of people, African philosophy should be part of social work curricula.

Local case studies. Early on in the evolution of social work in Africa, there was collaboration between Zimbabwe and Ghana concerning sharing case examples of social work practice. However, for the most part, one of the consistent themes throughout the ASWEA documents, subsequent

articles on African social work, and this PAR research group was the lack of local case examples for students. Efforts have been made to collect case studies (ASWEA, 1973) from the local context, but in places like Ghana this has not been successful. One research group member stated that she was tired of reading about social work in urban Chicago and having to adapt it to the rural Ghanaian situation. She questioned whether it was fair to put social work students through this adaptation process when the amount of mental energy this takes could be better channelled to creative thinking and studying. Another group member gave an example of a social policy course he took. It wasn't until he was a research assistant after graduating that he realized the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy was a key national social policy. No one gave him an example of social policy in Ghana to study or critique. There is a complacency concerning the acceptance of western case examples and this has to change. This is a result of the other challenges described in previous chapters concerning the lack of funding for higher education and lack of resources and faculty time to address these concerns, including updating case examples. Publishing textbooks is very difficult with limited finances available. The lack of local case examples is partly due to the use of western textbooks as well as the need to constantly update case studies for use in the classroom.

Rediscovering historical traditions. For many African countries, oral history and cultural language is very important. In Ghana the use of proverbs is important in many professions and in the community. They bring people in close contact with the local natural environment. For example “An elephant dies because of many spears” (Ibekwe, 1998, p. 27) speaks to co-operation. “The usefulness of a well is known when it dries” (p. 9) refers to appreciation or “Do not tie up a dog with a chain of sausages” (p. 75) refers to futility. A teaching style that brings out these proverbs and stories to communicate principles would enhance social work training. This also reminds students of their own heritage and it may promote seeking more knowledge about life before colonization. These proverbs could effectively be used to support more traditional social work interventions and other forms of social work training.

In discussing how to move on from oppression, systemic racism, and power dynamics, Smith (2008), in her study on South African education, revealed that the “lethal multiple oppressions that they had experienced,

and sometimes continued to experience, had created a devaluation of self, identity and culture” (p. 380). One of her student interviewees remarks: “When the master of the slave is gone, within that domain it keeps on going, it’s an ugly cycle but it keeps on going you know, and I think that’s what happens when you are not free, mentally, although oppression is not physical, it’s in our minds” (p. 378). Themes identified from her research were: 1) internalized oppression; 2) identity development and psychological defence; 3) responses of denial, anger, and helplessness; 4) critical conscientization and feeling more powerful; and 5) an understanding of oppression and the need for critical, anti-oppressive practice. She found that the interviewees, social work students, upon reflecting and discussing their experiences, were helped to be liberated from these feelings. This sharing of experiences left them feeling more powerful and able to act. Finally, she found that a “respect for and embracing of traditional culture (such as the use of the talking stick) symbolized a decolonisation that was found to be liberating, dignifying and empowering” (Smith, 2008, p. 380). Social work training should allow for this reflection and discussion to take place in a safe environment and should respect and use the tools available in traditional culture.

There is a rich history of community development in Africa, and this should be strengthened in the classroom (Ablloh & Ameyaw, 1997). Community development needs to take into account the changing nature of culture. Historical traditions may or may not be appropriate to keep in a changing world. On the other hand, cultural identity is tied to traditional ways and useful components of these traditions should be preserved and taught. With the consistent poverty experienced in Africa, innovative techniques for community economic development must be part of the curriculum concerning appropriate community development. Like the women in the Northern Village who sold shea butter to the Body Shop, these are the types of case studies that should be taught and encouraged in order to alleviate poverty. Businesses that give back to the community while paying people a good salary (Yunus, 2007) should be promoted.

A good understanding of the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the historical effects of their policies should be part of social work training (Ife, 2007).

Social workers need to understand the role of the U.N. and its agencies, the role of NGO's, the role of the World Bank and the IMF, the neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas, globalisation and the power of the global corporations, the complexities rather than the simplicities of the Middle East, of Africa, of Latin America, of Asia, of Eastern Europe, the legacy of the cold war, and the origins of cultural and religious tensions, on all continents, that go back centuries if not millennia. (Ife, 2007, pp. 19–20)

I believe that Africans have a much greater understanding of these policies than social workers in the western world, as they touch their everyday lives. The many programs of the IFIs, including the poverty reduction programs, and SAPs are programs within a neo-liberal agenda that does not favour poverty reduction. The new poverty reduction strategy program from the IMF “seems to merely add new social and governance elements to former reforms, which have been unsuccessful over the past two decades in achieving progress toward these goals.... it is unclear how policies emphasizing the primacy of the market mechanism in such areas as trade, finance and agriculture can be reconciled with the improved access of the poor to productive assets, and to actually mitigating the negative outcomes of structural adjustment” (Mouelhi & Ruckert, 2007, p. 289).

Using different research methods. Traditionally, research has been quantitative in nature in many African universities. This is understandable, given the history of university education in Africa, which was heavily influenced by western university models in both structure and content (Ajayi et al., 1996; Ashby, 1964; Boateng, 1982). However, it is also puzzling, given the historical tendency for oral history and consensus tradition. Laird (2003) challenges the notion that quantitative research is the most appropriate for African social work:

The particular socio-economic circumstances of developing regions, the disparity of cultural context vis-à-vis western nations and the wider parameters of social development activity in the context of meagre direct welfare services provision, are *prima facie* grounds for a critical consideration of the

applicability of the research methodologies advanced by western social work scholars. (p. 252)

She identifies various problems such as using western instruments, designed by British and American professionals for the industrialized world, and Eurocentric language and assumptions made in the outcome. “In short, quantitative methodologies are compromised because their instruments of inquiry are over determined by a particular socio-economic and cultural milieu” (p. 256). She goes on to encourage a more participatory approach to research and in particular using Participatory Rural Appraisal, first used by Chambers (1997). This tool addresses power relations within the research itself and uses many tools for knowledge-gathering, as well as empowering local people to look at the issues in their community. “The concentration on group settings for the gathering of information rather than through individuated processes such as the questionnaire or interview is an interpersonal encounter more consonant with African social structures” (Laird, 2003, p. 267).

Research methodologies should be more consistent with the society in which researchers are collecting their data, and this is why this particular methodology was used in Ghana. It is time for qualitative research to have a more prominent role in research education in African universities.

Addressing mental health issues. Considering the predominance of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its affect on the mental and emotional state of families and the traumatic experiences of child soldiers and refugees in many parts of Africa, mental health issues and interventions need to be addressed in all social work courses. Post-traumatic stress disorder is increasingly becoming an important issue with these vulnerable groups of people. Kabeera & Sewpaul (2008) found in their study concerning the after-effects of the Rwandan genocide that “returnees developed mental problems, but on account of lack of psychiatric facilities they were unable to access proper treatment. The experience of life-threatening and shocking events, like rape and murder, robs one of a sense of integrity and wholeness. Some survivors reported experiencing nightmares and recurring images of frightful events; they had difficulty sleeping, felt tense and extremely sad” (p. 326). Straub, Pearlman, & Miller (2003) recognize healing from trauma as the first important step in healing and

reconciliation. While working in Rwanda, they made information available to the public that explained in detail the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and how to get help for this disorder. This was an important part of their reconciliation process in Rwanda. Participants were provided with trauma information through the radio and written forms on how to heal through “engagement with painful experiences, empathic support from others and the reconnection to and renewed trust in people” (p. 289). In the Liberian refugee camp in Ghana, there was little attention paid by different NGOs and the UNHCR concerning funding trauma programs. In a camp with over 20,000 refugees, there was only one group addressing this issue. I believe this is true in many refugee camps, where the priority is to provide food, shelter, and clothing. However, trauma counselling in refugee camps is a vital and important service that can be provided by appropriately trained social workers. Pearn (2003) graphically presents the traumas that children experience through war, conflicts, and soldiering:

Post-traumatic stress disorder ... has been very much a featured disease of the late 20th and 21st centuries. Children are less likely than adults to talk about such episodes or to understand their genesis. Nevertheless, recurring obsessive thoughts of horror, flashbacks and recurring dreams either of stark reality or of symbolic illusion are some of the chronic symptoms of this childhood disorder. (p. 170)

In particular, the effects on the child soldier’s psyche are particularly damaging: 1) desocialization and dehumanization; 2) loss of childhood including schooling; and 3) a society-induced psychopathy, which causes post-traumatic stress disorder and is very difficult to rehabilitate. “Exposure to violence, to cruelty and to the systems of war where the resolution of problems is perforce solved by force during childhood years is inimical to the development of conscience ... war-imposed terror and cruelty, directed against others but observed by the child determine the norm in the evolving conscience of a growing child” (pp. 169–70). Social workers have an important role to play in rehabilitating these children of war to stop the normalization of violence of a generation of children who

are prone to suicide as a result of this exposure to violence. Training to support this role is important, but it is often excluded from the social work curriculum.

Changing the face of field practica. Field practicum is considered crucial to effective social work training. As one lecturer in social work states: “It wakes you up. It makes you see how poor people are, how people are suffering ... when you see these things, and then you start learning how to deal with real issues.” As far back as 1972, field work and supervision was highlighted as an important part of social work training (ASWEA, 1972). There was emphasis on fieldwork in rural areas as in the 1970s this was where most of the people lived. Group and community work were emphasized as important to social work education (ASWEA, 1974c, Doc. 6). In many African schools, field practicum programs seem to have some problems, including length of time in the field, lack of supervisors, lack of choice of placement, and integrating theory and practice. The field practicum component of social work training should be extended with more emphasis placed on community fieldwork.

Gray and Simpson (1998) give a good example of a social-development-based practicum. It is called a ‘community-based student’s unit,’ where a group of four students go into a community, for months at a time, and work alongside the community in identifying developmental needs, prioritizing those needs and identifying local resources in order to find solutions with full community participation. The value of this type of practicum is that it gets students out of the somewhat elitist classroom and into the rural areas. “The community recognizes the contribution of the university via its students and the students themselves attest to the value of the experience gained even though, at times, they felt they were attempting a ‘mission impossible’” (p. 236). Early social work training in Ghana did the same type of practicum. Students were taken to rural communities, on the weekends, to work with people, particularly with women and children.

Other innovative ways for field work practica need to be created and tested with the goal of providing the best possible experience for students and also enhancing the individual and community in which the students are placed. A good practicum example was explained by a research group member concerning children in fishing villages not attending school but

going fishing instead. They explained: “if a social worker is attached to the community, study how the children come into the fishing rather than the school, find out their interest and try to see what the person can do either to the small group of boys trying to encourage them.... We can really see whether they could go back to school or if their interest is elsewhere.” Through organizing community leaders to discuss this issue, an appropriate plan could be created that meets the needs of the children and the expectations of their school. For example, fishing could be considered part of the school curriculum and used as an incentive for children to go to school once they are finished fishing. Another example of an effective field practicum is letting students go into the villages and conduct community meetings as part of their educational experience. Finally, concerted effort should be made and programs established for student exchanges between other parts of Africa instead of Europe and America. This can only help to increase the awareness of social work issues on the continent and will help to bring together social workers in Africa in order to share knowledge, skills, and experiences amongst each other.

When I was a volunteer at the University of Ghana, 2004–2006, there was little support for students in the field. I, along with another volunteer, devised training for supervisors, revised the grading system and made a commitment to visit each student once in their three-month practicum. This was easier said than done. Visiting students meant a few days travel on mediocre roads, spending the night in rural areas, and meeting with the student and supervisor. The idea of a full-time fieldwork coordinator may seem like a luxury, but the research group felt very strongly that this is missing in social work education. Supervisors and students need that support from the Department of Social Work.

2. Developing new courses

The group identified new courses that they felt should be introduced to the social work curriculum at the University of Ghana. These courses reflect issues that are of concern to Ghana presently and integrate some of the ideas from the research project. The new courses include: 1) traditional mechanisms for social change; 2) social work and power issues; 3) social work and social action; 4) social work values and ethics in African

society; 5) social work and refugees; 6) persons in need of protection in institutions; 7) development theory and practice; and 8) mediation and conflict resolution. These were mainly thought to be appropriate for the BSW level. Laird (2003) suggests appropriate questions to ask when evaluating and creating new curricula:

- 1) Does the present social work curriculum include and fit into the psychological, spiritual, economic, social, political and environmental issues in society; 2) Is the curriculum holistic in nature; 3) Does it emphasize African traditional knowledge; 4) Does it explore the continent's different social welfare experiences and international policies; 5) Does it address gender issues; 6) Does it include international perspectives; 7) Is it up-to-date with current African issues; and 8) Are the courses using local case examples for teaching? Concerning the results of this curriculum in local practice does it encourage and produce social work activities that 1) work in the local setting; 2) achieve appropriate results; 3) worthwhile interventions and 4) resource efficient? (p. 252)

Although we did not have these specific questions at the time, I believe that, through the process of reviewing the present courses and identifying new courses, the group critically asked these questions.

Traditional mechanism for social change. This course would explore the idea of linking social work interventions that build upon the core traditional practices in the country. It would begin with a study of traditional social mechanisms before colonialism and identify which traditions are still effective in society today. All societies have developed systems over the years to solve their own social problems. The course would be jointly taught by a social work professor and a professor from the Institute for African Studies or an equivalent. Traditional mechanisms for coping with social issues would be identified and work would be completed around creating new social work interventions that incorporate those mechanisms. During the research process, a professor from the Institute of African Studies shared three examples of traditional mechanisms to deal with social issues: 1) women pounding fufu (ground cassava),

2) disregarding protocol and 3) a mock battlefield. All were used as tension-releasing activities and the group talked about how these could be incorporated into social work interventions.

Women pounding fufu. There are times in which women need to speak their minds without the pressure of the elders or men around. One such tension-releasing activity that allows women a place to speak their minds is around pounding fufu. As women are pounding and grinding the cassava, they are also singing about life, about birth, their husbands and lovers and all kinds of things about family life, marriage, negatives and positives of life. This balance between physical labour and oral communication allows for life's stresses, joys, and worries to be vented to each other. Social work group interventions could create space like these traditional practices for women who are vulnerable.

Experiencing Asafo. The second example is a period of time in the year in which common people can say what they want to say to the elders and chiefs without repercussions. In Fante, this is called *Asafo*. Because of the respect inherent in the life of the elders and chiefs, it is not possible to complain too much about their leadership. There is certain protocol that is used in addressing these leaders. However, a certain time is set aside for the men of the village to be able to speak any way they like to or about the elders and chiefs, often using very profane language. They can dress any way they want and say anything they want in this context and the elders and chiefs can't respond. This is a way to relax a somewhat heavy protocol system in order to relieve tension in the group. This type of community-building process could be used in other areas where the community has an important issue to discuss and where space is created for people to talk about their concerns in a non-hierarchical way.

Mock battle. There was a Nigerian festival that consists of a mock battle between two groups who have been feuding. A mock battle is played out and they conquer each other and then eat at a banquet together. It uses art, theatre, songs, and poetry and is done every year to try to resolve a particular conflict. Again this is a good community-building exercise that can be completed with the whole community or parts of the community, depending on the issue.

The above mechanisms and others can be seen in festivals and rituals, and the principles behind them can be useful to social workers looking at new interventions for practice. The use of oral tradition, belief systems, drama, song, and language could be explored. Other ways in which social workers could work within traditional systems, including traditional health clinics, chieftaincy system, traditional healer, women's movements, etc., should be explored. Potential conflicts between traditional and modern interventions should be examined using practical examples.

Educational programs should develop awareness of and appreciation for people from different ethnic groups and their experiences. As they acquire empathic ability, individuals would also learn to respect and value the humanity that unites their diverse ethnic groups and understand that such unity is a major prerequisite for local, national, and regional lasting peace as well as individual prosperity. Most of all, these programs would enhance participants' awareness of and appreciation for the increasing and unavoidable inter-ethnic interdependence that is engrained in the very fabric of African history, traditions and customs. (Ndura, 2006, p. 98)

Finally, the course should include a critical reflection on the social worker's role in intervening with cultural behaviours that are unhealthy and inappropriate. This assumes that all students will have some training in the local culture. If the intervention is appropriate, can it be completed in a culturally sensitive and successful way? One group member states: "if

we are social workers and we are supposed to practice things that we are taught, which don't actually fit in our society we have to try to indigenize it so that if social workers are not having the results then we could use traces in our culture to try and make it more applicable to our setting."

When the group considered the topic of traditional mechanisms for social intervention, it was pointed out that, in the Sociology department alone, every year students do long essays on social issues in Ghana. These essays are put on shelves and few people look at them. Also, in the Institute of African Studies, students and scholars have researched many ceremonies or festivals, and as the works of social workers and researchers these essays are great resources in gathering information about societal traditions. This idea of incorporating traditional social mechanisms for social work interventions is a shift in thinking and members of the group began to believe this was possible. One group member states: "I feel [current interventions] are not too acceptable and we understand those things in principle and we accept them and we want to make it more practical, we could create ceremonies, we could change some of the things to make it more acceptable." The idea had been planted that we can be creative with social work interventions and that we can use our knowledge and skills to produce interventions more appropriate to the African setting. Once these mechanisms are identified, questions need to be asked: 1) How can we implement these mechanisms and take it from a state level to the home; 2) Can a rural mechanism fit into the urban setting; and 3) Can you shift them, and, if so, do they still make sense in a new setting or should they be modified and/or abandoned altogether? There are many traditional mechanisms in society that are there to relieve tension, conflict, and present problems, and they just have to be identified and looked at in relation to social work. This class would help students to enhance their knowledge of these traditional mechanisms and to develop the skills to use these mechanisms to design and implement effective social work interventions.

Finally, an introduction to traditional authority structure would be helpful in this course. Kreitzer (2004b) shows similarities between the role of the queen mother in villages and the role of the social worker. Closer collaboration between queen mothers and social workers when working in the village is important. The queen mother in the research

group confirmed this by saying: “What I will advise all social workers, whenever you are sent to a village or somewhere to the people, the first people you are to meet to make your work easier is the chief and the queen mothers and the elders in the village. When you meet them and you tell them why you are there, they will welcome you and help you to make your work there with them easier.” If possible, a queen mother should be included in this course as a guest speaker or a guest lecturer as she is the expert on culture.

Social work and power issues. The objective of this component of the curriculum would be to have students examine in depth the different ethnic groups in the society. Because of the intricate details of power issues within ethnic groups, outside resource people could come to speak about their particular ethnic group. Issues of power, authority, class, ethnicity, racism, and oppression could be discussed as well as traditional approaches to empowerment and positive change in society. Rural and urban issues should be explored in light of power issues as well as tensions between religious and cultural systems. The importance of language in culture could also be explored in light of power issues.

Social work and social action. A practical course teaching the history of social action and successful techniques for social action at the local, national, and international levels is becoming increasingly important in a world where there is a large gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots.’ Social workers in the west have tended to favour individual therapeutic intervention (Midgley, 2001) while social workers in the South, particularly in Latin America, advocate for social activism for social change. Mmatli (2008) advocates for social workers “to adopt political activism as an intervention strategy aimed at creating a conducive environment in which other social work methods can be practiced” (p. 297). Gray & Mazibuko (2002) also advocate that social workers, previously tending to stay out of politics and economics, should play “an active role in the political and social arena at all levels” (p. 198). Mmatli (2008) suggests that social workers should be involved in lobbying to exert pressure on politicians and other decision-makers to address important issues.

Firstly, where possible “social workers should work closely with their clients to develop an alternative vision or agenda that addresses their concerns, initiate a debate on such an agenda, and lobby for bipartisan

support” (p. 303). This will show social work’s interest and presence at the government level and will also benefit the clients. Secondly, social workers should stand for electoral positions on tickets of political parties that are consistent with social work values. Social workers need to occupy positions of power. Thirdly, political education can raise the consciousness of the poor in order that people can make informed choices about whom to vote for. Finally, voting is an important social work activity. Practical skills on how to lobby Parliament, write letters, and organize demonstrations could be taught. How to promote the profession of social work publicly should also be explored. Important to this course would be a practical application of social action as a required assignment. This could be to speak on current affairs programs on the radio and TV and to publicly acknowledge that one is a social worker. In the end, promoting social justice is about “actively working towards more egalitarian societies” (Kabeera & Sewpaul, 2008, p. 333). “Political activism in Africa should seek to achieve a common goal, that is, to influence policy decisions in order to maximize the benefits for social work clients” (Mmatli, 2008, p. 302). In Rwanda social workers have an important role to play concerning the Gacaca courts for healing and reconciliation by “ensuring that the hearings are fair and impartial ... securing legal assistance for alleged perpetrators and victims where necessary; and doing on-site debriefing and support for victims as the hearings engender a great deal of emotional trauma” (Kabeera & Sewpaul, 2008, p. 329). Social workers can advocate for change, and there are techniques and skills that can be taught for effective activism, South African anti-apartheid social workers being a group that has the experience in this type of social work.

Social work values and ethics in African society. This course would look specifically at national and international social work values in relation to African societies. The universality of social work values would be explored and, in particular, a detailed examination of African societal values and culture in light of African philosophy and traditional beliefs systems (Gray, 2005; Kreitzer, 2006; Taylor, 2000). This would begin with a deconstruction of the concept of culture in order to identify culture in a particular society and in Africa generally. In order to have culturally specific interventions, knowing the different cultures in society is paramount (Mafile’O, 2004). One group member states: “I came to learn

that we need to know the relevance of the cultural aspect of the people we are dealing with. Because it will enable us to be creative in developing relevant programs and projects that will be based on their specific cultural values which people will accept as their own and will believe in that.”

Once a critique of values and beliefs in relation to African philosophy have been explored, a further step is to critically look at how these values and beliefs may or may not contradict the values put forth by IFSW and IASSW Ethics in Social Work, Standard of Principles (2008). Each professional association should rewrite its code of ethics to reflect in content and language its own society. An earlier example was given in Chapter 3 of this book of the Indian code of ethics that was revised, through the help of Dr. Richard Ramsay at the University of Calgary, and this code of ethics now reflects more of the Indian society (TISS, 1997).

Ross (2008) gives four examples where traditional practices and values and beliefs can cause difficult ethical decisions for social workers in their practice. She advocates the development of an “indigenous Afro-centric model of social work to promote healing, and as a way of teaching social work students about the dilemmas inherent in respecting cultural practices which impinge on the rights of others” (p. 385). An example she gives concerns traditional medicine. Seen as combining mental and spiritual guidance, herbal medicine, nutritional therapy, and physical therapy, she asks: “why then should there be a conflict between African and traditional healing, western medicine and human rights?” (p. 386). If the traditional belief is that a person with a disability has this disability due to the ancestor’s wishes or a punishment for wrong-doing, the ethical dilemma for social workers is that they “are expected to respect the cultural beliefs of different groups; or on the other hand, they are expected to consider the rights of the affected individuals” (pp. 386–87). These are difficult decisions that will be faced by social workers, and students need to be aware of and skilful in dealing with different values. A second example is ritual animal slaughter. This has been denounced by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and yet it is an important ritual for cleansing. For the social worker, the ethical dilemma is whether they honour animal rights or “respect the rights of the cultural groups” (p. 389) because it is an important part of many ceremonial rites of passage. A third example is organ donation. “Cultural taboos often stand in the way of

organ donation ... many black South Africans believe that they cannot be buried without their organs as their ancestors will not accept them” (389). And yet many people die daily due to the lack of organs being donated to save their lives. A fourth example is virginity testing. Condemned by the South African Human Rights Commission for young girls under the age of sixteen, it is an extremely important practice amongst the Zulu.

The basic antagonism between modern-day human rights and African cultural rights emanates from the fact that while the former hold that the full realization of the human potential lies in the absolute freedom and independence of the individual, the latter espouses the notion of Ubuntu and the common good, that is, that no man is an island. The concept of Ubuntu involves putting people first and reflects the communal values of collective humanity, compassion, solidarity, respect, humility, caring and sharing. In other words, a person is a person through other people. (p. 391)

This course will not only provide the opportunity for students to critique their own value base and how this evolved but should raise awareness of (and develop skills to deal with) ethically difficult social work situations.

Social work and refugee issues. The number of refugees in the world, as of the end of 2009, was 10.4 million with 22 per cent in Africa (UNHCR, 2010). With civil wars breaking out, this figure will surely rise in the future. Not only does war determine movement between countries, but economic, ecological, and political reasons often send people to seek refuge in another country. This course would look at refugee policies and refugee issues, including externally and internally displaced peoples, hosting refugees, repatriation, social work practice in refugee camps (practice issues and intervention strategies, child soldiers, unaccompanied minors, counselling services for post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.), and the role of international organizations in refugee issues. The pros and cons of integrating refugees into society versus a refugee camp should be critically discussed, and visits to a number of camps in the country should be undertaken. Many African countries have been host to thousands of refugees, and this course is extremely important to address,

especially as working in refugee camps is often seen as being sentenced to the dreaded ‘outpost’ where no social worker wants to work. The profile of effective social work in refugee camps would help eliminate this attitude and fear so that it is seen as an important option in social work practice. Community-based counselling services like ones that have been developed in Rwanda (Kabeera & Sewpaul, 2008) should be part of the discussion in this course.

Persons in need of protection in institutions. This course would explore major issues surrounding institutional care versus community care in light of developmental approaches to social work. Resettling people back into the community (for example, people living in witch communities, long-term institutions, and orphanages) and appropriate strategies for doing this in an African context would be discussed.

Development theories in the context of Africa. A course should be taught that specifically looks at the social development approach to social work that has already been advocated for by twenty years of ASWEA conferences and other authors, including Midgley (1995), Gray (1998), Sewpaul (2006) and Patel (2005). A look at the South African White Paper for Developmental Welfare, as well as other countries working on this approach, would be part of the course. Criticism over the usefulness of the medical model and casework model for communal countries in Africa has been debated. New models that go beyond the casework and community work practice are needed from a social development approach (Laird, 2003; Lombard, 1999; Sewpaul & Lombard, 2004).

Mediation and conflict resolution. For many African countries, consensus has been a part of the traditional way of solving issues in the community (Gyekye, 1996). And yet social work curriculum often does not include conflict resolution as a skill needed in social work. Patel (2005) emphasizes the importance of this skill in social work. “The emphasis of mediation on finding a ‘win-win’ solution resonates well with social work’s core values of the dignity and the recognition of the worth of each person” (Patel, 2005, p. 288). This course would develop skills for successful mediation and conflict resolution with individuals, families, groups, and communities. Patel (2005) identifies three stages of conflict resolution as being peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Kabeera & Sewpaul (2008) suggest a “shift from a worldview that

supports violence as a means of conflict resolution to embracing dialogue, mediation and non-violent means” (pp. 332–33). This should be integrated into all curricula from primary school to university level, including social work curricula.

New courses had been introduced, a few years before this research, to the University of Ghana social work program and in particular members of the group were enthusiastic about two courses: Development and Social Issues I and II, which covered the whole year in the new MSW program. These courses critically looked at those aspects of globalization in the international system which impacts directly on the development of Ghana. They covered the main concepts of development theory and considered the controversies surrounding definitions of development, underdevelopment, and sustainability. They also cover North/South relations and the dynamic relationships between education, infrastructure, access to information, and poverty. The second half looks at effective and ineffective strategies for development and the role of NGOs and government agencies and then explores their relationship to each other. The topics addressed in these courses are crucial for social work training in Africa.

Other important courses introduced were: 1) people living with HIV/AIDS; 2) social work and law; and 3) school social work. These courses are not guaranteed to take place due to the lack of lecturers and the ability to pay them. Funding is the overriding determinate of whether courses can be taught. This is directly linked to the government’s priority with secondary education and infrastructure within the university itself. The more recent interest from the World Bank (2009a) may help in providing more professors to teach these courses. Our research group felt that courses for work with children and youth and a course on aging and life cycle should be offered at the bachelor’s level and not just at the master’s level. Also, each course should include an international element and a gender relations element and, in particular, knowledge, theory, and interventions from other African countries. Finally, there needs to be a concerted effort to educate and teach all students IT techniques that they can use in their practice.

These changes to the present curriculum and the suggestion of new courses in social work are the practical outcomes from the work of the

research group. The whole knowledge base of social work history in Africa needs to be developed and critically analyzed in an African context. Social workers need to be politically involved because “when social workers have been involved in social and/or political activism, they have been able to influence social policy” (Mmatli, 2008, p. 301). Case examples should come from Africa so that students can get the most out of their learning without spending the mental energy of adapting theories and interventions from a western textbook. Articles from Africa should be used in the reading list and have preference over western articles. Classrooms should minimize the lecture-style teaching and use adult learning approaches that create an environment for creative thinkers and visionaries. The use of drama, art, oral tradition, group projects, role-playing, practical activities, videos, and practitioners from the community coming in as speakers and instructors are appropriate to include in the classroom. This would require the creation of a safe and collaborative teaching environment where social work academics could develop new teaching skills and methods and develop a reciprocal arrangement by which community people could come and talk to the class and in turn academics give something in return to the community. In practice this could mean a community social worker could teach and in return the professor could volunteer time with the social worker’s agency.

Ideally, an African social work textbook is important in the development of social work in Africa and indigenous writers should be encouraged to contribute to this production. There needs to be an opening up of libraries around the world so African students, academics, and practitioners can access articles for teaching and learning. Finally, there should be programs set up so that students can do field practica in other countries in Africa instead of in Europe and America. This will increase African knowledge concerning social work that will contribute to the overall development of social work in Africa.

3. Other issues arising from the research process

Often, in a PAR process, other important issues arise that may not have been part of the original research proposal. These issues can often be as much or more important than the goals of the research itself. The group

had other issues that they wanted to address and the following are other issues that emerged from the research process.

Social work on the periphery. One common theme that emerged from this research in Ghana and is expressed consistently at African conferences is that social work is not a recognized profession in many countries in Africa and people want this to change. No doubt the work of both the IFSW and IASSW has helped in promoting social work worldwide, but it has a long way to go in Africa. On the continent, a body that brought social work together was the ASWEA conferences. However, in the early 1990s it was disbanded and became the Eastern and Southern African Association of Social Workers. More recently, the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) was formed to bring the continent together in social work education and practice. Their role includes developing relevant curricula and regional standards, undertaking joint research and representing the interests of African schools of social work at national, regional, and international levels. Each country's national association needs to be strengthened so that they are the voice for social work to their governments and people. At the moment many are struggling to survive. Public awareness campaigns and educational videos can also help give a higher national profile to social work. Trained social workers in high positions can educate and encourage the profession to have a voice in national social policy. At the local level, social workers can be involved in radio call-in programs stating that they are social workers and this is their point of view. Sometimes other professionals do not even know what social workers do and each social worker can be a voice for the profession. There would also be value in collecting records and documenting what social workers are already doing. One group member states: "we need to avoid creating the impression that Ghana social work has no basis at all in the Ghanaian culture. There is a need to have the impression corrected." Kabeera & Sewpaul (2008) suggest that social workers in Rwanda could play a huge role in coordinating and organizing community-based interventions such as the monthly community service activities initiated by the government, micro-credit schemes and soft loans to improve household incomes and innovative services for returnees. The more visible social

workers are in the community, the more people will see, understand, and value their contributions.

Professional Associations in Africa. Mazibuko & Gray (2004) provide a good history of social work associations in South Africa. At one point there were five different associations depending on race and social divisions. “Professional associations ... have had a chequered history in South Africa ... due to the deep social and racial divisions engendered by apartheid and attempts by the government to control every aspect of social life” (p. 140). They give a list of major functions of a professional association as follows.

- 1) advance the interests of social workers by attending to matters relating to salaries, service conditions and benefits, and line of promotion,
 - 2) promote the professional development of social workers through theory and research, and the introduction of professional journals to facilitate this development,
 - 3) encourage ethical professional conduct by providing codes of ethics to guide social workers, including practitioners, managers, policy-makers and educators, towards ethically and politically sensitive practice,
 - 4) ensure the promotion of relevant and appropriate social work education and practice aimed at the alleviation of poverty and the reconstruction and development of communities and
 - 5) monitor service provision so as to ensure a just and equitable distribution of social work services.
- (p. 132)

This is a tall order for professional associations that are struggling to stay alive. One of the issues confronting the Ghanaian professional association (GASOW) was that it had not successfully brought social workers together from parts of Ghana and if this didn't happen, then collective national action would be difficult to achieve. In Ghana, many people have passed through the social work program at the university and the school of social work, and yet there are few professionals involved at the association level and some practitioners don't even know that the association exists. There were several other issues pertaining to the running of a vibrant and successful association: 1) there needs to be new and younger

people interested in the association; and 2) it must be established who can be called a social worker in the country and continuing education must be provided for trained social workers. It is the association's responsibility, working with the government, to determine who can call themselves a social worker and who can't, doing this in a culturally appropriate way.

Another concern is that the Ghanaian government is not using the association as a source for professional advice in social policy issues. If an association is not working well, if it doesn't have its own professional people behind it, then it is less likely that the government will use it as a resource. In Ghana, other NGOs have taken on this role of advising government on social policy and filling in the gap. One in particular, the International Social and Development Centre (ISODEC), has built an image for itself, and people respect their views. They are a watchdog for the government, and they continually analyze and respond to the government's social policy issues. The professional association should strengthen its voice to advocate on behalf of the health and social welfare of its people.

Intra-continental work. Another important element for the growth of social work in Africa is intra-continental cooperation among the different countries in Africa. The new continental organization, the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) was developed in order to, amongst other things, create and maintain a regional network of critical debate and exchange of innovative ideas in social work education and practice. As Mwansa (2010) states:

The process of transformation must be steered by an organization that has legitimacy and the will to offer leadership, direction and focus. This should provide a forum for academics to debate the challenges of training a cadre of professionals who will respond to the specific needs of the people. It will also enhance information flow, the development of networks, faculty and student exchange, regular reviews, research and standards of excellence.... An organization for schools of social work is therefore essential for the transformation of the social work profession in Africa. (p. 131)

One of the main barriers to the growth of this organization is the culture of inertia (Mwansa, 2010). “The inability of social work to effectively respond to problems on this continent has opened it to criticism, scepticism and, at times, outright ridicule” (p. 134). Another issue is attempting to create culturally relevant social work curriculum. “Failure to deal with these issues will spell doom for social work in Africa. ASSWA has to take the lead in this endeavour” (135).

Other issues around intra-continental collaboration concerns finances. Unfortunately, many African social workers are not paid enough to be able to attend conferences regionally, let alone nationally or within the continent. The other barrier to the pan-African meetings is the perennial tight security around visas. So many conferences I have attended have had gaps in presentations because someone couldn't get a visa to travel to another country in Africa let alone another country in the world. It is a continual struggle just to get together as a continent. But it is crucial for the growth of social work. Collaborative research between countries, student exchanges, and conferences within the continent help with the critical challenge of making social work more relevant to the African situation. This dialogue has to continue and, as schools of social work begin to exchange their programs and ideas, others can benefit from these different programs and together a new and better curriculum and practice can emerge.

Institutional changes. One area of concern for the research group was the effectiveness of the colonial institutions that have remained since independence.

Government organizations. The group spoke about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the colonial institutions like the Department of Social Welfare. This topic also emerged in the ASWEA conferences. They were pleased that something, an institutionalized organized structure, had emerged that helped in the transition from traditional life to colonial/modern life. What the group was challenged by was the question of whether this type of institutional structure is still effective, or if major changes needed to be made. It is possible that, in order to implement the necessary positive changes in social welfare delivery, the entire institution should be replaced. Built on a remedial approach from the colonial era, its appropriateness has to be critically looked at. According to Laird (2003),

debates have been going on over the past decades concerning the appropriateness of these institutions. “African scholars have consistently argued that the national Departments of Social Welfare set up by the former colonial powers of Britain and France should be reoriented to undertake interventions which support the objectives of social development not rehabilitative modes of casework” (p. 259).

This critical reflection and institutional change in service has still not happened. Social work needs to advocate for effective social welfare services at the government level. To change a large institution like social welfare takes much time, planning, and resources. It will affect both the beneficiaries of this institution and the way social work is taught at the diploma and bachelor’s level. However, if people begin to think about a new approach to social welfare, this is a start. As one group member stated: “How do we look at the whole content of social work and make it useful to our needs and not necessarily to the needs of those people that brought it or people that said we should learn it? How do we make it friendly to our own needs?” This critical thinking concerning social welfare institutions needs to begin at the university level of social work education and students should be given the opportunity to be creative and revolutionary in their ideas around relevant institutions. The professional association should also be involved in this discussion. One group member thought that a solution was to create “a Ministry of Social Welfare because that seems to be the only way something gets attention.” It seems that if something becomes a ministry in Ghana then issues are addressed more rapidly. There are examples of other countries who have implemented changes to their colonial institutions. For example, in Zimbabwe they also took a developmental approach at looking at the effectiveness of social welfare institutions. Instead of these institutions using only government money that is constantly dwindling, these institutions began generating money and becoming self-sustaining.

4. Outcomes of the research project

One of the main concerns among the members of the research group was whether or not anything that we did would be implemented, or were we just doing research for research’s sake. Having a history of good ideas

that were never implemented due to financial constraints, hierarchical issues, and oppressive environments, the group members were reluctant to put their time and effort into something that might never make any difference. It was difficult to know how the research would make a difference and trusting the process was hard for everyone. All we could do was to do the best analysis we could and then disseminate the information and encourage the University of Ghana's Department of Social Work to implement the curricula changes. A group member explained: "What impact can we also as a group bring to bear on this situation so that at the end of the day the work that we do we will see our fruits being utilized ... what can we do to push the agenda forward as far as the adaptations or the changes that we want to see in the social work curriculum?" Another group member stated: "If we are not careful it is going to be a talk shop and it will appear that we will not be able to do anything about it. And then we also one day will sit here with the next generation and tell them how social work was in our time and here too we were not able to do anything about it."

A key component of Participatory Action Research is the actions generated from a project. Political action sets PAR apart from other forms of action research. Political action can take place at many different levels of society from individual to societal changes. Each action was meant to challenge social work education and practice in Ghana with the hope that it would move forward in a positive way. Our action plans came out of creating new knowledge and the conviction that this new knowledge needed to be made available to everyone interested in the study. Always in our minds was the importance of returning our knowledge to the community (Department of Social Work, social workers, students, and the community). The action plans were all political in that each confronted power relations from the individual to the societal level. Disseminating this knowledge to the public was also important. Fals Borda (1988) describes four levels of communication concerning the "production and diffusion of new knowledge": "It incorporates various styles and procedures for systematizing new data and knowledge according to the level of political conscience and ability for understanding written, oral or visual messages by the group" (pp. 95, 96).

A consensus process was used to decide on the types of actions we would be involved in and how we would implement them. Of the five plans we proposed, each had its own trajectory. The need to reinvigorate the professional association issue in Ghana was nearest and dearest to the group's hearts, and there was a sense of urgency in getting this sorted out and establishing a working and vibrant association. Concerning the issue of social work being on the periphery, we considered different avenues to make our profession known to the public, including appearing on TV, being involved in current affairs programs on radio and TV, and doing a public education video. The latter was agreed upon. The following describes the way in which each action plan emerged, unfolded, and was implemented. The action plans were presented to the Department of Social Work at a Presentation Day held at the university. The two final plans evolved from my own work in Calgary, Canada.

Recommendations for changes to the curriculum. Throughout the research process, we talked about the curriculum and our experiences with it. Three workshops were specifically designed to allow group members to share their experiences with the program and to comment on the course outlines. Towards the end of the project, we put our thoughts together and produced a document concerning recommended changes to the curriculum that is discussed above.

At the end of the project, a copy was presented to each of the part-time and full-time lecturers who taught in the Department of Social Work, as well as lecturers from other departments who taught social work students. A copy was also given to the library so that all students and the general public could see our recommendations. It was important that the research outcomes were transparent and open to the public.

Public Education Video: Social work in Ghana: Education and Practice. One of the main themes that emerged from the research project was the concern that social work was on the periphery in Ghana and the group had several ideas on how to educate the public about social work. Radio, television, talk shows, and a video were discussed. However, the idea had been floating around about filming a video. The group agreed that the best idea was for one of the TV stations to film it. Dialogue centred on how to do the video, what should be in it, who should be in it, and how long the video should be. Once we had decided

on producing a video, each person was to write a three-minute script on what they did as a social worker. Once these scripts were collated, I narrated the larger script, bringing the different scripts together. The group then looked at it and made corrections. Ghana TV (GTV) was approached with an agreed-upon price. A producer from GTV was invited to come and a schedule was organized. This schedule included travelling to the north of Ghana for a weekend of filming in the rural areas. The video was a way for the group members to participate in a practical educational activity and to show their own work and skills as social workers. Copies were given to heads of the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Community Development, and the University of Ghana, Department of Social Work. Unfortunately, we were never able to show the film on TV due to the fact that Ghana TV wanted money to show it and the agreement beforehand was that it was a public education film that should have been shown free of charge.

Re-energizing the Ghana Association of Social Workers (GASOW). By far the most pressing issue was the state of GASOW. Some group members were fed up with the association and others didn't even know if it still existed. The group used the workshops with different speakers to identify problems and to discuss the idea of starting a new association. In the end, three options came forward. The first was to start a new association based at the university. The second was to revive the old association. The third was to scrap the old one altogether and create a new national association. It was finally agreed that we would try to revive the old association by instigating a 'friendly coup' which would identify the issue of the lack of respect for the present association and send a message to the executive association that social workers were not happy with the professional association. Another important point was that members of the present association was frustrated with the apathy among social workers concerning the profession and the association. It was important to find the best way to attempt a 'friendly coup' so that a positive action could result that would include social workers from all over Ghana. The group decided to hold a general meeting for all social workers in Ghana to discuss the issue and decide on how best to go forward with re-energizing the association. Project money was used to advertise in two

national newspapers and over 250 letters were sent to government and non-government organizations.

On November 1, 2003, a general meeting was held, and over seventy people came from across Ghana. It was the largest general social work meeting that had occurred in recent times. People from the prison service, education service, community development, social welfare, industry, and non-government organizations came to give their thoughts and opinions concerning the future of the association. Group members and faculty at the university took a risk in supporting this meeting, as it was extremely political. After three hours of tense discussion, the meeting adjourned with the challenge for social workers to go home and think about what they wanted to do in regards to the association. The result of this meeting produced changes to the make-up of the association. A follow-up meeting was held and the executive of GASOW was relieved of its duties and an interim executive was established. Approximately a year later, fair elections were held and a broader representation of social workers was elected. The president of the association subsequently was elected as the African regional representative for the International Federation of Social Workers at their Nairobi meeting in April 2005. This is an excellent example of PAR methodology. A stakeholder group was created, opinions and information were shared, and knowledge and recommendations were produced. Most importantly, the final step involved implementation of these recommendations, and positive changes were implemented.

Presentation of a TV and video recorder. One of our recommendations was that the department should invest in audio-visual equipment to be used as a teaching tool in the classroom. The group bought the above items and we presented this at the Presentation Day. It was acknowledged that the money came out of the project funds, something many foreign researchers do not think to do in appreciation of an institution's support for their research.

Articles for publication. The group agreed to write a joint article concerning the research process. In January 2004, I wrote to all group members asking them to give me their thoughts and feelings about the research, the strengths and challenges, and anything else they wanted to include in an article about the research. I also asked them to give their comments on the role of the queen mother in the group process for an article

concerning the topic of social work and traditional authority (Kreitzer, 2004b). The article has now been published (Kreitzer et al., 2009).

African articles for courses. The group suggested during the course of the workshops that we collect all the indigenous articles we had or knew about and put them in a reader for the library. On my return from Ghana, I collected many articles concerning social work in Ghana. I have copied the proceedings of the GASOW seminars held in the 1970s, the ASWEA proceedings from the 1970s, and the four United Nations international surveys on social work conducted in the 1950s and 1960s. These documents were transported to the Department of Social Work in May 2004 for use by students there. Technology is geared towards the rich of society, and information via the internet and global libraries, although improved for many countries, is still not accessible for the average person living in an economically poorer country.

ASWEA project. Between 2008 and 2011, a joint project by the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa, the International Association of Schools of Social Work, and the University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work, was facilitated by which the ASWEA conference proceedings were collected, copied, tidied up for printing, and printed for distribution in Africa. As a result, hard copies and DVDs of the documents were produced and the material was also placed on line for access through the Wits University historical archives (<http://www.historical-papers.wits.ac.za/>).

5. Dissemination of information

The group suggested that we have a Presentation Day in order to show what we had completed through the project. The day was planned and over a hundred people attended the day.

Presentation Day. The group agreed to hold a Presentation Day at the Department of Social Work to present our different actions to the staff, students, and community people. On October 17, 2003, we met with all interested people to explain the research project and to present the action plans we had produced as a result of our research. The recommendations for changes were presented to the Department of Social Work. The full video was shown as part of the program and copies were presented to the

Department of Social Work and the School of Social Work, Osu. The television and the video recorder were presented to the department, and the presentation produced huge applause from everyone. Finally, it was announced that a meeting concerning the association would be held on November 1, 2003.

Publication of the research. After the research the group wanted to write about the research. We agreed that any member of the group who wanted to participate in writing an article about the research could do so. In 2009, an article was submitted and accepted for publication with multiple authors from the group Kreitzer et al., 2009).

The personal experiences of the group were collected at the end of the project. Each person was asked to express two positives and two challenges regarding the project and these were put onto video. Excerpts from this video affirm the conscientization of a group of people willing to critically look at their own lives, society, and profession.

Any time I attended a meeting I would just sit down quietly and listen to them. Now I know the work of the social worker. I am part of the system and I appreciate the work that they do. I am going to sing their song about them wherever I go and wherever I meet the community.... I have learned that we don't say problems, but rather they use the word issues.

Another challenge is with my own thoughts and feelings about social work in Ghana and about colonialism and about these different factors that have affected the evolution of social work in Ghana.... I feel I have made friends with nine people that I hope I will always be in contact with.

Being in this group has enabled me to read lots of articles concerning social work in other parts of the world, especially developing countries like ours, country's like Zimbabwe and South Africa and what they are doing. And this has really ginged (shakened) in me how to do developmental social work.

When we started the project, like others have said, this is a unique way of data collection, which is not the same as what we are used to. One interesting thing about it to me is the way we dialogue in the group.... We always discuss things in some detail and sometimes very hot and by the end of it we have a consensus.... When we are sitting as individuals in our homes or villages, either as former students or current students, we wouldn't have had the opportunity to do that. But the research project has given us the opportunity to contribute our ideas as to what should be done to the curriculum to make it suitable to changing needs.

When I came into the group, naturally I am a little bit loud and sometimes I forget that this is a participatory group that everybody's thoughts and views are to be expressed ... but with time I have learned to control myself and then allow anything to go and then after that I will make my comments.... It is a sort of a revolutionized type of research and I am looking forward to using it.... Another benefit that I have gained from this research is the friends I have made.

I have been proud to be part of this participatory action research. And what fascinates me is this aspect of, the positive aspect of, democracy; the democratic way in which we conducted this research.... I was faced with the challenge of personal biases. I felt that if western influence was not also proper then it was equally right for me to say that some of our cultural aspects were not also proper.... I saw that a big challenge for us Africans to start thinking about is that we need to give women and children their rightful positions so far as human rights is concerned.

The group has enabled me to critically exam some of the things that we have been thinking through as social workers.... This research has been a process where we all dialogue together, agree on and we have to reach a consensus in making decisions

and for me it has been very interesting to know the other side of research where you have to involve people in dialogue.... What role are we going to play after this group work has gingered (shakened) us more or less to re-examine the role social workers can play or should play in our society? What is the way forward? What are the next steps as group members?

This research has caused me to think, it is a very positive aspect that it has had on me. Before we started the whole research program, we were taken through some exercises [the map exercise] to think outside box. And that has stayed with me ever since. I mean for the first time I have seen that it is very necessary to sometimes not only respect the common, what people are used to, but to also consider other methods of knowledge which are equally important.... It is a vision of the research to establish a professional association. I know it is not going to come very easily because we have been doing some running around and it appears that people are not too enthusiastic about it so that is a big challenge.

This research will benefit me in my master's preparation because most of the articles given to us contained information about things that I have been looking for quite a long time which I had not been able to find.... I hate to say that when I was in my final year or so well as for social work, I only did it as a discipline and I will move to finance or law. But I think through this particular research method I have learned to love social work. The discussion with Dr. Blavo was actually asking me to stick to social work in the future.

F. Conclusion of chapter

Much has been written concerning the need to create a culturally relevant African social work curriculum; however, few writers give examples of practical ways to go about doing this task. The information in this chapter contains practical ideas that the group came up with in order to begin this process. The chapter also highlights other important social work issues that needed to be addressed in the Ghanaian setting and no doubt other social work professionals in other countries will have similar issues. Sharing how the research group tried to tackle these issues will be of value to others academics, students, and practitioners in other countries of Africa. In detailing the research process, it is hoped that other PAR projects will emerge and that the academia of the universities in Africa will see the value of this type of research and open the door to qualitative research methodologies. Finally, the action plans for this research were life-changing for the group members and for social work in Ghana. Like a pebble thrown into a still pond, the ripple effects are still being felt in Ghana. Discussion and debate about social work curricula continues, research group members have gone on to obtain higher degrees of education and others have continued in their practice. The history of social work in Africa, through the ASWEA documents, is being distributed all over Africa for use in teaching, research, and writing. The goal of a more culturally relevant social work curriculum continues to move slowly in African debates and discussions and in practice.

