



Empowering Youth through Youth Engagement in Social Action in India

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This study is based on a systematic process recording of Master Students' participation in 45 days Summer Placement Training (SPT) focused on 'hands-on' social actions across different areas in India. The paper describes the process in which young people became empowered and how such empowerment reflected in their competencies, learning process, wellbeing and social intelligence. After completing SPT participating students display noticeable increased confidence in expressing views and opinions and assertiveness in their interaction with seniors and professors. They became participative and involved in classroom discussion and extracurricular activities. Students also exhibited improvement in their interpersonal communication and overall physical and psychological wellbeing. These positive changes had a spill-over effect in the students' involvement and engagement with their communities. For example, they wrote a number of articles published in local newspapers; participated in radio programs broadcasted nationally; and produced and published a book based on their SPT experiences.

Keywords: Youth empowerment, Engagement, Youth-adult partnerships, Social Work Education, Summer Placement Training



Introduction

The advent of postmodernism era is conspicuous in all sections and sectors of society. The visible and invisible influences of postmodern especially on college system are worth exploring. The academic demands and pressures are increasing for colleges. They must maintain healthy and empowering environment and provide sound and conducive climate in all academic systems Channaveer (2008). Thus, apart from attending and participating in class room teaching students should be engaged and involved in social activism. According to Modi (2009), it is necessary to raise awareness regarding developing employable skills is necessary; nowadays for students only having academic and theoretical knowledge is not sufficient to secure jobs. In other words, it is necessary that students are given the opportunities and tools to gain skills and enhance their prospects for employment. In this connection it is need of time for engaging youth for their competency development. According to the Centre of excellence for children's well-being, youth engagement can be defined as the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. That is, youth engagement can be achieved through virtually any activity in which youth can get involved with, for example sports, arts, music, volunteer work, politics, social activism; therefore, youth engagement can occur in almost any kind of setting (Centre of excellence for children's well-being, 2009) .

This study is based on a systematic process recording of Master Students' of Social Work education programme participation in 45 days Summer Placement Training (SPT) focused on 'hands-on' social actions across different areas in India. The paper describes the process in which young people became empowered and how such empowerment reflected in their competencies, learning process, wellbeing and social intelligence. After completing their SPT participating students display noticeable increased confident in expressing views and opinions and assertiveness in their interaction with seniors and professors.

Summer Placement Training (SPT) is a part of the Social Work educational training. The practical and theoretical pedagogy of social work education in India can be divided into concurrent fieldwork training and placement training, the concurrent fieldwork training refers to on-going training activity throughout the year and placement fieldwork training refers to placing the students for a given period of time in a particular fieldwork settings. Fieldwork training in social work education is recurring and it aims to develop competency and education is imparted with larger dimensions. Fieldwork provides opportunity for students to gain knowledge in different situations; it is an empirical way of learning new things with creative and innovative ideas. Moreover it fosters the development of intellectual and emotional balancing to shape and strengthen youth capabilities. Fieldwork gives opportunities for the students to understand the scientific knowledge and social phenomenon. According to Mujawar and Sardar (2010), the importance of field placement (fieldwork) in social work education



cannot be overemphasized, that is because as an applied discipline social work education must place emphasis in acquainting students with the profession by providing hands-on experience in the field.

It is highly necessary to prepare the students for the practical exposure. Fieldwork is a technical process and functional in nature; thus, systematic plan for fieldwork training should be made to develop students' competencies. Fieldwork is a guided interaction process between students and the actual and practical life situation in which social work as a profession has abiding and deep concerns. According to Yorke and Knight (2003), employability is a set of achievement, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation which benefit themselves, the community and the economy, thus it was necessary to place students in such a field that can mould the students in their best forms. Lawani and Subhedar (2006), states that Social work being oriented and intervention oriented profession education, therefore education in Social work should aim at helping trainees to acquire and internalized deep knowledge of theories and techniques of social work objectives. The social work trainees have to learn every practical aspect within the two years of training programme. Hence the importance of fieldwork training programmes, the main aim of fieldwork in social work education is to provide the opportunity to the student to learn and practice the professional skills in the fieldwork that are taught in the class. And it is the authors believe that during fieldwork training social work students are prepared to be competent professional social workers.

What is Summer Placement training?

According to the guidelines given by University Grants Commission India (UGC) (2001), it is increasingly recognized and accepted that a part of summer vacation, after completing the first year of the post graduate studies in master of social work programme, could be used fruitfully to integrate practice skills and techniques learnt. Although no all fieldwork programmes have in place Summer Placement training, the time frame recommended for the summer placement is a minimum of three weeks. During the Summer Placement training the trainees (students) should work directly with client system and the management operations of day to day work of the setting. Therefore for a minimum of three weeks students are placed in different social work settings.

Objectives of the summer placement training

The main objectives of summer placement training include providing students with the opportunities to (1) experience direct practice and management operations; (2) improve, enhance and integrate practice of social work method and strategies; and (3) first-hand experience of the role of a professional social worker.



In line with the UGC 2001 guidelines, the Department of Social Work at Walchand College of Arts and Science, decided to conduct a summer placement training for students who had completed their Second Semester MSWI course work. That is because Fieldwork needs scientific understanding of the field and sound technical knowledge; often students are placed in the field without any preparation for the fieldwork setting they are assigned to. The students' experiences from unplanned fieldwork settings and unsupervised guidance results in their loss of interest in fieldwork and the outcomes are not positive. As stated by Gore (1981) 'if the practical experiences are to be an integral part of the educational programme, then there must be clarity connecting what the student is to be learnt in it'. Thus it is highly necessary to prepare students for fieldwork training and teachers/supervisors should have conceptual understanding of what it is actually needed to be studied and/or addressed during the fieldwork training. During summer placement training youths (students/trainees) are first trained for the placement and in social action and then sent directly into the social action field. Social action is one of the methods of social work that allows youths to become involved and engaged with their fieldwork tasks.

Social Action training: a method of Social work education in Summer Placement Training

Social action in India has vast ancient experience, right from Indian freedom movement to present struggle for development. Social action is a secondary method of social work education; and one of the models of community organization. Social action it is an organized group effort to change or improve social or economic institutions, or to solve mass problems. Social action is a legally permitted and it is mass activity. Social action is an effort to bring about changes or prevent change in current social practice or situations through education, propaganda, persuasion or pressure, to achieve the desirable goals or objectives, it seeks to inform and influence public opinion and/or official policy so informed decisions can be made. As stated earlier in the introduction, social work education is a practice oriented programme and social action as methods provides youth (students/trainees) to get involved and engaged, so that, they can analyse, understand and apply the theories learnt in the classroom; and develop and manage their own learning process from their experiences. The following table (table 1) provides the names of the current social actions that are taking place in India, and the issues that these groups deal with. Students are allocated to one of these groups during their summer placement training.

Table 1: Current social actions programmes for summer placement training.

<i>Sr.no</i>	<i>Social Action in India</i>	<i>Issues</i>
1	NarmadaBachoAndholan, Badvani, Madhya Pradish,	Tribal village rehabilitation and construction of new dams in tribal forest areas.
2	MajdoorKishanSakthiSanghatan, Rajasthan	Right to Information Act and anti-corruption movement.
3	LoksnagarshMorcha, Nandurbar, Maharashtra	Forest Right Act 2005: forest land acquisition act and rehabilitation of tribal villages
4	VayamChalval, Thane, Maharashtra	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tribal Programmes and Policies.• Tribal Sub Plan

Method

Study Design

The present paper reports the finding from a qualitative inquiry and observations of students during their summer placement trainings; the training took place in different social action in India for 45 days. The study is based on salutogenic perspective, where students are placed in social action and their responses to the social action environment are observed and recorded systematically. Thus study is a purely a qualitative process recording based on inductive data collection.

Sample:

As the study is a qualitative in nature, very specific sample was chosen. 28 Postgraduate students completing their Master's degree and specializations in urban and rural community development were chosen from total 130 students. The total sample consisted of 20 male and 8 female students. These 28 students were placed in different social action within the country for their summer placement training that lasted 45 days. Students were interviewed to elicit information regarding their experience; and the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The student academic progress was observed throughout the year.

Preparing students for social action

Getting out of the vicious cycle and breaking stereotype,

Preparing students for summer placement training is a challenging task; social work educator should be patients and faith in the students. As we get students from various field and streams of knowledge, and often students have strong believes based on their experiences and understandings. According to Menachery and Mohite (2001), for a large number of students social work education is their last option; often when students fail to gain entry into their course



of first or second choice they will take social work education. Therefore, some students do not consider social work as a career option, even after joining a social work course. There are also a few students who decide to join social work after some temporary fieldwork involvement and experience. However when social work teachers are committed to social work education, change can be made and long lasting interest and behaviour modification can be achieved. However, students remained more interested in their marks and degree oriented and teachers are happy with their 6th pay commission. To break this vicious cycle and its stereotypes a multidimensional approach is needed. Teacher should be able and willing to organize student central work and programmes. The author of this paper proposes that by giving freedom to students to prepare their own action plan (e.g. what and how they want to study in the year) assigning students reading and writing tasks, appreciating students' efforts and work students and teacher can become interested in social action and experience and understand social work education in a positive light. Students have to be given time, they need to be listened and heard. When students are given a voice and adults (social work educators in this case), listen to them when they raise or speak up, many positive outcomes can be achieved. For example students-social work teacher relationship improves and mutual understanding, respect and trust can also be reached.

An important barrier to overcome is the Students lack of conceptual clarity of social work, social action and working with tribal community. When they were asked about their difficulties of fears prior to going to Summer Placement training, the most common answers were:

- *“My parents will not allow me to going that far”*
- *“I cannot go; I have no economic means to travel?”*
- *“I am a girl; how can I be expected to go and live in tribal area during the placement?”*
- *“ How are we going to get there, it is so far”*
- *“Will we adjust to the tribal community?”*
- *“Are Tribal people aggressive?”*
- *“Where will we live?”*
- *“What will we eat?”*

Therefore, the social action training starts at the students' home. First, convincing parents is a tough task for the students; especially for female students. For many students, particularly girls the summer placement would be first time in their lives that they actually leave Solapur district; and for a most of them it would be their first time going out of majority out of Maharashtra state.

Many students face economic difficulties that might prevent them from going to Summer Placement Training (SPT); thus, the alumni of Urban and Rural Community Development

Specialization sponsor the travel of this students and in return the sponsored students (after completion of their education and obtaining a job) are required to sponsor or help to find funds for a student to go to Summer Placement Training. A way to give back to the community; in this way the economic difficulties are easily solved and students get motivated and a sense of responsibility to do well in SPT as it is indirectly monitored by their alumni friends.

Involving students in Reading

Nowadays youth are lethargic and non-interested in reading they want everything to be 'ready-made' and at no time. Students are more conscious about examinations and grades and less interested in learning. Preparing students for summer placement training is another challenge, in my case I planned and distribute ahead the reading list and emphasised to the students the importance of reading on the issues and problem that social action addresses, and also encouraged them to read about what to expect and what is needed to embark in social action activities. After placing students into the different groups of social action, students are required to read about the particular social action group they have been assigned to, and to present on the current status of that social action group of the social action. The reading tasks would help the students to catch up with the speed of the social action and they can easily incorporate themselves into the group. Table 2 summarises the riding tasks assigned for each of the social action groups that students were placed in.

Table 2: Reading tasks for Summer Placement Training

Sr. no	Social Action	Readings
1	Narmada Bacho Andholan, Badvani, Madhya Pradesh	1. Andholan Sasvat Vikasasathi, Journal 2. Forest Right Act 2005
2	Majdoor Kishan Sakthi Sanghatan, Rajasthan	1. RTI Act, detail and the process 2. MNAREGA
3	Loksnagarsh Morcha, Nandurbar Maharashtra	1. Forest Right Act 2005, 2. Jansunvai Process (Public Hearing)
4	Vayam Chalval, Thane	1. Tribal Programmes and Policies 2. Tribal Sub Plan

Students were advised to gather information in a particular social action; and in their chosen dates they have to present and share the information with the rest of the students each and explain the present situation of the social action. This activity helped students to understand the situation of all four social actions groups. Personally as social work educator, I strongly believe that reading enhance confidence and create interest in students to work in social action. Reading and sharing knowledge also generates thinking ability and curiosity in the students. I



have seen how after reading students start to think critically and formulate questions. The following are some of the interesting questions my student's have asked after they 'discovered' the social issues and problems and completed their readings:

- “*Why most of the social actions are related to tribal areas?*”
- “*... Why some are exploited in the name of development or progress?*”
- “*Can we have development [as nation] and progress while our people are being exploited?*”
- “*What is development then?*”
- “*Why we don't stand with tribal groups for their rights?*”
- “*Is economic estimation and cost analysis everything in rehabilitation of tribal groups?*”

It became extremely important to me to answer their question, and to provide them with the tools to address their critical thoughts and ventilate their feelings, but how can we do this? Let them write about what they feel after reading.

Engaging students in Writing

During my years of teaching I have experienced that writing helps students to develop confidence and teach them how to put forward their ideas and views clearly and in a systematic manner. It is important to mention my student for the past 2 years have written more than 150 articles in different local newspapers. As result of their gained interest in reading, their involvement in social action during the summer placement training, my students became more active in getting knowledge by reading and discussing on what they read, and by writing they develop a clear thinking process. In time, students developed ability to write analytically, became more inquisitive and interested in work in social action. And of course, they get more motivated as their friends and family appreciate their newspaper articles. Parents themselves become more understanding and start having faith in their sons and daughters when they see their kids are writing for newspapers. Finally, after sensitizing students with reading on the social action and writing about it, it became easier to prepare them for the real work in the social action.

Role of students in social action

Another crucial step in preparing students for social action is the do and don'ts of summer placement training and social action. After reading and writing about a particular social action, students get lot of energy to work with these social action groups/issues. So, it is necessary to make them understand that we are going to be a part social action for few days, and we have to be prepared to return back to our daily routines. Therefore students are request to follow their social action instructor and to refrain from taking any decision on their own without consultation. We have such discussions/advising sessions in class normally one week



prior going to social action. These sessions help students to understand their roles and responsibilities as trainees in social action work.

After their Summer Placement Training, our students have worked for many committees in social action (e.g. 'Zaa Commission') and took part in mobilizing huge masses for social action; we started receiving many appreciating letters from Social activists such as Medhatai Patkar, Ulkatai Mahajan, Pratibhatai Shinde, Aruna Roy. Students have walked 20 to 30 km in tribal areas and have tested their abilities in mobilizing rallies. This activity has given them the chance to believe in their own abilities.

The journey of social action did not stop after students came back from summer placement training; now they advocate and inform their communities about the situations in social action and what problems the tribal people are facing in their day to day life.

Advocating Social Action

When students return back from summer placement training they write about their experiences and about the situation of tribal people in the country; their articles get published in the local newspapers. Writing in different newspapers has become a medium to present and share the work done by the students in social action and also has served to raise awareness among local people about the social action. Students have used both paper and electronic media for advocating the problems and issues of tribal people in India. Students write in different newspapers articles, they write about what they experienced in SPT; about the ground realities of tribal community; how a particular social action is helping a tribal community to resolve the problems.

The SPT experiences of my students and their work in social action has also been broadcasted all throughout Solapur district by a local radio station. Radio is a good medium to reach the unreached masses especially in rural areas. Writing in different local newspapers and broadcasting on radio helped to reach people and share the experiences and reveal the crushed realities of the tribal community. However, exposure in mass media communication has also enriched these student experiences and learning process.

Speaking on radio was an activity that enhanced student's communication skills. When the students decided to share their experience with their community and arranged to participate in a radio programme; we arranged training sessions on how to speak and these were delivered by Akashwani Solapur. This training programme taught students how to speak effectively and how to avoid the common mistake we make when speaking in public. This was a wonderful experience for these students, recording their voice in radio station and listening to the foretaste on radio set was indeed an amazing experience for the students. Also it was a proud moment for their parents and communities too, they gather together to hear their kids on regional radio

station talking about learning and social action advocacy. On that day I received calls from my student's parents thanking me for providing such opportunity for their sons and daughters. This activity definitely strengthens the bond between students and their parents, but also contributed towards student's engagement and involvement with their communities.

Writing a book

This year, a new innovation was added to summer placement training, students of urban and rural community development specialization, wrote and published a book where they present and share the experiences and views. This innovative practice was entirely the result of the students' initiative; creating a book on SPT experience in social action is indeed, a historical step in social work profession. Everything from the cover page and sketches in the book to the writing are the students work. It took them more than one year to complete and publish their book. Their effort was noticed by Social Activist Medhatai Patkar who as token of her appreciation for these students work wrote the preamble (preface) for the book.

The way students ask questions and articulate in group discussions in the classroom show that the students have developed and enhanced their abilities and capacities. Their participation and the way they carried themselves during the radio interview reflected the changes that have taken place in my students. Their engagement and involvement continues. Table 3 summarises the situation of MSW students before going to SPT training and students empowerment after training.

Table 3: Before and after empowering students through youth engagement

Sr.No	Indicators	Before training	After training
1	Writing	Students never wrote anything in newspaper	On an average every students have written five articles in four different news paper
2	Public speaking	Students never participated in public speaking or thought about participating in radio or television interviews	Students participated in four programmes of thirty minutes; specially conducted by Indian Radio Station. All students were given chance to share the experience.
3	Reading	Students never read issues of social action	Students discussed upon twenty books one by one.
4	Physical ability	Students never walked continuously more than 5 km	Students walked about 25 km a day in social action



5	Relationship with their	Students were having fear to speak with parents	Students started sharing their experiences with their parents
6	Classroom attendance	Only forty to sixty percentage of the students were present in classroom	Attendance raised above seventy five percentage and more
7	Participation	Were hesitant to participate in classroom discussion	Now raise interesting issues and debate systematically
8	Interest in profession	Not interested	Dedicated and dedicated their area of interest to work on after completion of course.
9	Moving out of hometown	Many students never went out of the state even district	Students travelled more than two states in SPT

Need of Policy Intervention:

Social work practicum endows an epistemic base to comprehend social reality and understand it critically it is a postulate that is supported by developments in epistemology Giddens (1974). The basic premise of social theory is to deliberate on the nature of social reality, epistemology and social praxis Samta Pandya (2009). Social work practice is a backbone of social work profession and summer placement training can play a vital role is engaging the students in social realities. Ontologically summer placement training can provide good platform for students. Epistemologically summer placement training has provided opportunity to students to reveal their qualities.

India is a young nation with more than 50% of the population is youth (Census 2011). With so much of complexity in morden era of education system we live in, one of the major objectives of education system is to prepare the students with certain skills and competencies witch would enable them to deal with continuously developing competitions. Various education commission and policies have stressed upon the importance of the development of responsible citizens of the country, which strongly believe in the core values of citizenship, which includes democracy, social justice, equality peace and respect, Arora Pankaj (2013). Social work practicum and especially summer placement training can be a medium to incorporate these values in the students.

According to the UGC (2001) report Summer Placement Training is an optional component in social work curriculum. The objectives of summer placement training are effective to engage the youth students in social work practicum. The present study has enlightened with its results that youth have tremendous potentials and can do amazing new learning endeavours if they are given chance and are believed. Social Action is a method of social work, unfortunately students cannot get hand on experience of social action in the college arena and so sending students in social action and engaging them in it can be a good initiation. Students placement for summer placement training can give good exposure to social action



method thus institutions, colleges, university department should implement this activity and can develop a social work education practicum with new policy of placing students in social action. Social work education intends to develop youths, who not only participate in the process of education but also be proactive and responsible towards social problems of the society at large.

Epistemologically this study suggest that the summer placement training should be institutionalised and not only brought into National youth policy of India but also in the social work profession as a compulsory component of social work profession so that the youth can be engaged in different social realities and thus youth can build into responsible and active citizen of India.

Learning from endeavour, a Conclusion:

The author like to quote Mahatma Gandhi (1962), he said: *“Interdependence is and ought to be as much and ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being”*, In other words, if we want to become self-reliance, we should believe in interdependence, we are all interdependent on in each other. Students, teachers, parents, institution and society at large, we are all interdependent. Learning is a two way process, where the one that teaches also learn in return. Practice is essential for indigenised stances of social theory ideology and praxis. Summer placement training is an indigenised praxis. Collectively we can enjoy the teaching-learning process. Teaching-learning process becomes more enjoyable because collectively we motivate each other to study and learn new things and share our knowledge. Humans have a capacity to change; thus, students’ attitudes and behaviour can be changed and/or strengthen using different pedagogy of social work practice. Youths can be empowered by systematically involving them into enjoyable learning environment. Once you have faith youth the journey of their empowerment initiates. Empowering youths through engaging them in social action is definitely an amazing endeavour.

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