

# Experiences and Lessons from an International Practicum Program in Undergraduate Field Instruction

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*This paper outlines the process of organizing social work practicum placements in the Philippines for students from Mokpo National University (MNU), South Korea, in cooperation with the College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines, Diliman. It presents insights drawn from students' reports, faculty documents, and the coordinator's notes. Through two practicums held in 2008 and 2009, participants learned not only social work methods and skills but also cultural awareness and strategies for overcoming their own inadequacies. Overall, the objectives of the program were achieved despite cultural and language limitations. The paper concludes with a discussion of learning gains, limitations and suggestions for future related programs.*

## **Introduction**

Social work education has been continuously expanded in Korea since formal education began at the Ehwa University in 1947. Since the establishment of the national standard examination system for certified social workers in 2003, social work has been on the list of the most in demand jobs. Colleges and universities that offered social work courses consequently grew in number. However, prominent social work practitioners have expressed discontent with social work education. Textbook contents were not only too abstract but practicum training was also deemed ineffective. National social work standards for undergraduate practicum were found to be insufficient in both qualitative and quantitative terms when compared with those of other countries (Nam, 2004). For example, students must complete 120 practicum hours to graduate and qualify for a first rank social worker certificate in Korea. Meanwhile, in the Philippines,

students are required to complete at least 1,000 hours of supervised field instruction to graduate and qualify for professional practice.

Reflecting on this situation in Korea, the MNU Department of Social Welfare faculty has been considering various ways of providing relevant field instruction. One of the alternatives identified was the establishment of an overseas practicum course. This was considered important for several reasons. First, since Korea (especially rural areas) is now and will continue to be a multicultural society, married and working foreigners will face and present many issues and needs. Secondly, Korea's economic status has moved up, as evidenced by its membership among OECD nations. Unlike many other countries' NGOs, church-based organizations, and GOs that receive assistance, Korea is no longer an international charity receiving country. Korea has now become an aid-giving country. Therefore, an important requirement for Korean social workers is to be trained in culture sensitivity towards aid-receiving countries. Third, a stronger international solidarity is required to reduce, if not to eliminate, the adverse effects of growing globally inequality. These served as the impetus for the inter-university practicum programs.

This paper presents 1) the process of organizing social work practicum in the Philippines for Korean undergraduate students; 2) an analysis of students' perspectives and significant cross-cultural learning; and, 3) some suggestions for future international placements. This paper was inspired by the positive experiences and learning, and the desire to share these to interested social work educators and students. This first hand experience showed that, although international social work practice is complicated to manage and difficult on the part of students, it is feasible, enjoyable, and rewarding for both faculty and students. The paper seeks to describe and analyze the details of the practicum that can inform future plans for international practicum between the two different countries. The paper begins with a discussion of the program background, followed by a discussion of the institutional framework and methodology and highlights of curricular learning activities. The key lessons learned from the practicum are summed up in the conclusion.

## **Program Background**

This section will focus on (1) the rationale and objectives of the practicum and (2) the preparations undertaken, followed by a description of the practicum.

### *Practicum Objectives*

The MNU-UP Inter-University Practicum Program was held twice, in 2008 and 2009. The two practicum programs were almost similar, with the later one just slightly adjusted based on the first year experiences and evaluation. The MNU proposed the practicum programs to which UP positively accepted. When MNU planned these programs, there were several intentions for the students: 1) to provide experience of a culture-sensitive practice experience; 2) to provide an opportunity to learn a foreign language (especially, English) conversation skills; 3) to develop an understanding of international social work education standards; and, 4) to develop students' self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses for professional and personal growth.

The MNU is a regional university in Southwest Korea. Agriculture and fishery dominate the region's economy. Many of the students and their families generally are unable to finance overseas travel. The South Korean government provided funds for an international practicum that intends not only to develop culture-sensitive social work practice, but also to expose the students to a life abroad even for a short time. For MNU, the practicum was planned to equip students with professional and personal capabilities for local and foreign practice.

The objectives of the program agreed upon between MNU and UP were:

- A. Identify/describe rural conditions in the Philippines, particularly in Plaridel, Bulacan, which may be unique and/or similar to those in South Korea. In other words, gather information and insights on the situation, needs and concerns of rural families and communities that the class visited in Plaridel.

- B. Describe and analyze the functions, roles and challenges facing social workers in specific practice settings, e.g. a local government, church or non-government organizations.
- C. Demonstrate knowledge, attitudes and skills in working with client groups, through a skit presentation of any or a combination of such tasks as: situational analysis, planning and organizing recreational activities, and recording.
- D. Sum up the student's experience of rural social work practice in a paper, with their learning and insights.

### *Practicum Preparation*

Preparation is essential for a successful international practicum placement because various hindrances and limitations need to be anticipated and managed. Before conducting the program, the MNU faculty faced several issues: 1) Is the Philippines a right place for the practicum? 2) Since Koreans mainly use Korean language in formal and informal life, how will the students overcome language difficulties? and, 3) How does the faculty select students who can successfully complete the practicum?

#### 1. Place Selection

Having been a UP student once, the practicum coordinator had first hand knowledge of UP's social work curriculum. She therefore had no doubts about the quality of the learning experience Korean students would get from placement with UP. The rest of the MNU faculty, however, did not have the same experience. They had not even traveled to the Philippines. Because an international field placement requires a special arrangement and sound planning, all members of the faculty needed to come to an agreement. They decided to visit the place ahead of time to explore the possibility of placement. One

faculty member and the coordinator conducted a preliminary field investigation in the summer of 2006. They went one step forward, when the Department organized a field trip of 22 students and three faculty members to the Philippines on September 23-30, 2008, in partnership with the Department of Social Work, CSWCD, UP Diliman.

Based on the 2008 trip, MNU faculty members concluded that the Philippines, especially under the auspices of UP, was a reliable place for achieving the objectives of the international practicum. They identified several specific reasons why the Philippine rural areas were suitable for the practicum: 1) situations in the Philippine rural areas are similar to those of Korea in terms of relative economic and social status of people living in those areas compared to city areas; 2) most Filipinas who are married to Korean men came from rural Philippines; 3) the Philippines has standardized and elaborated a social work education system in terms of philosophy and contents; 4) many people in these areas can understand and speak English; and, 5) living costs are manageable within the program budget.

## 2. Language Training

Language is a huge issue since Koreans do not speak English fluently and many find the prospect of speaking in English rather daunting. However, the students must meet and communicate with people in their assigned areas; also, they must communicate with the local supervisors during a practicum period. Therefore the faculty required students to undergo language training before leaving Korea. Students who wanted to participate in this practicum must take “English Conversation in Social Work Setting” (1 credit unit) for one or two semesters, which have been offered since the faculty decided to have international practicums. Then, before leaving from Korea, they were provided a one-week English Camp, in which native English speakers

served as trainers of selected student participants. During the camp, they lived together and used English only. Students took exercises in conversations with potential client groups, writing reports and making presentations, leading in recreational programs like games, art works, singing, etc. Of course, a new language cannot be learned overnight and so many of the students barely reached beginner's level of English speaking despite all efforts to this end. Nonetheless, the language camp definitely assisted the students to gain more confidence towards building a beginning helping relationship with foreign nationals like the Filipinos who are, relatively, more conversant in English.

### 3. Cultural Awareness

Although Korea and the Philippines both belong to Asia, their cultures, natural environments, economic and social conditions are markedly different. The participants of the first practicum were less prepared for these differences because much of the preparation efforts went into breaking the language barrier. On the second year, however, the faculty managed to integrate a multicultural and international perspective in their social work education. On the second year, the MNU Department of Social Welfare was able to set up various preparatory student activities with multi-cultural families. Students, who wanted to participate in the practicum program in the Philippines, were asked to interact with Filipino families in Korea. One enthusiastic Filipino, who was teaching English in a language institution at MNU and serving as a part-time assistant for the program, regularly met with the students. She taught them Philippine history and culture and a little Tagalog. She brought the students to a Filipino restaurant where they were served 'sinigang,' a popular dish in that part of the Philippines where they were meant to visit. We found these activities helpful for the students preparing to relate with unfamiliar people in a different part of the world.

4. Selection of Participants

The recruitment of the practicum participants was a significant event for the students. It was during this time that they found out who among them would receive government sponsorship for their practicum. It became a sort of competition to qualify for selection in the program. Faculty members who composed the Selection Committee were guided by rules in the interest of fairness. They sought to balance the rules for academic grades, language competency, and course requirements with those of personal characteristics like curiosity, commitment, enthusiasm, interest and good social skills. To achieve balance in assessing the fitness of students, the Committee set up a specific set of criteria for selection, namely: 1) grades 20%; 2) English fluency 20%; 3) NURI project participation 50%; and, 4) student's proposal 10%. Through the selection process, eight and 13 students were selected to join the practicum in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

5. Others: Personal Preparations

As Pawar et al. (2004) indicated, personal preparation is as important as professional and academic preparation for international social work practicum. Students who made it to the final list of participants prepared several things before going to Philippines. Since it was the first time for most of the students to visit another country, they had to apply for passports first. To avoid visa extension, duration of the practicum program was adjusted to 20 days which is the maximum legal period for a stay in the Philippines without a visa. Aside from travel requirements, students prepared basic Korean food such as kimchi, chili paste, Korean instant noodles, and the like so that they would have some comfort food while trying unfamiliar cuisine. Also, they prepared laptop computers for reports and presentations during the practicum. They brought along recommended personal medication, weather and occasion appropriate clothes, digital cameras, and pocket money.

### *Description of the Practicum*

The MNU practicums started in January during winter vacation. In Korea, most social work practicum courses take place during vacation months to allow daily reports for fieldwork, with the students not having the burden of attending classroom classes. Considering the weather in the Philippines, a Korean winter vacation is a more suitable time than a Korean summer vacation for the practicum. Hence, it was scheduled from January 14 to January 30 on the first year, and from January 12 to January 30 on the second year. In both years, the practicum was organized into two main parts: a classroom-based orientation on systems and theories and a community-based practicum for field practice. Both practicum parts were planned and managed by the DSW faculty of CSWCD, UP, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MNU.

#### 1. Classroom-based Orientation

Classroom-based orientation consisted of lectures by CSWCD faculty and resource persons at UP, Diliman. The lectures were very important for understanding the setting, the Philippines being extensively rural. A Korean interpreter assisted the participants in understanding the lectures which were given in English.

#### 2. Community-based Practicum

Community-based practicum was conducted in a rural municipality named Plaridel after one of the Philippines' national heroes. The place is one and a half hours away from Manila by car. The UP faculty recommended and arranged the placement because UP students had used it for their own practicum and research projects. Here, social work practitioners and educators work together to learn from practicing and testing social work theories in a selected community. Operationally, the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer



provided direct field supervision in tandem with a university-based faculty field supervisor.

The Mayor of Plaridel warmly welcomed the students and actively provided almost all the things that they needed for the practicum, such as arrangements to visit places, field supervisors, lecture and discussion facilities, transportation, security, and a fully supportive coordinator for all activities.

For community immersion during the first year, the students stayed in the convent of St. James Church, a historically renowned 400-year-old Catholic Church. Priests and church members were very supportive, providing not only accommodation and food but also opportunities for cultural exchange and international fellowship, and emotional support. Security and safety were not an issue for students in Plaridel who were, in a way, under the guardianship of the parish priests. However, the participants could not stay at the church in the second year because the place was not enough to accommodate the increase in the number of students. So, they ended up staying at BarCIE International Center in Malolos, a place 30 minutes away from Plaridel by jeepney. Compared to the first year, the participants in the second year had the burden of commuting from the Center to the placement. Although the latter students had to endure some isolation and loneliness, this was compensated by meeting ordinary village people while commuting, and concentrating on their practicum reports inside their hotel rooms.

### **Institutional Framework and Methodology**

This section discusses the institutional framework and methodology of the practicum. By institutional framework, we mean the policy and organizational contexts of the project. This is followed by an explication of the methodology used in the practicum.

### *Institutional Framework of the Practicum*

Two main documents outlined the key references for the practicum. These were the New University for Regional Innovation (NURI) which is South Korea's national education project and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.P. and the MNU.

#### 1. New University for Regional Innovation (NURI)

The NURI is a government grant project for innovating educational programs among regional universities in order to provide equal opportunities to develop the human power of students who mostly come from poor agricultural or fishery families. The NURI aims mainly to provide financial support to a 3- or 5-year special education program of a regional university that cooperates with a regional industry. Thus, students are able to be educated and trained in the community, while focusing on practice. It also assists in the graduates' employment after graduation, through the development of human resources that respond to the development needs of a particular region. The government NURI Committee administers the NURI project and is tasked with selecting and evaluating NURI-affiliated universities. It is composed of 13 members from all over the country.

The MNU Department of Social Welfare submitted a proposal for funding an education and training program plan for professional rural social service providers, to the NURI Committee. After 3 months of evaluation by the RFP, the proposal was accepted. The MNU NURI project is aimed at educating professional social service providers for leadership in the provision of social services and leisure activities for people in rural (island) communities. Below is a brief description of the project profile:

- Period : July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2009
- Participants: 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students and masteral program students in the Department of Social Welfare

- **Activities :**
  - Developing and applying special curriculum for rural social services
  - Developing and applying client-oriented field practicum programs
  - Building an employment system through faculty-agency supporting system
  - Enhancing personal infrastructure in the community through technical assistance for leisure services
  - Promoting international relationship through volunteer activities, practicum, exchange grade programs in a rural community

Based on the project, the faculty planned various programs abroad, such as field trips, practicum, voluntary activities in Asian countries including mainly the Philippines and Japan. The inter-university practicum in the Philippines was also developed under this structure.

## 2. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UP and MNU

On August 25, 2006, UP through its College of Social Work and Community Development and MNU through its Department of Social Welfare signed a Memorandum of Understanding for fostering and developing a cooperative relationship between the two institutions. Under the MOU between two institutions, a UP faculty member came to MNU to present a paper in a symposium on Rural Elderly in Asia. The paper was based on a joint research regarding wellbeing and health among rural elderly, conducted in Japan, Korea and the Philippines. In addition, the MOU provided for organizing a student field trip and practicum program. Specifically for the practicum, the two institutions signed a contract outlining their respective responsibilities, as follows:

- For the Department of Social Work, CSWCD, UP to ...
  - provide a field organizer and supervisor;

- organize the field practicum program; and,
  - arrange for the residence of visiting faculty and students.
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- For the Department of Social Welfare, MNU to ...
    - provide the budget for all expenses of the practicum; and,
    - assume responsibility for all practicum activities.

### *Methodology of the Practicum*

The practicum program utilized several learning methods (for example lecture, exposure trip, and supervised field practice) just like social work practicums in Korea. From the lectures, students obtained an overview of Philippine social welfare/social work and the rural socio-economic situation at both national and local levels. Thereafter, they were able to experience what they learned from the lectures in real situations during the field trips and supervised placements. Since overseas travel was a rare opportunity for many of the students, visits to several historical and cultural sites were included in the visiting group's itinerary.

#### 1. Lectures

In the first practicum year, lecturers focused more on an overview of the Philippines and social work, especially in a local rural level. For a week, the Korean participants attended lectures by UP faculty and resource persons at UP, Diliman. In the succeeding week, government officials and agency personnel lectured in Plaridel. In the second year, however, the number of lectures and briefings were reduced to put more emphasis on understanding the rural context. Rather than sit in the classroom within a limited period of the practicum, the students sought and pursued the learning opportunities from 'real practice.'

Generally, the UP faculty with the exception of a farmer leader and a Child and Family Welfare expert, lectured on the Philippine social

welfare situation at the national level and in the rural areas. Speakers showed national statistical figures and issues about poverty and the state provisions for social services. Also, for students' application during the practicum, lectures were given on theory and method of integrated social work as a practice model. The students were familiar with the integrated practice theory, having finished a course named Social Work Practice 1 that is based on the integrated approach to social work practice. The change in the line up of lectures in the second year of the practicum included a topic on the migration situation in the Philippines. The lecture made evident the increasing number of Filipina-Korean marriages in Korea; and this was very useful to the students. Understanding the Philippines itself and her people was one of the goals to have the practicum in the Philippines because social workers in Korean rural areas often work with multi-cultural families.

## 2. Exposure Trips

Most of the exposure trips featured in the first year practicum provided an understanding of social services in rural areas of the Philippines. There were residential institutions for the elderly, NGOs for the poor, citizens' organizations, and government organizations.

Among these were the Emmaus and Tahanang Mapagpala which were Catholic Church-based homes for the elderly in Malolos, Bulacan. During the trip to the two elderly homes, students learned programs and services as well as administration and management concerns of the agencies, as they interacted with the elderly. At the Tahanang Mapagpala, students led a short program for entertaining the elderly with singing and dancing.

Another agency was the Alalay sa Kaunlaran Inc. (ASKI), a non-governmental organization involved in micro-finance. After having a lecture on ASKI's vision, mission, goals, programs and services, students

visited Selda, a community-based group, in order to observe a meeting of community entrepreneurs and interact with the people.

Students met with the Senior Citizens Federation in Plaridel. This organization is similar to a Korean Elderly Association in terms of member eligibility, functions, and activities. During the meeting, some seniors showed their interest with the practicum and situation in Korea. One of them even asked each student about his/her 'first impression of Plaridel.' During the first year practicum, students designed an exercise for the elderly, which they recorded in Video CD.

In the second year, students visited the City of Marikina to observe a successful local government project for cleaning the city, especially its riverside renovation. During the visit, the Markina City Planning and Development Office briefed the students and gave them a tour of the city. Shortly after, the mayor herself received the group. Then, the students compared and contrasted the riverside situations between the Municipality of Plaridel and the City of Marikina. While they realized the gaps in river care management in one, the comparative study pointed out the feasibility of river care in the other, for the present and the next generations.

### 3. Supervised Student Practice

Supervision is a significant factor for improving performance of practice among social work undergraduate students (Jung, 2004). Students in groups of three immersed themselves into different placements - child welfare, youth welfare, and elderly welfare - during the first year of the practicum. Then, community welfare (with informal settlers by the riverside) was added in the second year.

While an agency supervisor assisted and supervised the assigned students daily, a faculty supervisor came to the field to follow up the progress of

the practicum and to feed back his/her assessment to the assigned students. Faculty supervisors were available for consultation, mostly twice a week.

The supervisors and students communicated in English. Sometimes they used written communication, drawings, sketches, and diagrams to make up for language limitations. Also, because of distance between faculty supervisors and students, they used on-line communication.

Besides the supervisors-students' exchange, students reported and discussed what happened and what do for the next day with the MNU coordinator every night after coming back from their placements. The MNU coordinator mainly helped them to understand comments from the agency and faculty supervisors, and to solve problems and obstacles that they confronted due to their language, cultural, and academic limitations.

Finally, the students worked on mid and final practicum oral reports for both agency and faculty supervisors and other related audiences. They presented what they had done and learned from the practicum. Even though the presentations in English were a challenge for them, they tried their best and, in so doing, made themselves proud of their own accomplishments.

#### 4. Other Activities

Two most influential activities for the students, among many others, were: (1) activities for peer relationship-building, and (2) activities in the community with local residents. During the two practicum programs, the Korean student participants met with members of the CSWCD Student Council and Junior Social Work Association in CSWCD, U.P.. Although language barred them from spontaneous

replies, still they got to know their similarities and differences by singing, dancing, playing games, and eating together. Another opportunity was the basketball match between Korean participant students and youth in Plaridel. Besides the game, they had several outings, a birthday party, and farewell party during their stay in Plaridel. These were valuable opportunities for young students to form global solidarity with their foreign counterparts, for their future careers.

A memorable community activity was the fluvial parade linked to a river advocacy campaign. Invited, the Korean delegation joined the annual fluvial activity along the river with local government officials, policemen and members of Fishermen's Association. They rode small bancas and shouted 'clean the river' in both Tagalog and English in order to call the attention of the riverside residents not to throw garbage into the river. Through this experience in community participation, the students felt they made a small but important contribution to saving the environment. On the other hand, they observed that better strategies could have been used, such as direct home visiting to explain environmental issues. Furthermore, it seems that the advocates were more concerned about the dangerous and polluted conditions of the houses by the river than by the river contamination itself.

### **Highlights of Curricular Learning Activities**

The key learning activities in the practicum are outlined in this section. These include: (1) social work practice with pre-school children; (2) social work with the youth; (3) social work practice with the elderly; and, (4) community practice with informal settlers by the riverbank. The discussion in this section is drawn mainly from the daily reflections and final reports of the students from the 2009 practicum.



### *Social Work Practice with Pre-school Children*

For a 'taste' of social work practice with pre-school children, a student group was placed in a day care center. A day care center is a social service aimed at providing supplemental parental care to 3-5 year old children who may be neglected, potentially neglected, abused, exploited, or abandoned during part of the day when parents cannot attend to their needs. By law, each barangay is supposed to have at least one day care center. The Barangay Poblacion Day Care Center serves about 100 children distributed into three class sections. Three students were placed in a morning section with about 30 children.

#### 1. Students' Activities

The students were assigned to practice mainly three different tasks: observation, assistance, and case study.

##### Observations

First, they observed hazards and a lack of basic amenities. A big coconut tree in the backyard posed a danger to the children's safety inside the center grounds. There were no seats in the parents' waiting area nor a clock in the classroom. They noted a broken water tap and an unfixed door. Secondly, they found the educational materials rather inadequate. There were no books for reading although there were broken toys. Having fed back these observations to the agency supervisor and MSWDO staff the students expected the problems to be attended to. Third, another observation concerned children's class activities. The students used such indicators as eye contact, body contact, group painting, face painting and 'Tooho'\* for assessment of individual child characteristics. They found that children's interaction, self-assertion, and obedience to the rules differed by gender and age. They submitted these findings/results to the teacher (their agency supervisor) for his class management reference and further action, where possible.

### Student Assistance

During class hours, the students helped the teacher and practiced their own short programs such as teaching alphabet and numbers, checking attendance with stickers, and leading games. From these activities, the students found two major problems in the center. They observed that the teacher was overloaded with work and that there was a phenomenon of 'Friday Sickness' (meaning, children tended to absent themselves on Fridays). They suggested the use of volunteers for reducing teacher's overwork and the formulation of rules for attending classes. After they checked children's attendance and gave token gifts and admonitions, the number of absent children on Fridays was markedly reduced.

### Case Study

The day care teacher assigned a child case, a frequent absentee. The child, a 5- year-old boy, had failing eyesight and asthma. The students visited his home six times and interviewed his mother. Then, aside from the expressed problems as mentioned earlier, the students learned that he had lagged behind class lessons (due to many absences). The students analyzed the boy's situation by using the person-in-environment perspective and provided some suggestions. Among these were to refer the child for medical attention and to utilize home-visiting volunteers to help him to catch up in school.

## 2. Issues and Insights

During the students' consultation with the practicum coordinator, the hottest issue was children's 'Friday Sickness.' The students thought that basic schooling at any age is most important to the children. The students could not accept the fact that an individual can decide whether to go to school or not. One student wrote in her

daily reflection form, 'Parents said that reason for Friday sickness is just Friday sickness. I am very surprised.' That is, she found that parents did not seem to take attendance or absence seriously. Therefore, the students referred to 'Friday Sickness' as normlessness and ignorance of the rules. In fact, most Koreans, especially parents, will never allow their children not to go to school. One of the important Korean values is that every person should have proper education. Therefore they thought this 'misbehavior' must be corrected even among pre-school children.

The students' daily reflections indicated that they learned the purposes and principles for day care as well as the functions of daycare workers in the Philippines. They also noted that, in the planning of any program for children, they must consider the attractiveness of the program for the children who would need to be motivated to learn in a day care center. Finally, they had an opportunity to apply a person-in-environment perspective to a real case situation. Aside from fulfilling the course requirements, they started and sustained a good relationship with the teachers and the parents. For example, the mothers often brought strange fruits which they shared with the ever-curious students. These fruits came from the backyards of the teacher or the parents as a thoughtful gift to share a different fruit with foreigners. One student even wrote in her daily reflection form: '[Filipinos] are very kind. I am much impressed by people in the Philippines.'

### *Social Work Practice With the Youth*

In the field of youth welfare, three students were placed in the Barangay Youth Program of Barangay Banga 2. There were 30 youth who were registered in the three different programs: education programs (study room, job training); supporting programs (school materials, feeding project, counseling); and, activity programs (band activity, basketball tournament).

## 1. Students' Activities

During the practicum, the students gathered data and information through key-informant interviews, research, and participant observation to understand the community and the youth. Also, they conducted several programs based on the purpose of interventions for the youth.

### Understanding Community and Youth

The students gathered statistics and information by interviewing the Barangay Chief and the Barangay Secretary. Through this, the students learned about the youth population and community resources in Banga 2. Their findings included: (1) out of 1,461 youths living in the barangay, 81.2% were school youth, while 18.8% were out of school youth; (2) there was one public school, one private school, one library, 2 basketball courts, and one Barangay Hall in the barangay; 3) the youth worked as junk food street vendors, gathered used bottles, and fished in the river that bordered the barangay.

To understand the barangay youth, the students reached out to them through some ice-breaking activities like basketball, balloon art, tea time, and so on. Meanwhile, they interviewed the Barangay Secretary, the LLN Officer, the Barangay Youth Counselor, and the president of the youth organization. They found that the educated school youth differed from those uneducated by age ranges, daily activities, income and jobs of parents and youth, needs and dreams. Also, they found out the reasons why the out of school youth do not go to school, such as lack of money, being bored with school, or being too lazy to go to school.

### Activities

During the practicum, the students planned and conducted several exercises such as:

- “Have and Less” exercise (1hr.): To identify and become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses
- Making timetable (1hr.) : To let them evaluate their life style
- Writing your dreams (30min.) : To enable them to express their own dreams
- Job quiz (1hr.) : To introduce various jobs to them
- Writing letter to your future self (1hr.): To orient them towards the achievement of their dreams.

## 2. Issues and Insights

In general, the students thought that they learned three lessons from the placement: (1) understanding the importance of youth environment; (2) the pressing necessity to solve education problems among the youth in less-developed countries; and, (3) methods to make a positive relationship with youth. Since the situations confronted by Korean and Filipino youth are quite different, the students could not say that the practice with youth here would be valuable or applicable in Korea. But the experience made them think about the possibility of working as an international social worker who practices abroad to help abandoned children and disadvantaged youth.

### *Social Work Practice with the Elderly*

Three students were placed in Barangay Poblacion to: study elderly welfare in a Philippine rural community, by immersion in the Senior Citizens Association and SC Federation; learn about the elderly welfare system of the local government in Plaridel, as represented by the MSWDO and SCA; to draw up a suitable plan for elderly welfare practice through comparing Plaridel’s situation with Korea; and, to draft plans or suggestions to respond to the senior citizens’ needs.

## **Students' Activities**

To achieve the said objectives, the students were assigned to work with a Senior Citizens' Association (SCA) and to interview selected old persons living in the barangay.

### **Working with an SCA**

The students conducted document research to gain an understanding of the SCA. They reviewed the SCA's organizational structure, activities, objectives for 2009, and membership guidelines. Then, they attended a SCA Federation meeting. Twenty one members, including a president and a vice president from 19 barangays, were present. In the meeting, the students were assigned to facilitate the opening program to set a light, warm and relaxed atmosphere for the meeting. The students planned to demonstrate and practice balloon art work with elderly members. A student in charge of the program practiced the demonstration over and over the day before the meeting. The other two students assisted the individual participants to make a balloon apple correctly. In their final report, the students noted the positive reactions of the participants towards this activity.

### **Interviews with Elderly Persons**

The students interviewed 15 elderly persons in Barangay Poblacion with assistance from local volunteer-interpreters. The interviews which often lasted for 30 minutes, were held at the interviewees' houses. They drafted an interview guide first and then got feedback from the faculty supervisor. The interview guide included daily activities, family description, health description, support/finance, and community participation. Based on the results of the interviews,

the students identified the strengths and weaknesses of the interviewees. Then, they compared the elderly in Plaridel with the elderly in Mokpo. From this, they raised three main recommendations:

- to recruit and train instructors in elderly exercises to work in the barangays;
- to develop habits of physical fitness among the elderly by providing public space and proper sports equipment, and continuing health education campaigns; and,
- to strengthen support for SCA's activities by allocating an adequate and permanent place for the association, and by informing members of, and making accessible, the various SCA programs and services to them.

## 2. Issues and Insights

All students perceived that the Filipino seniors they met lived in peace and harmony with their families. At the same time, they involve themselves as elders in town affairs. These perceptions may be explained by their interaction only with those of middle class backgrounds. However, particularly in the first practicum year, the students met a grandmother who was pained in having an out-of-school grandchild due to the family's lack of financial resources. The student's image of the elderly in Plaridel is influenced by the image of Korean elderly in an agricultural community. They work hard even in their old age, live alone or only with their old spouse, without visiting families and others, and are hardly able to finance their health care. Compared to rural Korean elderly, therefore, the students thought that the elderly folks in Plaridel were living in good hands with their families there to care for them.

*Community Practice with Informal Settlers by the Riverbank*

During the second practicum, three students were placed in Barangay Banga 2 to work with the informal settlers living along the riverbank. They studied closely the different areas in the community and the lives of informal settlers. The U.P. students who were assigned in this area for their own practicum assisted and cooperated with them. From this came their understanding of the conditions of the community and its residents.

1. Students' Activities

The students' tasks were phased into two: research on the community and its people; and, planning and administration of a program, based on the results of the research.

Research on the Community and its People

The students went to the community for a few days to understand the informal settlers' conditions. From the municipal library research, they found statistical data of the community and the related Acts on informal settlers such as Republic Act No. 7160, Urban Development and Housing Act, and Local Housing Board Act. Next, they walked every narrow path and street of the community to understand its physical characteristics and to identify possible resources for the people. Then they sketched a community map. It was very hard work because of the hot weather, compared to Korea and the polluted environment. Third, they visited several homes and interviewed households near the river. With all the data they obtained, they analyzed community resources and described the situation of the informal settlers in the area. Their key conclusions were as follows:

- The social consciousness of informal settlers needs to be improved through community organizing campaigns.



- Informal settlers need to enhance their access to resources.
- The community's resources need to be expanded by increasing government support and enhancing relationship with formal settlers of the community.
- Although present community resources are not enough, informal settlers need to be helped to use these resources, since they cannot live without help from the outside.

Program: Community Information Directory

Based on the above conclusions, they produced a community information directory booklet for dissemination to the informal settlers. First, they compiled a list of and then gathered basic data on organizations, institutions, and agencies which represent important community resources for the lives of the informal settlers. The directory contained the phone number, address, name of director, service and program of each organization, institution, and agency in Barangay Banga2 and Plaridel municipality. Aside from lists, the information included 'Do's and Don'ts' tips for developing people's consciousness on public and private properties. By design and language, the students sought to project the characteristics and needs of the informal settlers. Finally, they made 50 copies of the directory and gave them to the UP students for distribution because the Korean students had by then finished their practicum. Meanwhile, the UP students continued their community work for a few more months.

2. Issues and Insights

In this practicum area, an issue was the context in which the practicum was administered. Unlike the child, youth, and elderly welfare areas, there is no community work practice in Korea.

The students wondered, ‘how ... old community people listen to, discuss with, and follow young undergraduate students from UP?’ This was not only a cultural shock but also a ‘professional shock’ to Korean students. In Korean society, age is a very important factor for deciding almost everything. Younger people almost always follow older people. If not, they are regarded as ill-mannered. From this point of view, the students wondered how such young students lead much older people. And coordinating community activities is also an unusual practice in Korean social work. Staying and working in the community site during the whole period of student practicum is very uncommon also.

Reviewing the lessons from the community work with informal settlers, all the three students mentioned the greater importance of knowing the community and its resources than sticking to ‘stereotyped’ roles of the social worker in the community. Here is one student’s account:

*Through this practicum, we had [a] lot of experience. We thought social worker’s work is developing program and providing services with lots of resources. But we know some client live with lacking resources of environment. What can social workers do? A social worker’s work is finding resources, connecting with resources to people, mobilizing resources, and organizing residents. We have to empower clients. Clients will be able to find out their problems and solve the problems by themselves. We will have to become active social worker.*

### **Conclusion: Lessons Learned**

The whole experience – not only lectures, field trips, field work, but also the walking, riding, shopping, eating, and talking with the local people became a challenge for the students, who had their first encounter with a foreign land. In particular, the students found the following challenging:

- encountering extremely poor people and seeing their conditions as street children, out of school youth, and informal settlers;
- finding optimistic solutions to the many faces of poverty in the Philippines;
- dealing with different ways of thinking and attitude like “Friday Sickness;”
- communicating in English and Tagalog;
- using public transportation (jeepneys and tricycles) confidently;
- eating Philippine food for every meal like fried pork for breakfast and ‘Chow King’ (a local fast food chain) for dinner.

The whole practicum provoked all the students to appreciate what they have and do not have in Korea, when compared to the Philippines in terms of education, lives, and minds. Some of the most important rewards/gains in the practicum were:

- the experience of living and working in another culture, especially the hospitality;
- gaining insights into different cultural norms between Korea and Philippines, such as pessimism versus optimism among the elderly, strictness versus flexibility among parents of pre-school children, obligation or obedience to authority versus freedom to decide for themselves among the youth;
- practicing social work skills like research, interview, doing case studies, program organizing;
- learning to be sensitive to cultural needs of Filipina migrants since the students were exposed to local culture during their stay in Plaridel;
- sharing their experience with others through supervision, presentation, and group meeting;
- being able to overcome some of the challenges, especially language limitations;

- gaining self-esteem after going through hard times;
- importance and possibility of being an international social worker.

Meanwhile, there were also some losses from the practicum because they had the practicum in the Philippines rather than in Korea:

- possible limits in some specific social work skills due to language difficulties and the short duration of the practicum;
- internship or hiring opportunity after the practicum.

A key question is whether or not the objectives of the practicum were met. Regarding the first objective, the students could identify and describe rural conditions in the Philippines, especially in Plaridel where they stayed and practiced. This was possible since all areas of the practicum dealt with general information of a placement area and the students gathered information from available statistics, interviews, and direct observations.

As for the second objective, it was noted that the students were able to discuss knowledge and insights on the situation, needs and concerns of families they visited with both agency and faculty supervisors, practicum coordinator, and their group members. The third objective was met only to a certain extent. Although they tried to identify how social work deals with specific client situations (for example those of the out of school youth, informal settlers, poor families with sick members, and so on), they could not clarify the social workers' functions and roles at a satisfactory level, because they met and worked only with two social workers from the local level. Achievement of the fourth objective was seen in how they analyzed situations, planned and organized activities, and wrote recordings and reports. Also, they presented their experiences including learning and insights from the practicum three times - at Plaridel Municipal Hall, UP Diliman, and MNU. Overall, the objectives of the practicum were satisfactorily achieved.

There are points that may be beneficial to future students and field educators planning to organize an international placement. First, systematic planning and preparation need to be done at both educators' and students' levels. At the faculty level, the field instructor must set up concrete and realistic objectives for the international practicum. Substantial preparation is necessary for facing expected and unexpected situations. At the students' level, they will need to understand the place where they will be assigned: not only its culture, history, political and social situation, but also the weather, food, transportation, and language. In this case, a key limiting factor was the ability to speak Tagalog. Second, management of the practicum should be considered and made a special part of the budget. This particular practicum program was made with a tight budget. Therefore, the duration and scope of the practicum (about 2 weeks) was heavily dictated by the budget. Ideally, students would need some 'getting-used-to period' before they are placed in the fieldwork site of a country different from their own. For example, it takes a while to get used to the transport, food, general surroundings, and the handling of two currencies. Third, cooperation among related formal institutions is pivotal for successful placement abroad. In this case, the faculty of the DSW of CSWCD, UP and officials of MSWDO, Plaridel were the good partners for planning and organizing the practicum. Since the MNU faculty did not have enough information about and any relationship with potential placement agencies and local communities in other countries, the liaison and guardianship role of partner institutions was critical. Without these co-operating agencies, the practicum could not have materialized. Finally, motivating/encouraging students is a crucial factor in getting them involved in the planned activities. In particular, the students had their first experience of living abroad, so they encountered unexpected situations every day. Somehow they were nervous and helpless. They needed to be given supportive comments and reasonable explanations from supervisors, coordinators, peers, and local people in order to actively participate and show their capacities and hidden potentials. Overall, a successful international social work placement could be attained through a close collaboration between the three stakeholders: students, educators, and local participant organizations.

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### **Endnote**

\* 'Toocho' is a Korean traditional game for all ages, which aims to throw an wooden arrow into a jar.