

## Thoughts on China Social Work Field Teaching Practice in the Context of COVID-19 Epidemic

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### ABSTRACT

*Social work originated in Europe and The United States, and gradually rose up in Asian developing countries in the middle of last century. Social work field teaching practice has always been the basis for social work to take root in the multicultural society and the localization of social work in Asia. Therefore, the field teaching practice is a very important part of social work professional education. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has a global and far-reaching impact in all areas. Although social work's different field teaching practice models have been formed in the localization process of China social work, the applicability of existing field teaching practice models in the epidemic situation has been significantly reduced. The transformation of social work field teaching practice model is inevitable. Based on the previous field teaching practice models of social work in China and taking the field teaching practice of social work in the university where the author works as an example, this paper proposes work program of social work field teaching practice in the context of COVID-19 epidemic.*

**Keywords:** Social Work Field, Teaching Practice, COVID-19, Work Program

### INTRODUCTION

Social work is a practical subject, which is fully reflected in social work education and social work practice. Even social work education itself is a form of social work practice (Teater, 2019). Training a professional social worker in social work education requires two parts: formal learning and professional practice, which can help students judge whether social work is their best career choice (Royse, 2012). As early as the end of the 19th century, at the beginning of the development of Europe and the United States' social work, social work field teaching practice has been an important part of professional training. To the early 21st century, the social work education is not only the duty of teaching, and also to help social work practitioners, the combination of services and interest groups, this view has become the cornerstone of social work professional development (Kendall, 2002). These duties should be pre-assigned in social work field teaching practice.

Besides Europe and the United States, Australia, Japan and other countries gradually established social work education and practice system from 1930s to 1950s (Mendes, 2005; Kosei, 1998). The development of Hong Kong social work has had a profound impact on the China's inland so far. Hong Kong social work education began in 1950, after thirty years, and 1980s is a period of rapid development of Hong Kong social work education and practice. The standards of social work education in Hong Kong since the 1990s has been established, such as, the social work field teaching practice must reach 800 hours (Liu, 2006).

The development of social work education and practice in China inland can be traced back to the 1920s and 1940s, when a group of universities such as Yanching University gradually opened social work education courses, and in the 1920s and 1930s, under the guidance of

some scholars, they carried out internships related to community social work such as rural construction movement. In the 1980s, with the reconstruction of sociology discipline in universities and the establishment of China market economy system, the demand for community social services became increasingly obvious.

With the support of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, social work education was restarted in the late 1980s when Peking University established the major of Social work and management. In the following three decades, social work education and practice developed rapidly in China inland. Nationwide, more than 300 colleges and universities have set up social work majors, and there are more than 10,000 professional social work service agencies. Social work education standards have been established in 2002. According to requirements of “the national teaching standards of undergraduate course of colleges and universities”, the social work field teaching practice for undergraduate not less than 800 hours, as well as the requirements of the social worker’s professional assessment are that assistant social worker and social worker should have practical ability to analyze and solve practical problems. The above requirements determine the undergraduate students need to be professional competent through long-time field teaching practice.

After 30 years of development of Social work education and practice in China inland, the localization of China social work development mode has started by the education first, timely transferred to practice orientation. To promote the reform of education and the localization of professional social work practice theory and method, are the important task of social work development of China island in the 2020s (Wang, 2019; Yuen-Tsang, 2019).

## **EXISTING SOCIAL WORK FIELD TEACHING PRACTICE MODEL AND NEW MEASURES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19**

### **The formation of China social work field teaching practice models**

Social work field teaching practice is generally divided into two types: long-term practice and course practice. The long-term practice is when a student as an assistant work in a social service agency for a professional period of one semester or summer vacation, etc. Course practice means that students' time is allocated to classroom learning and course practice according to the teaching arrangement. For example, students are arranged to have an internship in an social service agency 1-2 days per week or 1-2 weeks per semester (Royse, 2012). This paper aims to work program formulation of the long-term practice under the influence of COVID-19.

At the beginning of this century, scholars in the field of social work have discussed the teaching model of field practice. Field teaching practice is generally typed into four models: the institution-based apprenticeship field practice; the college-based internship practice; the partnership between institutions and colleges field practice; the integration of teaching practice (Shi, 2003). The main content of field teaching practice is to establish partnerships with government social welfare departments and professional social work organizations, excavate local resources through project cooperation, and participate in the research on social issues and the construction and development of residential communities (Xiang, 2000; Shi, 2003). Moreover, broadening in adolescents, clinical treatments, the disabled, and family counseling, etc., and to establish the social work practice base for enriching the content of field teaching practice, cultivating students' practical ability is very important, but if the field practice institution is not ideal, that could produce negative effects, such as lower students' willingness to engage in social work (Zhu, 2000).

In 2011, some China social work scholars had a discussion on the issue of professional field practice education, and put forward some opinions on how to carry out professional field

practice education. For example, they emphasized learning professional knowledge and internalization value in professional field practice, and established the “practice-teaching-research” trinity teaching practice. With combining the practicality and rationality of professional field practice, social work practice is integrated into professional research and local practice. And developing the professional field teaching practice under the joint supervision of schools and institutions, etc. (Shi; Ku; Ma; Zhou; Zhang; etc., 2011). On the basis of these discussions, the development of social work field practice in recent ten years has presented the following three main practice models.

**a. long-term practice based on a service project or professional service.**

Professional teaching practice based on service projects has its rationality under the realistic situation of the development of Social work in China. The content of project-based teaching practice is to find the convergence point of social work intervention according to social needs and professional needs (Xia, 2013). The service projects include three aspects: curriculum training project, professional internship project and social service project. The teaching practice model of “social group – project – practice base” is formed through in-depth cooperation among the school, government and social work institution (Liu, 2012). In the design of services oriented practice, the school is to negotiate with the government and social services agency, then arrange students to a professional part of the project to make the students into the operation of project, quickly clear goals and roles in the project work, formed a kind of teaching practice model with service effect as priority, (Zheng, 2014).

However, there are ethical dilemmas and risks in project-based teaching practice. For example, project-oriented teaching practice could violate the essence of field teaching practice and affects the learning effect of students. Besides, the limited role of students couldn't give consideration to the interests of service beneficiary, and there is a risk of violating the ethics of "the interests of the client first" in social work (Peng, 2014; Guan, 2017).

**b. long-term practice based on teaching practice centers or bases.**

The construction of teaching practice centers or bases are the foundation of practical education of social work. It is through the link with university, local government and institution to practice mechanism of innovation for social work development (Huang, 2016; Huang, 2018). In the view of integration of theory teaching and practice teaching, teaching practice centers or bases construction take into account the needs of multiple subjectivity such as students, schools, agencies, as well as client. Systematic field practice and student field experience have always been concerned. Therefore, increasing the number and quality of professional teaching practice centers or bases and covering as many social work service fields as possible involved in social work teaching practice should be promoted. (Zhang, 2012; Yang, 2014).

However, the field in teaching practice centers or bases are also confronted with such problems as insufficient resources, inconsistent institutional demands and arrangements, difficult to determine field practice objectives, low administrative tendency and professionalization of institutions, insufficient diversification of centers' or bases' service field, and insufficient professional practice instructors and professional supervisors (Ning, 2013; An, 2014; Li, 2017; Ju, 2017; He, 2018). Therefore, the construction of teaching practice centers or bases need to perfect operating system (Sun, 2019), improve the organization environment of the teaching practice centers or bases, the organization supervision and the service targets, reduce the influence of administrative logic of institutions, promote localization of supervision, meet the needs of service targets, and

improve the professional confidence of students' field practice. (Liu, 2019).

**c. long-term practice based on professional joint supervision model.**

Supervision is an important working method of social work education and practice. Establishing a positive, democratic and dialogic teaching mode of supervision plays a direct role in cultivating students' critical spirit and practical ability, paying attention to marginalized vulnerable groups in society and setting up social work values (Yao, 2010). From The point of supervision logic, the Integration of Theory and Practice Loop Model(ITP), put forward that the target of supervision is for students to combine the theoretical knowledge of social work with practical knowledge in different situations, and the content of supervision will be used as a reference to guide students' practice (Bogo; Vayda, 1998; An, 2010). Joint supervision refers to the formal internship agreements signed between the social work departments and professional institutions in the same city, or across the land or across the border, in which social work students are arranged or sent to institutions or communities for internship, and social work departments and professional institutions jointly provide the whole internship training and internship supervision for students.

Based on joint supervision, social work department will arrange students to the eastern developed regions of China such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, Hong Kong for social work professional internship training. Social workers and senior professional teachers provide joint supervision to internship of students. In recent years, this kind of internship of social work students has been adopted by many colleges and universities (Zhang, 2011; Li, 2014; Li, 2014). In the recent two or three years, researches about joint supervision practice also show that through this kind of internship, students in professional cognition, personality development and professional growth, professional practice experience are evident in the harvest. but at the same time, the social work profession is faced with the dilemma of autonomy and professionalism. Therefore, when internship students gain the experience of professional negative cognition and marginalizing experience, their willingness to engage in social work professional service will also decrease. (Yu, 2017; Li, 2020).

To sum up, social work education has formed a relatively comprehensive practice system and diversified professional field teaching practice models in more than 30 years of development. Different teaching practice models of social work have been fully applied in social work education in colleges and universities and the effect of practical experience has been summarized. However, there are still some limitations in the previous research and experience summary of teaching practice models.

First, the professional teaching practice of social work at present still is given priority to with professional education system. The colleges and universities, teaching practice centers or bases, have a dominant position to the arrangement of students' field practice. The subjectivity of the students to participate in practice is not obvious. And it is lack of reflective researches on teaching practice models (Xie, 2017). Students' thinking on generating professional practical knowledge and reflexive practice through internship or field should be encouraged and guided (Wu, 2017), which is helpful to train students to become the future planners and practitioners of social work profession.

Second, the existing professional social work field teaching practice models emphasize the perfect teaching practice system of practice centers' or bases' construction. But the reality is often difficult to well meet the teaching practice system of many conditions, such as difficult to focus on the core target of the field teaching practice, the demand of colleges and universities education reform (Liu, 2016), and the professionalization of institution, the promotion of students' professional values and the ability.

Finally, The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. Social work professional field teaching practice faces new problems. The previous field teaching practice models are difficult to cope with the new problems brought by the epidemic. Under the epidemic situation, it is an urgent problem to discuss how to protect the basic rights of students' health and safety, and how to realize the basic requirements of students' field teaching practice and professional abilities.

### **How should social work field teaching practice be carried out in context of COVID-19?**

Taking the school of Ethnology and Sociology of Inner Mongolia University as an example, this paper analyzes the transformation of social work practice during the epidemic. The teaching practice plays an important role in the teaching and training scheme of social work discipline in Inner Mongolia University. The teaching practice model of social work in Inner Mongolia University mainly focuses on project practice, laboratory construction and practice. With the expansion of the field teaching practice, the construction of teaching practice centers or bases such as linking social service institutions has made significant breakthroughs. So far, diversification of centers of bases have been, that cover the school social work, social work for the disabled and the elderly, the urban community social work, social work for ethnic group and nomadic areas, rural social work, medical social work, and other fields. The number of teaching practice centers or bases reaches more than 20.

Since 2016, through establishing cooperative relations with professional social work agencies in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other regions, the school has arranged sophomores and Master of Social Work (MSW) to go to the agencies for internship or field practice in the mode of joint supervision. Complete 1/2 of the field teaching practice's time required of discipline practice standard through the long-term practice in summer section, that is, no less than 400 hours. It can be seen that long-term practice in summer section is of great significance to the social work field teaching practice of the school.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the relatively limited understanding of the duration and transmission route of the epidemic, the previous field teaching practice model is difficult to adapt to teaching practice during the epidemic. Therefore, how to carry out social work field teaching practice under the epidemic situation is a common challenge for teachers and students of social work. In the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, it is urgent to overcome the difficulties, namely, to do a good job in students' physical and mental health under the guidance of the epidemic prevention and control opinions and measures of the Ministry of Education and other education authorities, and to achieve field teaching practice goals and practical effects during the epidemic without lowering standards. In order to deal with the difficulties brought by the epidemic situation, the social work field teaching practice model has been changed. it is very important for social work practice innovation and thinking under the epidemic situation. The following practices of social work field teaching practice in Inner Mongolia University are being gradually improved.

#### **a. Summarizing the effectiveness and shortcomings of the previous practice models, and considering how to equivalently achieve the effectiveness under the epidemic situation this year.**

Quantitative research method was used to evaluate outcomes of students' field teaching practice through long-term practice in the past summer section. In order to summarize the successful experience and difficulties of the previous practice models. Through questionnaire survey, the data of social work students' field teaching practice in the past summer section is collected. and the descriptive statistical analysis and statistical analysis of related variables is used to analyze the data.

**b. Assessing the needs of current field teaching practice, determining practice target, and formulating measures that take into account the epidemic situation and field teaching practice effect.**

In accordance with the requirements of epidemic prevention and control and the discipline standards, the school, field practice instructors and students should jointly discuss and formulate safety measures and practice plans for students during the epidemic. And to assess the field practice needs of social work students who will be participating in a long-term practice of summer section. The field teaching practice needs to be adapted to local conditions of students' family residence. It is recommended that students take practice in family residential areas and associate with local institutions for collaborative participation. Through the questionnaire survey, the data of the students' long-term practice demand in summer section were collected, and descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the students' practice expectation. Students are encouraged to set practice targets in line with the reality, so as to equivalently achieve practice effect of internalizing professional value, testing theoretical knowledge, improving professional ability, and generating practical experience.

**c. Students' family local field practice and joint online supervision**

According to the local epidemic situation, students and institutions jointly set field practice plans and completed practice tasks and text records of practice. The field practice instructor communicated and interviewed with the students to understand the impact of the epidemic situation in the students' residence and the situation of the local institutions. In view of the differences of students' practice targets, the instructors put forward the requirements on the professional value and ability of the students. Students have a dialogue and discussion with the instructors, and independently formulate the field practice plans. The field teaching practice model has been changed from the former entrusted institution internship to the current cross-professional cooperative and participatory field practice. Meanwhile, senior professional social work supervisors in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other regions are invited to conduct online supervision jointly with the school instructors to assist students in solving problems encountered during the field practice.

**d. Action research**

Process evaluation of students' practice effect is important. It is necessary to evaluate the students' field practice process through questionnaires and make the content analysis research of students' field practice text record, so as to know the achievement of students' field practice targets. According to the actual situation of the field practice and the confusion encountered by students, timely adjust the practice tasks, to find practical wisdom and knowledge to deal with the confusion.

**e. To summarize the effect of social work practice during the epidemic and promote the diversification of field teaching practice models**

The effectiveness and improvement measures of field teaching practice model achieved during the epidemic need to be assessed, as well as the significance of this model for the reform of social work education. Depending on the trend of the epidemic, educational institutions need to determine whether to continuously improve field teaching practice model. At the same time, it may be an opportunity to promote the diversification of teaching practice models of social work and the localization of China social work education and practice improving the quality of social welfare services.

## CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed the vulnerability of human societies to infectious diseases. But life has to go on. The concept of "resilience" in social work is an affirmation of people's potential to recover from adversity. In the context of COVID-19, social work field teaching practice still needs to show resilience. Based on the analysis of the previous practice models and the work program of the current practice models, this paper presents the potential of continuing social work field teaching practice. The changing field teaching practice model, it emphasizes the use of quantitative research and qualitative research methods to evaluate the social work practice effect and evidence-based comparative research. Meanwhile, the practice knowledge of the field teaching practice is discussed in the paradigm of action research, such as protecting the right of students' health, assigning field practice targets and plans through multilateral negotiations, and implementing joint online supervision. It is hoped that the thoughts of this paper can be used as a reference for social work education and practice in the context of the epidemic.

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