

## International Collaboration: Developing the Practice of Social Work Curriculum through Study Abroad and Participatory Research

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**Abstract :** Background: Globalization presents international social work with both opportunities and challenges. Thus, the design of this international experience aligns with the three charges of the Commission on Global Social Work Education. An international collaborative effort between an American and Scottish University Social Work Program was based on an established University agreement. The presentation provides an overview of an international study abroad among American and Scottish Social Work students. Further, presenters will discuss the opportunities of international collaboration and the challenges of the project. First, we will discuss the process of a successful international collaboration. This discussion will include the planning, collaboration, execution of the experience, along with its application to the international field of social work. Second, we will discuss the development and implementation of participatory action research in which the student engage to enhance their learning experience. A collaborative qualitative research project was undertaken with three goals. First, students gained experience in Scottish social services, including agency visits and presentations. Second, a collaboration between American and Scottish MSW Students allowed the exchange of ideas and knowledge about services and social work education. Third, students collaborated on a qualitative research method to reflect on their social work education and the formation of their professional identity. Methods/Methodology: American and Scottish students engaged in participatory action research by using Photovoice methods while studying together in Scotland. The collaboration between faculty researchers framed a series of research questions. Both universities obtained IRB approval and trained students in Photovoice methods. The student teams used the research question and Photovoice method to discover images that represented their professional identity formation. Two Photovoice goals grounded the study's research question. First, the methods enabled the individual students to record and reflect on their professional strengths and concerns. Second, student teams promoted critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and professional issues through large and small group discussions of photographs. Results: The international participatory approach generated the ability for students to contextualize their common social work education and practice experiences. Team discussions between representatives of each country resulted in understanding professional identity formation and the processes of social work education that contribute to that identity. Students presented the photograph narration of their knowledge and understanding of international social work education and practice. Researchers then collaborated on finding common themes. The results found commonalities in the quality and depth of social work education. The themes found differences regarding how professional identity is formed. Students found great differences between their and American accreditation and certification. Conclusions: Faculty researchers' collaboration themes sought to categorize the students' experiences of their professional identity. While the social work education systems are similar, there are vast differences. The Scottish themes noted structures within American social work not found in the United Kingdom. The American researchers noted that Scotland, as does the United Kingdom, relies on programs, agencies, and the individual social worker to provide structure to identity formation. Other themes will be presented.

**Keywords :** higher education curriculum, international collaboration, social sciences, action research

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