Innovations in Social Welfare
Empowerment and globalisation in a Nordic social work education context

The Nordic countries have been experiencing paradigm shifts from a focus on problems, pathology and deficits to more strengths-based, capacity-building and inclusive approaches, especially in the field of child welfare. This article describes joint Nordic (Nordplus) Master level courses that have been introduced to promote a more inclusive and empowering way of working with children and families. The overall theme of the Nordplus project is democratisation of child welfare work. The project includes three separate courses: (i) Empowerment and family decision making in child welfare; (ii) Strengths and solution oriented child welfare work; (iii) Children, youth and participation. The project brought together masters students from the Nordic countries and professional academics from the Nordic countries, South Africa and Australia. This article describes and problematises the learning process and the outcomes of the project. An important aim of the project was to interrogate the relationship between the global and the local.

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Introduction

This article deals with the potential benefits and the challenges of adopting democratic principles and empowering methods in social work education and practice in the Nordic countries in the area of child welfare and child protection. The democratisation of social work education and practice has gained ascendancy in social work literature (Dominelli, 2002, 2004; Fergusson & Lavayette, 2006; Ife, 2002; Leonard, 1997; Sewpaul, 2003) on a global level. This trend is also evident in the international definition of social work (IFSW & IASSW, 2001), the global standards for social work education and training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005), and the IFSW and IASSW Code of Ethics (2004). These international developments have important implications for social welfare policy in different contexts. Social work is a part of the welfare system in the Nordic countries and it is dependent on legislation and political decisions. Social work also has an impact on welfare legislation and related political decisions. In this context, the knowledge base of social work education is crucial and the choice of theories, methods and pedagogical approaches of child welfare within the welfare state becomes extremely salient.

The education of social workers has a long history in the Nordic countries. The first schools of social work were established in the first half of the 20th century, from the very first, in Norway in 1920 to the last, in Iceland in 1957 (Wiehe-Wallin, 2004). Social work received status as an academic subject towards the end of the 20th century. Although social work in the Nordic countries is founded on humanitarian and Christian values, it also has a tradition of using professional expertise and legislation. Drawing on this historical background, social work has become a powerful profession which includes both care and control of service users. While social workers may endeavour to share both power and responsibility with service users, this is not always easily accomplished because of social

work traditions and earlier experiences, and because legislation emphasises the responsibility of the agency and of the social worker. Additionally, the service user has to be willing to shoulder power and responsibility, which takes courage and energy.

The demands put on social workers are changing rapidly because of the growing number of people of foreign backgrounds and because of the intense worldwide transactions of values and knowledge. These changes have become apparent, where on a global level there are calls for service user involvement, and for a more global understanding of social work within which the particularities of local contexts are taken into account (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005). Child welfare and child protection services in the Nordic region are seeing the beginnings of shifting paradigms, from a focus on problems, pathology and deficits to a focus on strengths, capacity building and empowerment.

Nordplus and the European university reform

One of our main concerns in designing the Nordplus programme was how social work education could provide professional social workers and social work students with a global understanding of social problems. A related issue was the implication of such an understanding for theories and methods of child welfare and child protection work. All Nordic countries have their own codes of ethics in social work, which are consistent with the principles reflected in the IFSW/IASSW (2004) Code. The codes of ethics and global standards[1] are the foundations of international social work, encompassing certain core values, i.e. human dignity, solidarity and democracy. Developing global standards was a very delicate and difficult assignment and there are many pitfalls to avoid. The Chair of the Global Standards Committee writes:

> The global standards document is rooted in radical, structural, humanitarian, and postmodern approaches where there is a rejection of reductionist, logical-positivist rationality and a rejection of the language of managerialism and the market . . . It emphasises non-hierarchal power relations and the importance of inclusivity, especially that of service user inclusion, human rights and social justice, and their co-existent responsibilities and mutual obligations. (Sewpaul, 2005: 216)

Other global documents, like the United Nations' conventions on the *Rights of the Child* and on *Human Rights*, also emphasise inclusive and democratic principles. These documents have influenced several current social work theories and practices, such as empowerment-based and anti-discriminatory social work, and it is against these global developments that the Nordplus programme was initiated.

The Nordplus programmes financially support intensive programmes on Bachelor's and Master's levels. Five departments of social work from four Nordic countries jointly created three Master's courses on the overall topic *child protection and democratic principles*. The three courses are: (i) *Empowerment and family decision making in child welfare*, (ii) *Strengths and solution oriented child welfare work* and (iii) *Children, youth and participation*. The first course has been offered twice, the second once while the third course is still on the drawing-board. The idea of creating a joint intensive programme at Master's level arose in 2000 in a preparatory meeting within the Nordplus network. At this time the schools of social work in Stavanger and Bodoe were in the process of obtaining university status, thereby becoming eligible to offer courses at Master's level. The department of social work at Gothenburg University has been offering a Master's programme in social work since 1985.

Apart from global imperatives, this Nordic cooperation coincides with the European University reform, called the Bologna process, the main purpose of which is to increase European cooperation in higher education. The reform has three comprehensive goals: to promote mobility and possible employment and to attract students from across the world. Universities throughout Europe have created new courses and revised old ones in accordance with the requisites of the reform process. The experience gained in working on the three Nordplus master courses has benefited the development of new courses connected to the Bologna reforms. As a result, the curriculum was developed to emphasise the strengths perspective and more inclusive and democratic theories and methods. The Family Group Conference was introduced as one such democratic and strengths-based approach in child welfare work.

Family Group Conference

Family Group Conference (FGC), which is used in many countries across the world, is an example of an inclusive and democratic method in child protection. The method was developed in the Maori community in New Zealand (Lupton & Nixon, 1999; Marsh & Crow, 1998). Briefly, the main purpose of the method is to promote democratic principles by including the family in the decision making about the child. Therefore the family, instead of a professional social worker, is in charge of the whole process in a child protection case. The family, with the child included, works in

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[1] The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) jointly produced global standards for social work education and training that were adopted at the General Assemblies of IASSW and IFSW in Adelaide in 2004.

partnership with an independent coordinator and invites key persons, such as relatives, neighbours, teachers and friends, to a meeting. The child welfare workers are present at this meeting where the current situation, as well as the future of the child, is discussed. The best interest of the child is always the focus. The coordinator, who is separate from the child welfare office, conducts the first phase of the Family Group Conference where the child welfare worker, together with other members in the meeting, presents information about the child. After this phase the professionals withdraw from the meeting and the family, together with their network, makes a care plan for the future of the child according to the questions asked by the child welfare worker in the first phase. There are minor differences in the way in which this process is carried out in the Nordic countries. In Denmark, for example, the social worker, in cooperation with the parents and the child, constructs these questions (Faureholm & Broenholt, 2005). In the following and the final phases, the child welfare worker and the coordinator rejoin the conference and the plan is presented. At this phase it is up to the authorities to make decisions on the plan (Andersson & Bjerkman, 1999; Horverak, 2001; Omre & Schjelderup, 2001; Sundell & Haeggman, 1999). The following are some of the key elements of the programme (Faureholm & Broenholt, 2005; Schjelderup, Omre & Marthinsen, 2005):

• The coordinator should be neutral in relation to the child welfare office.
• The extended network of the family is mobilised.
• The representatives of the child welfare office should have a positive attitude towards the plan presented by the family.
• The professionals are not present at the second phase when the future of the child is discussed and the care plan is set up.
• The child takes part in the FGC.

The processes of a FGC and its main principles are aligned with the key principles of the global standards document, which emphasises inclusivity, service user involvement, democratic participation and human rights. These principles were also evident when the participants in the Nordplus network met in Copenhagen to create the first Nordic Master's course in child protection. Several members were at that time, and still are, involved in child protection, either as academics or practitioners, and are interested in developing innovative, democratic and inclusive methods in working with children and families.

Values such as democracy, a focus on strengths or assets and an emphasis on anti-oppressive social work practice (Dominelli, 2002) were core themes in our discussions. The method of FGC seemed an obvious choice that was consistent with our ideological positions and our philosophical approach to working with families. Another concern was the growing number of people of non-Nordic origin in our countries and the challenges this posed for child welfare and child protection. There was also recognition that in a rapidly globalising post-modern world, we would need an international or global perspective in our educational and practice initiatives. The method of FGC served both purposes of having a democratic and inclusive approach, and of being known and used internationally.

Child protection in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries are welfare states with a high level of public financing. An emphasis on gender equality and children's welfare and protection is another characteristic of social welfare policy and social work in Nordic countries (Bjoerk-Eydal & Satka, 2006; Hessle & Vinnerljung, 1999). The national social insurance system is based on the previous income of the individual, but there is one exception – economic assistance from local social services. Young people with no education, recent immigrants and single mothers are the main recipients of this type of economic assistance (Hessle & Vinnerljung, 1999). According to Bjoerk-Eydal and Satka (2006), Nordic children have been a key consumer group of both benefits and services while being relatively invisible in welfare policy research. The authors argue that one of the causes for this lack of visibility is that children are constructed as dependent family members rather than as subjects in their own right. The authors assert that social workers contribute to the social construction of childhood, not only when they take direct actions based on the notion of 'the best interest of the child', but also in their daily work with families and children (Bjoerk-Eydal & Satka, 2006).

Another characteristic of the Nordic countries is the *dual owner family* characterised by a high rate of family instability and the fast-growing category of *single parent family* (Baeck-Wiklund, 2002). For example, in Sweden 75 per cent of all children are raised in a nuclear family with both birth parents. The others are raised in other types of families such as single parent or linked family systems. In the latter, the parents live separately and often in a re-constituted family while taking equal responsibilities for the child (Larsson-Sjöberg, 2000). In practice this means that two family systems are responsible for the child and that the child has to relate to both. This family instability can be a challenge to child welfare organisations. Another challenge is the high prevalence of families with roots outside the Nordic countries that have often escaped from war and suffered from hardship and personal losses. In Sweden more than 10 per cent of all children are born abroad and more than 20 per cent have a foreign background, with 'foreign background' referring to at

least one parent being born outside Sweden (Johansson & Oesterberg, 2001).

These aspects of life in the Nordic countries affect both citizens and the social welfare system. New family forms and families with ties to members abroad make new demands on the social welfare system. When the legally guided and often inflexible social services meet with a family of foreign background, the problems of the adults often dominate social work practice and the children do not get sufficient attention (Egelund, 1997). Williams and Soydan (2005) argue that sometimes minority children need to be protected, not only from abusive parents, but also from oppressive social work practices. A research project in progress – by Gustafsson and Johansson – found that families with foreign backgrounds experience child welfare services as unreceptive and unresponsive to their wishes and needs. From the perspective of social workers, legislation and lack of financial resources make it difficult to help service users in the best possible way. However, Dalrymple and Burke (1995) argue that it is possible to use the law as an empowering tool to ensure that the needs of all family members are met.

The contextual versus the global

The Nordic Master's courses grew out of a frustration about the lack of democratic principles in child protection both in the education of social workers and in social work practice. This frustration and an interest in improving education and practice in child protection was the starting-point of our joint pedagogical work. There are many similarities concerning social legislation, praxis and social work education in the Nordic countries. Still, the differences are large enough to promote discussion around social work issues in a Nordic context. We had, for example, lengthy discussions about how age matters when interviewing children in child protection cases. In this special issue there is a difference in both legislation and practice. In other cases the Nordic context is insufficient for comprehending social phenomena. The role of the family is one example. To be able to understand the dilemma, a family with roots outside the Western world experiences in its transactions with social services, we need knowledge about diverse cultures. In the Nordic countries the family is no longer the only or main provider of childcare and care for the elderly and the disabled, as it is in many other countries in the world. This dilemma needs to be acknowledged when the social worker encounters families with non-Western backgrounds.

The FGC was adopted as it allowed for a global and inclusive model for social work with different types of families. The FGC method also makes it possible to apply democratic principles in child protection services. FGC served as an example of a modern and empowering way to work in the first Master's course: *Empowerment and family decision-making*. In this course Nordic lecturers provided all the teaching. In the next course there was a need to extend the knowledge base and to consider other theories and methods within the same paradigm. As organisers and lecturers, we ascertained the need to learn from colleagues from countries outside of Europe. Thus, two academics, Assistant Professor Karen Healy from Australia and Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul from South Africa, both of whom had prior teaching experience in the Nordic context, were invited to lecture on the second Master's course: *Strengths and solution oriented child welfare work*. The strengths perspective has an empowering aspect because qualities such as resilience and individual strengths (Healy, 2005; Saleeby, 1997) are emphasised. This course also contained aspects of human rights, gender equality and the role of the social worker in a global perspective, with a focus on social activism, lobbying, advocacy and the roles of social movements in engendering social change.

The two courses presented so far are focused on child welfare work with families. However, it was felt that there was a need to highlight the rights of the children. Concepts like *children's rights* and *the best interest of the child* constitute a great challenge in Nordic child protection as they reflect a need for paradigm shifts (Schjelderup & Omre, 2003). Instead of viewing the child as vulnerable and victimised, the child is increasingly being seen as a competent human being with his/her own will. The concept *the best interest of the child* contains a contradiction: the child is conceived of as both competent and vulnerable at the same time (Sandbaek, 2001). That is the starting point for the third and last Master's course in the series, *Child protection and democratic principles*. Hopefully, we will be able to develop and offer this course within the Nordplus framework.

Power, powerlessness and change

The essence of all three Master's courses is the significance of power relationships for family social work practice and for the education of social workers. The discourses on power rest on several different levels. First, we investigate the distribution of power between the child welfare organisation, including legislation and praxis, and the child welfare worker. The second level is the power relationships between the child welfare worker and the family. Thirdly, we problematise power relationships within the family in relation to the notion of *the best interest of the child*. The fourth is the global level, where there is hegemony of Western social work knowledge (Gray, 2005; Sewpaul & Jones, 2005). The hegemony of Western social science has important implications for social work practice *vis-a-vis* families

in the Nordic countries with a non-Western origin. For example, there are often differences in view regarding the socialisation of children and the responsibility of the family. The fifth level concerns social work education itself, with skewed power relationships between those who predominately educate and those who are supposed to listen and learn. We maintain that it is important to deconstruct power relationships on all these different levels in order to understand the essence of social work practice.

The deconstruction of power

Firstly, social work does not belong to a classical profession like medicine or law and does not regard itself as a powerful profession (Hasenfeld, 1992; Jaervinen, 2002). On the contrary, social workers see themselves as belonging to a relatively low-paid profession with a predominantly female workforce and lacking generally accepted theories and methods (Jaervinen, 2002). Yet, as Jaervinen (2002) argues, social workers often act within a powerful organisation, and their exercise of power, Lundstroem and Sunesson (2000) assert, is deeply rooted in the organisation. This means that, in comparison with a qualified doctor, for example, the professional social worker wields very little personal power; power exists within the organisation. Social services, including child welfare and child protection, carry a lot of power connected to legislation, distribution of financial and human assistance and staff. However, the institutional power is more complex than that. According to Foucault (1990), power has many faces. He argues that while power can be observed as a diversity of strength conditions within a context, it also organises the same context. Consequently, power cannot be reduced to an institution, structure or to certain abilities. In this Foucauldian perspective, the social worker cannot be seen to be separate from the social work organisation and all transactions within this context express power both in an intrinsic and in an organisational way.

Secondly, children in child welfare, and even more so in child protection work, are often vulnerable and dependent on adult carers. Child protection involves enormous institutional power, with statutory removal of children from their parents, and social workers are confronted with conflicting duties with families and children. There is often a conflict between the respect for parents' rights and the protection of children (Banks, 2002). These dual obligations produce a very demanding task with multiple accountabilities. Using another Foucauldian concept, the social worker exercises 'pastoral power' (Holmes, 2002) in relation to the family in that the social worker exercises both care and control. National and international instruments attempt a resolution of this dilemma by exhorting social workers

to advocate for the rights of the child. Unfortunately, the dilemma is more complex than that. The child who lives at home is dependent on the family and, from the child's perspective, what might be in the best interests of the family might be in her/his best interests. All too often children are not consulted about what might be in their best interests, and it is the presumed expert knowledge on the part of professionals that dominates. Paradoxically, legislation might preclude working in the best interest of the child; for example, where one person in the family abuses a child and the child shares strong attachments with other members of the family, it might be in the best interest of the child to remove the adult abuser. But because it is far more difficult and time-consuming from a legal point of view to do this, more often than not it is the child who is removed – an option that might be furthest from the best interest of the child.

Thirdly, there is another conflict of duties in relation to the family because of the professional responsibilities for both care and control of the family members. As already mentioned, the interest of the child does not always correspond with the interest of the parents, which means that care-giving also includes controlling the parents. This is also connected to another facet of control, namely that the child welfare organisation, as part of the welfare state, is supposed to control public spending. The social worker, as part of the child welfare organisation, is the agent of the welfare state with a mandate to make sure that the intentions of the welfare state are fulfilled. Given the hegemonic discourses linked to the welfare state, such exercise of power often goes unrecognised, both by the social worker and the service user. Few people would have any objections regarding the dominant argument that tax money should be spent wisely. Pierre Bourdieu refers to this kind of hidden power as symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1982).

Fourthly, because of the domination of Western theories and methods in the area of child welfare, social work practice may be less beneficial to families from other cultures compared than for indigenous Nordic families. Robinson (1999) argues that Euro-American cultural values, theories and methods in social science have been accepted as universal and are being imposed on non-Western cultures. If non-Western families do not fit into the Western social work perspective, there is a risk that these families are and will be seen as problematic and that their perspectives and worldviews will be insufficiently understood. Thus, families of non-Western origins might receive inappropriate help or no help at all. There is also the risk of pathologising normal behaviours and attitudes that might be relatively foreign to Western contexts (Skytte, 2002). The Western hegemony in social science is also a barrier to valuing theories and methods with other origins, and social workers might not even consider searching for knowledge outside

the Western sphere. This also applies to social work education, where theories and methods outside the Western world are rarely used.

Fifthly, according to Johansson (2004), social work education and the power relations between educators and students mirror the power relations between social workers and service users. In this relationship the educators are, or are perceived to be, superior to the students with regard to power and experience. The relationship between social work practitioners and educators is characterised by a similar hierarchy, even though there is less difference in power between these two groups. The relative equality regarding knowledge and experience in the latter relationship makes it a worthwhile object of investigation. Most students in the Nordic Master's courses were qualified social workers with many years of experience. Qualified social workers and lecturers often have similar experiences of practical social work mainly because several lecturers also have backgrounds as qualified social workers, but their professional identities and practices might be different. Both practitioners and educators have a 'field' of their own and with a unique 'doxa', to use two concepts of Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Vacquant, 1992). By 'doxa', Bourdieu means the unique rules, regulations, routines and conceptions about what is right and what is wrong. The 'doxa' of a field is often a value system that is very obvious to the members of the field but is hidden from others. It is difficult for the members of the field to observe its value system as it is partly created by the 'field' itself (Jaervinen, 2002: 255).

Discussion, self-reflection and the learning process

Based on the above theoretical reflections, we tried to understand our own engagement in the teaching, our relationships with the students and the student's experiences of the courses. The evaluations of the courses by the students have been, overall, very positive and the course that included non-European lecturers, *Strengths and solution oriented social work*, had hardly any negative feedback. The knowledgeable lecturers with different pedagogical styles inspired the students and it was advantageous to be given information from other parts of the world on a first-hand basis. The students found the non-European information during lectures and the literature to be valuable in relation to their daily social work practice. The other course *Empowerment and family decision making in child welfare* received some critical remarks, mainly related to the focus on the Family Group Conference as the dominant method in child welfare. Conversely, the same students found the intensive and deep engagement with one method valuable. The following quotation from a student, exemplifies the views of those who attended the course:

My overall perception of the course was very good. I thought the lecturers were very professional and gave us some different perspectives of social work. The lecturers were well prepared and had a lot of knowledge about global social work. I thought the course was well organised and it was very intense. We were divided into small groups and were given assignments which started discussions in the groups and made us active. I thought that the course was very good because it brought up many interesting aspects of how social work is implemented and understood differently in many countries and it is very important to understand social work ethics. The course gave me tools to work with in my practice. Some students might have some difficulties with the language because the course was in English. Some parts of the course were more linked to social politics but those parts were also interesting to me as an international master student. The exam could have been a little bit more related to social work practice.

Some students expressed their views on the way empowerment and emancipation was mediated and discussed in the lecture room. They argued that the students and the lecturers were not invited to participate on an equal basis, and they sometimes felt more disempowered than empowered. This was, of course, a very serious observation considering our emphasis on empowerment, democracy and inclusion and our effort to embrace these principles and practices. To gain credibility for an empowerment-based approach, one obviously has to experience it and to gain from it. Part of the dilemma rested on the fact that the Nordic lecturers had a mandate and legitimate power to carry out the pedagogical assignment, including the setting and grading of examinations. This mandate and power, however, has to be linked to a conscious responsibility to promote a mutual learning process. The designated roles and responsibilities of the Nordic lecturers highlighted their power positions, thus opening themselves to criticism, enabled by the discourse on power in the classroom context. At the very least it would appear that a safe environment was created for critical engagement, producing a paradoxical consequence where the students felt empowered enough to express their disempowerment.

The students were assessed via a very thorough examination and most of them showed marked knowledge about empowerment, strengths perspectives and democratic principles. We do not know, however, whether these experiences have made any difference in their daily work as social workers in child welfare. We do not know if there are any changes in their views of the strengths and capacities of the service user or if they use the FGC as a method in child protection. If enhanced awareness and knowledge are precursors to

action, we hope that the classroom experiences translate into action. A follow-up study in this respect would prove beneficial. What we do know, however, is what we have gained ourselves. We have certainly learned from being responsible for and from carrying out this joint project, and the knowledge gained is irreversible. The Nordic Master's programme made it possible for us to acquire experiences about ourselves and to learn more about child welfare. This allowed us to open ourselves to new experiences and perspectives and to broaden our knowledge from the Nordic countries, from Europe and from other parts of the world – a message endorsed by the students, with some of them claiming that it constituted a life-changing experience for them. The resounding message that remains is: *Child welfare (and social work) is a political issue, influenced largely by complex conflicting and competing power dynamics at various levels, and a localised practice within a global sphere*.

A question that lingers is: why is it sometimes a more demanding task to educate professional social workers than undergraduate students? Professional social workers are as eager to learn as undergraduates, and they are also active and interested in the subject. Could it be a question of power? Social work educators claim, explicitly or implicitly, that besides their own *field* and *doxa* they also have access to the *field* and *doxa* of the social work professionals. The question is: does the professional social worker recognise his/her own *doxa* the way it is presented by the educator and is he/she willing to accept the way it is presented? Undergraduate students do not yet have a *field* of their own and might be happy to be introduced to their future *doxa* by their educators. This is an area that merits further exploration.

Conclusions

As social work education and social work practice are closely linked to the welfare state, there are political implications for social work. The role of the school of social work is to educate students for practice excellence and to carry out the intentions of the welfare state in an ethical and democratic way. The role of social work practice is to carry out these intentions in practice. This means that the two institutions share a demanding responsibility in an ongoing process of interaction (Omre & Schjelderup, 2006). As the social work context is both national and international, there is a need for cross-national and global perspectives. The Nordic Master courses are good examples of cross-national cooperation and constitute a productive and feasible way to gain insight and knowledge about democratic principles and values.

The objectives of the Master's programme were to provide students with knowledge and skills of specific intervention strategies, enhanced understanding of democratic principles and a global perspective. This was hard to evaluate. Within the framework of the Master's course, and in the absence of a field practicum component, it was possible to examine theoretical knowledge but it was harder, if not impossible, to know if this pedagogical concept works out in practice. Good pedagogy is a process that includes both students and teachers in a mutual communication that promotes learning (Johnsson, 1990; Sewpaul, 2003). Drawing on this there is a possibility to respond to this issue by scrutinising our own daily practices as academics. Recognising learning as a mutual process, it should be possible to observe a difference in our practice in the lecture room and elsewhere. Are democratic principles, empowerment and global perspectives reflected in our pedagogical strategies and educational material? If so, is it more likely that change has occurred also in the daily life of the students as they have been experiencing the same learning process? A longitudinal study would provide some answers to these questions.

Social work education and social work teachers benefit from experiences like these when creative processes are given ample room and time, and when professionals have time to share new knowledge and to question each other in an egalitarian and caring context. A well-known but yet international context hopefully makes creativity flourish, and in this way produces a platform for innovative pedagogical and professional experiments; experiments where it is possible to develop local experiences in a global context and global experiences in a local context. A good example is how the pedagogical style of the foreign lecturers, which had high student participation throughout the programme, inspired the Nordic lecturers to reconsider their own pedagogical approach.

This way of observing and criticising the role of the educator is not often done and we hope this article will initiate a discussion about the demands put on pedagogy by a curriculum based on democratic principles and empowerment. We agree with Leonardsen (2007) who argues that if social work students have empowerment on their agenda, they should take part in their studies in a fully empowered way, but we have also learned that this is a mutual process. This issue is very important as it draws directly on the relationship between the social worker and the service user. There is a similar parallel process between social worker and service user as there is between student and lecturer in the way that all participants have to be willing to share power as well as responsibility.

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