

E-SUPERVISION OF AN INTERNATIONAL PRACTICUM: FROM TSUNAMI RELIEF TO THE LADIES OF THE CLUB

**Jane Birkbeck, M.S.W., Thompson River University, British Columbia
and Shawna Bava, B.S.W., Canadian Mental Health Association**

International placements for social work students are rewarding, challenging, and filled with unexpected experiences and unanticipated learning. Supervision that encourages students to reflect on their thoughts and feelings, and on occasion to reframe their experiences, is a key component of international field education. This narrative describes the development of an international placement in India and subsequent e-supervision of one student, from tsunami relief work to agency practice.

Introduction

Early in 2004 I packed up my office, turned in my marks, and left the School of Social Work at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) destined for a six-month sabbatical leave in Tamil Nadu, India. Once away, my most enduring reminder of those final, hectic weeks was the picture of one student's wide smile as she stopped by my office door and whispered a last reminder, "Jane, find me a practicum in India." Shawna Bava, then a third-year student, wanted to complete her senior practicum in an international setting. University faculty who travel to international countries are well-placed to bridge academic communities and research international learning opportunities for students (Rai, 2004). I undertook Shawna's request with due diligence and minimal comprehension of the complexities involved.

International field education in less developed regions requires students to carry out tasks in culturally complex societies; thus, even the best pre-preparation planning is unlikely to ready the student for problems, surprises, and complications. The importance of international partnerships, collaboration, and communication (Barlow, 2005; Skolnik, Wayne, & Raskin, 1999), an approach to field instruction that takes into account the national and regional context (Bogo & Herington, 1986), challenges to the development of equitable partnerships between the North and

the South (Tesoriero & Rajaratnam, 2001), and the importance of preparing social work students for cross-cultural practice (Sachdev, 1997) are all critical considerations. While the challenges are significant, an international practicum offers the potential for students to develop intercultural skills, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural competence, and a reflective and competent practice (Tesoriero, 2006).

The School of Social Work at TRU had hosted a number of international social work students, but had yet to place a student outside of Canada. My goal was to find a social work program in India that would provide a challenging yet supportive placement.

The Search for a Placement

Through my volunteer work with Initiatives for Women in Development (I.W.I.D.), a women's policy development agency in Chennai, I quickly learned that the practicum would be less complicated if English was both the medium of instruction at the host university and the language of casual discourse between students. As the I.W.I.D. "policy proofreader", my language deficit challenged me from the beginning. All office communication at the agency was conducted in English, except at lunchtime when the stories, gossip and laughing responses were all recounted in Tamil. My sense of "foreignness" escalated even as I

acknowledged to myself that nothing is more customary than to speak one's first language. It took effort not to appear uncertain—or worse, disgruntled.

With this new learning in hand, I began my quest for a practicum placement in Chennai where four universities offer social work programs. I met with deans, directors, international staff, and university presidents. All offered *chai* and Indian snacks, information on various programs, and the promise of English instruction. English is the language of government in India, and most universities offer their programs in that language.

My final university visit was to the Madras Christian College (M.C.C.), inaugurated by Scottish missionaries in 1837 after the city was renamed Madras by its British colonizers. Today M.C.C. is a degree-granting autonomous college affiliated with the downtown University of Madras. Located in Tambaram, on the final stop of the commuter line in a city of over four million people, M.C.C. was once an exceedingly rural university situated far from the temptations of life in the City. Today it sprawls over 375 acres, boasts the second largest scrub jungle in Asia, houses three hostels for men and one for women, and offers 29 academic departments in both day and evening programs.

I arrived on a class break; the students offered hot *chai* and a cool place for me to sit. Sipping my tea, I observed that the language of teatime was English. As I waited to meet with the social work faculty, I could not help but wonder if I had found the ideal host for Shawna's practicum. Ease with language, and the ability to talk about trivia without translation all perhaps more important to the Canadian social work student's learning in India than a learned comparison of practice theories.

Miriam Samuel, director of the social work department, led me into the administrative offices. I stood in one large room with two generous windows, a desk in each corner, and a pedestal table in the middle. Miriam explained that the faculty once considered dividers to close off their desks but decided they would work more effectively if they could see and talk to one another. As I thought of my

colleagues and our isolation in individual offices, I could not help but agree.

We sat at the pedestal table and the two men and one woman who are the core of the M.C.C. Social Work Department shared classroom stories, and compared courses and even pedagogical approaches. I learned that Miriam had a two-year contract with the Chennai police department to provide gender sensitivity training for all police personnel. The course was also available to students, and I thought Shawna would likely find the class of interest.

A tour of the department revealed two classrooms, each with twenty-four writing desks set in a circle; a library room with too few books; a windowless meeting room with eight chairs around a rectangular table; and a computer lab: two aging computers set on a small table behind metal folding chairs. My careful inquiry gleaned the information that these computers are for the use of all full-time and part-time faculty as well as the students. I stood there considering once again the wealth of the West, the affluence and assets, how the computer in my office is regularly replaced – not merely upgraded – every three years. Facing the fruits of such inequity, I considered yet again how critically important it is that the West begin to seriously share resources with the South. As I thought about Canada's nominal contribution to foreign aid, it was difficult not to cringe.

On my next visit to M.C.C., I presented a mini-lecture to the students about social work in Canada, and then we simply posed questions to each other, uncovering the similarities and differences in our lives. I left with an invitation to teach International Human Rights on my return to India and my promise that a practicum student would arrive from T.R.U. in due course.

Pre-Placement Activity

On my return to Canada, Shawna and I initiated discussions with the Social Work Field Education Coordinator and the International Studies Office at TRU. Discussions began with MCC in the fall of 2004 about Shawna's winter 2005 practicum. She and I chatted as time permitted; then suddenly it was

November, and our work was truly in the details. Shawna emailed a number of questions to Miriam Samuel, head of the Social Work Department, and received this reply:

From: "MCC SOCIAL WORK"
Subject: RE: international practicum
Date: Mon, 15 Nov 2004

We usually advise foreign students to wear a *salwar kameez* that is Indian, when they are in the field. You can get them when you come here. Will work out your placement details and let you know about it. Also we need to discuss about your course. This semester we have 3 electives in the areas of Gender, Human Rights and Environmental Issues. Do let me know what you are interested in. Yes malaria is common here. Hence you need medication for it.

Ah yes, malaria. Shawna and I had two discussions about the virtues of the daily pill that might cause some stomach upset versus the far more convenient weekly pill that could cause hallucinations and psychosis. Should she be vaccinated for Japanese encephalitis? Rabies? Questions of safety assumed increasing importance. We met twice for three hours, Shawna reading in advance so she would have questions, me making lists of what I thought were the most important topics to cover. After a meeting we would debrief by email:

Date: Sun, 21 Nov 2004
From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca
Subject: India

I started a list of things I forgot to mention - take a dozen of those little Kleenex packages, but don't bother to take toilet paper - you can buy it in Tambarim. Also, plan to buy a cell phone in your first week or so - it will be a godsend when you are in an auto-rickshaw and looking for an address. I used Air-Tel in Chennai with great success. I hope you will soon be able to get in touch with Miriam.

Pre-Placement Problems

Eventually, Shawna and Miriam connected, and the fallout from their conversation created a number of problems.

The issues were serious enough that they had the potential to end the placement:

From: "MCC SOCIAL WORK"
Subject: RE: international practicum
Date: Wed, 01 Dec 2004

Regarding your payment you can send it as a bank draft in the name of 'The Principal, Madras Christian College'. You can initially send a draft for Rs.2500 which is about 25% of the total cost of your programme. Your accommodation is all arranged. As I mentioned earlier, there are some rules in the women's hall, such as you will have to be in the hall by 6.30 in the evenings and no alcohol is permitted inside. Boys are also not allowed entry into the hall. It may be a little odd, but I am sure it will be a very different experience. Two of my students sat in the hall, Misha and Geetha, and they will help you out.

After reading Miriam's email Shawna appeared at my office door, caught between laughter and tears. A 6:30 p.m. curfew? Her days would be taken up with classes, practicum and riding the train to and from her placement. How would she find time to email friends from the Internet Shop? To post to her website? To just walk around and absorb India? Perhaps shop for herself and for friends? I wondered if she could ask to have the rule revisited. Not eager to question the rules by e-mail, Shawna decided to leave curfew until she was in Chennai.

After talking with Shawna, I braced myself for meetings with my Dean and the Field Education Coordinator. In Canada, international students pay university fees to their home institution, not to the host university. Both the Coordinator and the Dean were adamant that Shawna, if required to pay for her placement, could not leave Canada for a practicum in India.

Fortunately, the contract was open to interpretation. Consultations at T.R.U. took place across academic disciplines, and in the end the most rational interpretation prevailed. Rs. 10,000 is less than 300 Canadian dollars. The cost of a course at T.R.U. is more than \$300 Canadian. Shawna, already signed up to take the Gender and Society course in

Chennai, would pay Rs. 10,000 for the course. Behind closed doors, Shawna and I breathed a sigh of relief and moved another step forward. In no time it was the end of term and we said goodbye; ready for the Christmas break, and excited about Shawna's adventure.

E-supervision: Framing Responses to the Unpredictable

On the 26th of December, 2004, the tsunami ripped through South and East Asia, destroying lives, livelihoods, businesses, and homes in many countries, including India.

Televised reports showed the bodies strewn on a beach close to Chennai and reported the tragic losses of the fisherfolk and their impoverished families.

Shawna and I emailed each other from our respective Christmas locations. Her parents wanted her to cancel the trip; she wanted to fly out as planned. As is often the case in social work decisions, limited information was available.

Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: RE: Fwd: Phone numbers.

I just arrived home from Christmas in Ontario and have been glued to news reports of the disaster in Asia. It is difficult to determine exactly what the situation is in Chennai. Have you been in touch with any of your contacts there? Although friends and family are suggesting that I postpone my trip, I do not think that is necessary. Do you? I picked up my Indian Visa when I was in Vancouver and am going for my final immunization on Friday. I will attempt to reach Miriam by email and phone over the next week.

And thus began our e-supervision. Students in international settings benefit from a readiness to face unexpected situations, and the understanding that a practicum in an unknown culture will bring significant challenges along with the rewards (Pawar, Hanna, & Sheridan, 2004). Even before the practicum began, Shawna was experiencing a variety of challenges. To provide support for these challenges and to celebrate the rewards, we had a plan to facilitate the flow of information

and ideas to and from Shawna's international setting. A variety of supervision models are utilized to follow students in international settings (Pettys, Panos, Cox, & Oosthuysen, 2005; Jounhson, 2004; Roby, & Panos, 2004; Raskin, Skolnik, & Wayne, 1991). Effective student supervision, including both educational and supportive input, can be provided through online delivery (Maidment, 2006). It was e-supervision that guided Shawna and me through this international placement.

Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Chennai trip.

I too have been glued to the news, especially *The Deccan Herald*, a reliable Bangalore paper, and *The Times of India*. It appears 143 people died in Chennai, most in a fishing village close to the city and a few strolling on the beach. What a horrendous tragedy for so many countries. I appreciate your dad's suggestion that you cancel. For now, I agree with what you propose; get more and more information. There is still time to make a decision either way. Meantime, I agree that you are the best one to email and phone Miriam - it is you who needs the news firsthand.

Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004

To: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: chennai trip

Thank you for directing me to *The Times of India* and *The Deccan Herald*. It was helpful to read news reports from local sources. I have sent an email off to Miriam and will attempt to contact her by phone as well.

Miriam's response cleared the way for Shawna's departure, and to some extent it relieved the concerns of her family and friends, as well as faculty and students in the T.R.U. School of Social Work.

From: "MCC SOCIAL WORK"

Subject: RE: international placement

Date: Fri, 07 Jan 2005

Wishing you a Very Happy New Year. As you have mentioned everything is safe here. We are living 25km away from the Seashore. But we as a department are involved in relief

work. One of us from the department will be there to receive you in the Airport. So if you have anything you want to clarify still, we are very happy to do that. The Tribal Visit as scheduled is not decided still, because of the Tsunami, so we will keep you posted about that in one or two days. Looking forward to seeing you in Chennai.

**The Placement: Culture,
Conscientization, and Challenge**

And so Shawna flew to India, and email kept us in touch. But this was not the practicum we anticipated, and I felt apprehensive about the challenges she would face too soon after her arrival.

Date: Fri, 21 Jan 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: pre-departure planning

We will be leaving for the tsunami relief project Saturday morning at approx. 8 am. All of the schools of SW in Tamil Nadu are participating in this project. Unfortunately, I don't anticipate that we will have Internet access in the relief area. Instead, I will attempt to contact you by phone once or twice while I'm away. The plan is that we will be away for 3-4 weeks - returning in the second week of February. We spent today in a pre-departure planning meeting. I am responsible for the documentation committee and will also be working on the resource allocation committee. Our first task will be to complete government approved assessment forms for each family. We are also responsible for conducting focus groups within each village and compiling the information we gather. My understanding is that this information will be utilized by NGO's and the government over the next few years. Time is moving quickly as you said it would. All in all, it's been a great first week here in Chennai. I must go and finish packing.

How, I wondered, would Shawna head up the documentation team when, for an absolute certainty, Tamil would be the language of the field? I worried that, in the midst of the tsunami, her white skin would bring even more curious attention her way than in the normal course of

events. I felt annoyed with my colleagues at MCC for allocating her a supervisory position. But most of all I hoped her peers would remember to speak English sometimes.

Date: Mon, 24 Jan 2005
From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca
Subject: Re: pre-departure planning

I smiled as I read about the extensive documentation process; tons of forms will be amassed. Indian bureaucrats love their paperwork; perhaps a legacy of the 'Britishers'. The resource allocation committee sounds potentially difficult, with my limited understanding of how you will function. Could be a tough task, particularly when there are too few resources to allocate widely. I will be very interested to hear how you felt and what you thought as you worked in this area. I take comfort in the fact that your team speaks English and the team meetings will, I hope, be conducted in English. At the villages you will be thrown into the situation where you do not know the language and much or most of the day is spent speaking Tamil. I hope you have a friend who will do on-the-spot translation at certain times, and not just when you are doing documentation. Let me know how this goes.

Eight days into the tsunami relief effort, Shawna and her fellow students were permitted one day off. She headed for the only internet facility in the area and wrote about her experiences.

Date: Sun, 30 Jan 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: tsunami rehabilitation project

It has been a long, hot, and interesting week. Our team has travelled to at least 6 *kuppams* (hamlets) in Villipuram district. We completed many household surveys and encountered a few problems with data collection. Many are frustrated at the lack of relief dollars and supplies.

I appreciated reading your email today as this week has been a difficult one for me with the language barrier. Most conversations and interactions occur in Tamil and I've felt quite lost. There is so much work to be done that

the students don't always have time to translate in the field. I feel frustrated, angry, and upset at times, and try to bring myself back to task. I think I am mostly fatigued from all of the staring. It seems that there is no place or time for myself. We are sleeping on the concrete floor in a school and working 12 hour days. It's exhausting.

On a positive note, I am learning first hand about the politics of relief work. The student group that I am traveling with is great... they sing and play guitar and make sure we have a coffee each day.

In Shawna's place, I would have found a tea stall and tripled my daily coffee intake. Instead, she summoned the energy to write me during this exhausting and frustrating time, describing how she balanced the dreadful moments of being foreign with the positive moments of her learning. As I read about her experiences in the field, I recalled telling her that it took me a full month to adapt to living in India. She did not have such a luxury, and I found her resilience remarkable.

Date: Mon, 31 Jan 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: tsunami rehabilitation project

Frustration, anger, sadness and upset were emotions that I experienced every time I was cut off by the language barrier. I grew tired of asking people to translate. But as I read your email my mind expanded to the everyday experience of relief workers faced with the anger and fear of survivors. For you, working daily in disaster relief surrounded by traumatized people and unable to communicate...this is more complex than I can imagine. And I forgot to mention the staring, didn't I? I wonder why, because a foreigner is stared at all the time, even in the major cities. In a small village, the never-ending scrutiny is fatiguing, exhausting, and very annoying. Sometimes I used my scarf to cover my head, for protection from prying eyes. And even though I knew that the staring was not malicious, I tired of the curiosity factor. Your entry into foreign service falls into the crash

course category; nothing we expected. The politics of relief work will provide much reflection when you return.

Of course, as her emails showed, Shawna was reflecting on the spot, empathetic about the pain of the people around her, realistic about her own responses, and always focused on the work. And I, sitting in Canada, struggled to find words of comfort, of empowerment, of minimal understanding of what this woman was experiencing. It stretched my writing capacity as I attempted to craft words that would acknowledge the extent of her ordeal and at the same time neither diminish nor exaggerate the circumstances.

Reflections on Relief Work

Date: Sat, 12 Feb 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: back in Chennai

I'm happy to report that we completed the tsunami rehabilitation project and arrived back in Chennai last night. You accurately described many of my thoughts and feelings in your last email. The past three weeks were an intense introduction to Indian culture and there were many times when I felt overwhelmed by culture shock.

In the most affected kuppams, we conducted household assessments of damage for all residents. The survey was not well designed and data collection was complicated. In all of the kuppams, we conducted focus group discussions and resource mapping. Most of this work was done in Tamil, but I was able to follow by reading the notes that students wrote in English or asking someone to translate for me.

We conducted programmes in many of the *kuppams* in our area, designed to be both educational and fun. The educational component focused on tsunami awareness. We found that superstition and misinformation was common, and many did not know what a tsunami was. The crowd would become silent and attentive as the MCC students provided accurate information about the tsunami. I think

this was the most significant assistance we had to offer.

Many of the children suffer from fear and anxiety that another tsunami will strike. We were doing a community programme one night and a lorry – a big water truck - came up the street. The sound startled the children, who thought it was another tsunami, and they took off from the crowd - running for high ground.

I was often approached by parents who offered me their children. At those times, I longed for the language to speak with them and explain that the color of my skin did not automatically guarantee their children safety from another tsunami or a better life.

We encountered grief, shock, anger, deceit, and denial. Social inequality and power dynamics interfere and families who need assistance are not receiving support. In most kuppams, relief supplies are distributed by village leaders equally even though some residents were not affected at all.

There is much more to write, but I am running out of time.

Shawna returned to Chennai saddened by all that she saw and particularly distressed that she was unable to communicate with the parents who pushed their children toward her, hoping she would carry them to safety. Without language she could only shake her head, when she wanted so much to offer comfort and hope. In the end, this was the most difficult part of her tsunami relief work. She also returned as a warmly appreciated member of the M.C.C. social work student group, began to attend her class and travel to her two practicum settings each week. Lack of time continued to be a theme for the remainder of the practicum; in the end Shawna decided to accept the 6:30 p.m. curfew. Between the curfew, her placement hours, travel time by commuter train, interactions with M.C.C. students and faculty, and her class, there were few moments for personal pursuits.

The Placements

Date: Fri, 18 Feb 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: agency visits

I completed two agency visits this week. On Thursday I visited YRG CARE - an agency focused on research, prevention, and treatment for individuals affected with HIV/AIDS. The group is working on a qualitative research project that examines the use of peer educators to bring about behavior change. It is a longitudinal research study being conducted in five sites worldwide: Russia, Peru, India, Zimbabwe and the USA. The coordinating body is the National Institute of Mental Health in the USA and John Hopkins University has been partnered with YRG CARE.

On Monday, I will visit the Y.W.C.A. in Egmore and meet with the senior social worker on staff. Miriam warned me that I won't necessarily receive a strong social work perspective there because it is run by well-to-do-ladies of society rather than social work professionals. However, the Y.W.C.A. will provide me with a ground level understanding of issues affecting women and children.

I was intrigued by the two very diverse practicum settings Miriam arranged for Shawna. Recalling some of my own experiences as a volunteer at counseling agencies in India, I wondered how Shawna would react to the work of the well-to-do-ladies.

Date: Wed, 09 Mar 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: update

My first day at the YWCA went really well. I met with my supervisor, Mrs. Immaculate Mary - the names here really get me - who has been working at the Y.W.C.A. for 18 years. We discussed some of the activities that I can be involved in and I am excited about the prospects. My supervisor wants me to write reports, and has also agreed to give me access to client files, written in

English, so that I can examine some specific cases.

Unfortunately, by the time I left the Y.W.C.A., I was not feeling well at all, and I spent all day yesterday in bed. I passed out in the bathroom at 2:00 am and was found by the security guard. It is VERY hot in the city.

I went into Y.R.G. briefly this morning - probably shouldn't have but I was feeling self-imposed pressure to get as many hours in as possible. I completed a report that was pending and took the train back to M.C.C. The commute to practicum at both sites is between 45-55 min each way, but I have come to enjoy the train ride as 'down time' for myself...as long as I can get a seat.

I was concerned about Shawna's illness; the combination of fever, heat, and sickness is unwelcome at any time, and even more so in a foreign country. As well, I was troubled by her approach to her practicum hours; her determination to respond competently in two settings and meet every requirement of a Canadian practicum meant Shawna had to move at an exhausting pace. I was unsurprised to learn she had collapsed and managed to arrange a telephone conversation to insist that she slow down. I suggested a number of tourist destinations, but it was almost two weeks before she embarked on a short holiday trip. A practicum supervisor at a distance can ask, but the learning opportunities may be too great for the student to acquiesce.

Date: Tue, 15 Mar 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: update

I am sorry and concerned to read about your illness. You are right about the utility of paying a visit to YRG while you were recovering. As far as the 'hours' go, as long as you are not in bed and sound asleep, you are putting in hours. The hour component in the policy manual describes the practice standards set by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work. These do not apply to your work in India, where waking days are practicum days as far as I am concerned.

You may tire of demands to write reports, but it will be instructive to look at a few client files and see what issues are presented and what is recorded.

Seminars and Workshops: A Week of Learning and Reflection

Shawna had many learning opportunities presented to her during her time in India, with invitations to frequent seminars and workshops. I still remember workshops that provided some remarkable learning about India, and I was excited about Shawna's opportunities to learn and network.

Date: Fri, 18 Mar 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: another week gone by

This week was a week of seminars. On Monday, I attended a disaster management seminar. The governor and some chief ministers were in attendance as were many media representatives and few participants. There were some interesting speakers who introduced the idea of formulating disaster preparedness plans to protect social capital, but there seemed to be a large disconnect between the information presented and the reality on the ground and in the villages.

On Tuesday there was a speaker at the Y.W.C.A., a representative from the juvenile welfare board. She suggested that a woman's primary responsibility was to the family, and that interests outside of the home jeopardize the health of the family. That was difficult for me to swallow... but it is something that I continue to reflect upon. The traditional family values and focus on the family can be very positive and provide a nurturing environment for both individuals and the community. Still, the responsibility in India falls only to the women, increasing their workload and decreasing their freedom to do anything else. I would have preferred it if the speaker suggested that both the parents need to share the responsibility for the health of the family.

On Wednesday, I was at Y.R.G. I had the opportunity to go into the field - a slum

community- and I felt some anxiety about what I would encounter. I found that there were many similarities between the urban slum communities and rural villages - lack of sanitation, limited resources, similar dwellings and methods of cooking and cleaning. The purpose of the visit was to touch base with one of the peer educators and visit with other community members. For the rest of the day, I worked with members of the domestic violence research project, who have a peer educator's manual that the staff is currently testing

On Thursday, I was back at the YWCA for a presentation on mental health at the Navajeevan Center. The consulting psychiatrist spoke on how to detect mental illness. The doctor was trained in Britain and she functions as the 'gatekeeper' for the mental health programme at the YWCA. Once a woman is on medication and "cured" of her illness she will be admitted to the programme.

On Friday, the Sahodari project - family counseling center - at the Y.W.C.A. hosted a seminar on managing behavioral problems in adolescence. The presenter stressed the role of parents and counsellors to provide adolescents with love and support, and a way to express those feelings. She said "adolescents today are hungry for experience, and we keep feeding them explanations. They are undernourished." After I got back to the residence, I spoke with a few of the girls about this and they agree that the level of expressed emotion in many families, especially higher caste families, is very low.

The topic that interested me the most this week came from a book rather than a seminar. My interest in 'family planning programmes' was sparked when I spoke with a doctor at a primary health center. This week, I found a book that linked family planning programmes to funding for development from Western countries and the World Bank. I've been reflecting on the idea that these programmes have been introduced to maintain control of resources rather than to assist the local population and that the programmes have a

disproportionate impact on poor women. It's an area that I would like to explore further. Is it possible for you to call one afternoon next week? Let me know.

I read and reread Shawna's long email, recognizing the maturity and wisdom she brought to this practicum as well as her thoughtful reflection, desire to learn, and ability to articulate her ideas so well. At the same time, cultural complexities made her question her learning, and she was willing to speak to those complexities in her e-mails.

The Limitations of E-Supervision

Date: Sat, 19 Mar 2005

From: jbirckbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: another week gone by

Your email identified much learning in the last week, Shawna. Some of that learning is difficult to deal with, particularly the role of women in all social classes. As I read your thoughts on shared childcare I could not help but reflect that we do not have a firm template for shared parenting in Canada, either.

You are absolutely right about the family planning programmes in India; the 'balanced family concept' has had a profoundly negative effect on girl-children. And so in India female feticide, practiced only by those able to pay a physician, is ignored by police and policy makers, while the male population grows. In the 2001 Indian Census there were 899 females aged 0-6 for every 1000 males. And in some areas of Punjab, a very wealthy state, there were towns with as few as 764 girl-children. This is not about development but globalization - boys cost less and bring more rewards, and the consumerism/commodification of women has created a desire for fewer girls. For the poor, there was forced sterilizations under Indhira Gandhi's son, Sanjay, and I am not certain these have ended. In India, family planning programmes are routinely linked to funding allocation.

Again I found myself reaching for words that would convey encouragement, education, guidance, and support. Words on a computer

screen have the ability to do all of the above, but they may also suggest judgment or unfair interpretation. Shawna chose to view my comments in their best light.

Date: Sat, 19 Mar 2005
From: shawnabava@hotmail.com
Subject: sunday reflections

Thank you for your email...I always feel better after reading a note from you. Supervision has been slim here and it's been very helpful to have your guidance and wisdom from across the miles. I look forward to hearing from you on Wednesday morning.

While email communication is quick and may be reasonably responsive, nothing can take the place of a real voice; even one interrupted by static on the telephone line. Shawna and I had a number of telephone conversations while she was in India, but they were all arranged on an *ad hoc* basis, usually at her request. In the future, I will have the number of a private telephone which the student can use, and I will make arrangements to call at a certain time even before the student left Canada. While this set time might not work for all telephone calls, it would be much better than nothing. It was during our infrequent telephone calls that I learned more about both the substantive and the less significant issues that concerned Shawna. In one call she vividly described her anger as one man after another pushed in front of her to buy tickets at the train station counter.

Date: Tue, 29 Mar 2005
From: jbirbeck@tru.ca
Subject: Re: hot hot hot

On the phone, you used the word 'rage' to describe your response to your apparent invisibility at the train station. I recalled my own rage, as I slapped my hand down on the third hand that weaseled around me at a station counter, wanting to buy a ticket.

I was neither kind, gentle nor humble in those moments. And, as you said so well on the phone, I too believed the "protected, cared-for woman" was a stance simply useful to Indian men. It seemed a matter of simply

making rules that would keep women at home in a place of servitude and isolation, while pretending to come from a place of caring and protection.

I think of you wading through the humidity and am glad you will be on your way to Goa shortly.

At last, I was "heard" by this too busy and very focused young woman who agreed to embark on a brief trip. It was a delight for me to describe for her the best way to travel by train, to find a decent hotel, to get around, and to see the sights. And, as I learned from Shawna on her return, it is essential that students in international settings take time to explore the country where they study and volunteer, to rest and to recreate. But after three months in India, even with a brief holiday, Shawna still felt tired and somewhat depressed.

Placement Reflection and Action

Date: Fri, 01 Apr 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: week in review

Visitors from the U.S. have been at Y.R.G. all week. The agency is conducting feasibility interviews and focus group discussions with potential participants. I've been involved in observing these sessions and typing transcripts in English. One of the staff listens in Tamil and I type in 'proper' English. I've noticed that a lot of information is 'lost in translation' causing some confusion. I've been reflecting on ways that this can be avoided as some of the miscommunication is serious.

I have been asked to put together some information on a gender sensitization workshop for the male staff regarding domestic violence.

At the Y.W.C.A., I've observed a lot of "bad" counseling skills and spoke with my MCC supervisor about that. He suggested that I try to give some feedback in a workshop format with staff. It will take some preparation for me to be able to do this in a way that will be acceptable to the staff. Still, I will try to do

so because it's been really difficult for me to sit silently while they pass judgments about the client in English when they know that the client cannot understand, and do other things to perpetuate a 'power over' relationship with the individual.

I started to feel down this week. This work is tiring and I don't get much comfort from the environment in the dorm. I'm sharing a room with two other girls, who often have two or three other girls visit in the evenings, and I long for privacy.

I thought about my time in India, always with a room to myself—a quiet haven rented in a family home. I simply could not imagine working all day with so many people around me, negotiating space among masses of people on the street and on the train, and then coming home to absolutely no privacy. It was little wonder that Shawna longed for quiet time and a quiet space to be alone.

Date: Thu, 07 Apr 2005

From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca

Subject: Re: week in review

Yes, much is lost in translation. I expect Y.R.G. will want to hear your concerns. A workplace that provides gender sensitization for the male staff is clearly thinking about good practice. I am aware that you are a resource to many in India; you have accomplished much in a very short time.

Oh my, and then there is the Y.W.C.A. and "the ladies of the club." Like you, I saw such 'bad' counseling at my N.G.O. in Bangalore. There was no getting around the director of the N.G.O., who would actually interrupt a counseling session to tell a client that she must not go back to her husband, or stay with him, or whatever. It was simply dreadful. Like you, I would bite my tongue, but I did not think to put together a workshop. You are indeed a resource.

I hope you find a quiet place to put together these workshops; I cannot even imagine making it through one of your days and then coming home to NO PRIVACY!!

Evaluation and Endings

Date: Thu, 14 Apr 2005

From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com

Subject: evaluations

My final evaluation at the Y.W.C.A. was on Tuesday. Miriam came to meet with Immaculate Mary and review the practicum. The evaluation was brief but positive. I didn't feel that I could speak openly about some of the observations that I've made there regarding counselling style and interaction with clients. Instead, I asked Immaculate Mary if she would be interested in me facilitating a short seminar for the staff in the family counselling center. I allowed her to choose the topic and she suggested 'counselling strategies'. I was very pleased with her choice and agreed to do just that. So, I will be returning to the Y.W.C.A. on April 27th to lead a short session in the afternoon. When that is over, I will feel that the practicum is complete. I didn't want to just walk away on Tuesday afternoon without attempting to contribute something to improve the counselling that takes place.

My final evaluation at YRG CARE is scheduled for tomorrow morning. In the past week I drafted the gender sensitization workshop; a very interesting project. I submitted my first draft last week, but after speaking with a few male staff members I realized that I needed to revamp the whole thing and get down to the basics. We had a conversation about 'Eve-teasing' (the term for sexual harassment in India) and the men were suggesting that the way to combat harassment was to educate women ... because that empowers them. I questioned if they believed that men needed to be educated or change their behaviors to change the system, but they didn't believe so. My heart sank.

I changed a lot of the exercises in the workshop in the hopes of engaging them personally rather than academically. I've asked that they reflect on their relationships with women in their lives whom they respect and who do not experience violence - mother, sisters, aunts and so forth - and question why

those women should be free from violence while other women must "adjust" to their experience of violence. I've heard women say countless times in the past few months that we/you/they just need to adjust. That seems to be the response to many situations of domestic violence.

I read this email and reflected that Shawna's time in India was quickly drawing to a close; her separation from that country, on an emotional level at least, was certainly well underway. Yet there she was, putting workshops together to gently confront violence against women in its many and varied forms.

Date: Fri, 15 Apr 2005
From: jbirkbeck@tru.ca
Subject: Re: evaluations

I am so impressed with the work you do to promote change within systems that can only be approached through empowerment practice. Your decision to prepare and facilitate workshops is one more example of your reflective practice.

As I read your work on gender sensitization and your decision to carry on with a personal model - which is so much more profound than a theoretical one - I considered again the depth of your practice wisdom. I read your ideas and thought about your ability to work with and through resistance. I wish I was there to watch you in action. Well done, Shawna. For the workshop at the Y.W.C.A., I have a small suggestion. You know it is difficult to 'hear' information that is contrary to one's usual practice. Perhaps you could print handouts of some important points from your presentation, for consideration by the staff after the session.

Endings . . .

Date: Thu, 28 Apr 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: on my way

It's hard to believe that I am in my final hours in Chennai...and that this will be my last email from India. I remember you saying that

thoughts of your bed were what made it easier to get on the plane...for me, it's thoughts of escaping from this heat.

Wednesday afternoon I returned to the Y.W.C.A. for a brief seminar on "counseling strategies from Canada." So, now that practicum experience feels complete.

My mind and emotions are spinning today...I feel that I have only touched the tip of the iceberg during my stay... the information has at times been overwhelming. So much to learn and so little time, but overall, I would say that this has been a very rewarding experience. Again, I thank you for your encouragement and guidance. There were many times when I was disheartened, thinking that no one here understood what I was feeling, and I would receive an email from you and know that you understood. I cannot thank you enough.

And New Beginnings

Date: Thu, 12 May 2005
From: shawna_bava@hotmail.com
Subject: request

I've been applying for positions from India and London and I have a job interview scheduled for Monday. I arrive back in Vancouver on Saturday. The position is a new initiative that "involves a recurring 26-week program for groups of 6-10 youth who will receive training in a variety of life skills, personal and group development, and career related areas. The program will culminate in a 2-week overseas project to participate in a restoration project in Sri Lanka." If you will be a reference, please let me know what contact information I should pass along to the agency.

Shawna was hired into the international facilitator's position, where she worked until November, 2006. In her two years with the program she accompanied one group of youth to Sri Lanka to build homes lost to the 2004 tsunami, then moved into the coordinator's position. She recently joined the Canadian Mental Health Association in Calgary, and in the fall of 2007 she will begin a Master's

program in International Social Work at the University of Calgary.

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Jane Birkbeck, M.S.W., is Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work and Human Services, Thompson River University British Columbia, Canada. Shawna Bava, B.S.W., Canadian Mental Health Association in Alberta, Canada. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: jbirkbeck@tru.ca.

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