Do All roads Lead to Rome? Teaching Social Work Transnationally

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Abstract: This story describes the journey of two social work educators who experienced transformation through co-teaching a course transnationally. Video conference technology was used to deliver a course on child and youth migration, simultaneously to four different groups of students located in four different classrooms in three countries. Our story sheds light on the significance of the teacher as a person and its effect on learning processes, within the context of the internationalization of social work education. The establishment of a community of learning was facilitated when teachers, along with students, were able to together venture beyond their accustomed paths of instructing and learning social work. For this to occur, substantial space was devoted – beyond that dedicated to the delivery of course content – to an exploration of commonalities and differences in personal and communal histories, cultures of learning, preferences with respect to discussion and questioning, as well as conceptualizations of the social work profession. Our reflections capture various aspects of the ongoing transformation process and highlight the complexity of social work education which involves the person of students and teachers alike.

Keywords: transnationalism, internationalization, teaching, transformation, forgiveness

Introduction

This journey has several starting points which ultimately converge. Stefan and Itzhak, the two protagonists, enter this journey at different times and with different backgrounds and histories. Stefan was a young researcher when he joined into a collaboration of German and Israeli colleagues during an international meeting of a research network on care leavers in Oxford. Itzhak entered this journey later on when the map of the collaboration between the German and Israeli colleagues had already been drawn. The group had decided to use the European Union's (EU) TEMPUS program as a stage to develop a joint project focusing on child and youth welfare. TEMPUS was funded by the EU to further collaboration between higher education institutions in the partner countries of the EU, particularly in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2014).

The EU-TEMPUS project, bearing the not-so-catchy acronym TACHYwe (Transnational Academic Careers in Child and Youth Welfare), began at the end of 2012, and ended in early 2016. Its major aim was to develop a curriculum on international child and youth welfare based on international expertise to help train future professionals. Itzhak came from Sapir College, one of the Israeli participating higher education institutions; Stefan was a faculty member at Hildesheim University, Germany, one of the four

institutions from inside the EU.

This group of scholars wanted to internationalize study courses and curricula as a central means to prepare students and future professionals to be active and engaged participants in a multicultural, interconnected world (D. R. Cox & Pawar, 2006; Kidd Webster, Arenas, & Magana, 2010; Link & Healy, 2005). This group built TACHYwe on important insights into international social work education, which began already in the 1970s and 1980s (see e.g. Healy, 1988; Healy, 2001). The group considered the internationalization of academic education as a reaction to the growing importance of cross border activities and of interconnections between countries, peoples, cultures, values, languages, political and economic systems, religions, and of current political transformations of the social world (Healy & Link, 2012). Our group thought it was pivotal to challenge students in a variety of ways to achieve a deeper understanding of global issues through personal encounters, as well as scholarly examination and inquiry.

Our group thought it was imperative for TACHYwe that the development of joint international courses avoid a top-down process, typical of professional imperialism (Midgley, 1981). Therefore, the project was designed as a bottom-up approach to curricula development, starting with the expertise and experience of the consortium partners. Integrating concepts of cross-cultural understanding across all disciplines and creating stable and respectful

relationships is not only an important competency for students in child and youth welfare, but was also a guiding principle in the work of the consortium. The challenge, however, is to translate these very common principles into the everyday practice of the project and the consortium.

Thus, TACHYwe put an emphasis on repeated border crossing practices among participants, virtually, as well as through on-site research visits and project meetings. These transnational practices (Köngeter, 2010; Vertovec, 2009) were not only important for gaining a better understanding of child and youth welfare in the various countries, but also for building a trusting relationship, and for getting a deeper understanding of the life stories of project participants. These transnational practices involved both students from participating universities as well as scholar participants – including Itzhak and Stefan. This approach challenged their knowledge, as they were confronted with the difficulties and barriers involved in understanding each other. Such understanding would necessarily involve reflection of their own explicit knowledge, as well as knowledge that is taken for granted (implicit knowledge) (Polanyi, 1969).

Upon this stage offered by the TACHYwe program, the two narrators initiated a joint course with students from four sites and three countries, using video conference equipment and software-based video conference tools. They were aware of the different forms of e-learning utilized in educational science, though less so in social work (e.g. Ballantyne, 2007; Bye, Prom, Tsybikdorzhieva, & Boldonova, 2006; Larsen, Visser-Rotgans, & Hole, 2011)). Interestingly, videoconferencing is hardly mentioned as an important means for the internationalization of higher education. Although the following stories will not focus on the technical aspects, it seems to be an important feature of the process since videoconferencing enabled a specific kind of simultaneous presence, which was buttressed by face-to-face preparatory meetings, skypeconversations and countless emails.

Itzhak's story

The story of the course begins for me in Dublin in the sports field at Trinity college where while strolling along together I got up the courage to talk

with them. I mean the Germans. Not my colleagues from Germany or the people from Germany… but rather… the "Germans." As I pondered my move I felt a pang of guilt. Would this mean I was forgetting Mrs. Wolfman, my childhood neighbor who had never spoke about what she had been through, but could not conceal the long series of numbers tattooed into her arm? What about the promise I made to myself when I reached the age of my manhood that I would never even sit in a Volkswagen? Almost despite myself but at the same time feeling propelled forward by a strong force deep within, I sidled up to them and spurted out, "I was never in Germany. I have never met Germans." And then I waited for what seemed to be a long time, but wasn't really. Immediately one of them smiled back towards me and I felt a gentleness that touched me and we talked. Although as we talked, a small voice inside of me continuously urged me to quit and return to my own group of Israeli colleagues. Back then I could not at all have imagined how what was nothing more than a five-minute conversation could snowball into a life changing transformation.

One month later I took a further risk. I decided to go to Berlin for a holiday. In the last days prior to my departure I felt so much guilt that I almost cancelled. How could I go and enjoy myself in the land where my people had been annihilated? The visit was extremely hard emotionally. I shed many tears.

The visit to the Berlin monument, to the victims of the Holocaust and the adjacent museum. I had seen all the photos before but somehow seeing them here was more real, more shocking, more painful.

On the small golden plaques outside of the homes of the victims, one of the names I saw was Berman – my own mother's maiden name.

At the same time, I could clearly see many positive sides to the society. The people in the street I met were friendly, kind, liberal and very humane. I felt lots of sensitivity to our joint history of horrific tragedy. All of a sudden I was finding myself in the beginning of a process of forgiveness.

With the passing months and another consortium meeting in Moscow, I understood that I was to teach a joint course with my German colleague with the kind and welcoming smile. I welcomed the opportunity. It might have sped up my forgiveness processes.

Suddenly Germany, German people and German things were of great interest to me. I wanted to learn more and more, and a university course was quite safe for me. There's no way someone who is a university student could have been *there*. Even with my hang-ups I could not in any way blame them for what happened. They are innocent.

Working on developing a joint course is difficult. Joining us are some Russian professors.

But working with them is extremely difficult and their professional knowledge is limited to what has been written in their mother tongue. I discovered that I don't want to hurt their feelings. I am very sensitive to the hardships and disadvantages that they must experience, and am very curious about my extraordinary sensitivity to them. Eventually I came to understand that it likely also relates to the Holocaust. Again my heart and soul return to this existential departure point. How can I forget that without the Russians, the world probably would have totally collapsed into the darkness of Nazi reign? Sixty years later, this seemingly negligible and dry historic fact has captured my professional better judgement.

Eventually all the university partners – Israeli, German and Russian – settled on a course syllabus. It had a very strong practice orientation and reflected our Israeli orientation, which is predominantly American. Again, is this once more a revisitation of my core issue? The allied forces... the liberation of the camps...

As our academic discussions proceeded, I noticed the distinctiveness of my distinguished colleague from Germany. He appeared to me a genuine scholar. I admired this and at times felt inadequate and even jealous for his breadth of knowledge.

He and I decided to Skype about the course. I was excited, though a bit apprehensive, to bring him into my home. I prepared logistically and mentally for half an hour and waited for him, for his ring. It was a milestone. My forgiveness was galloping forward. The conversation was productive and pleasant. I searched in the background for any other important information I could find. The furnishing on the wall was no different than ours here. He mentioned at one point his small child's school – I felt another leap in

my forgiveness – a tsunami of common humanity was hovering above me and was about to crash its full force on my head.

And it did crash down, as a powerful and even intoxicating experience teaching together.

Even more important than the course content was him, Stefan, and the exposure to the students he brought me. So the course content will have to wait. I feel I must start as my heart leads me.

Stefan was sensitive, gentle and humane… He treated the students – mine and well as his – with the utmost respect. He seemed to really genuinely care when he spoke about the distress young people who are immigrating to Germany from a marginalized background experience. And the students from Germany – they look just like we do – they talked about little things like the weather. They wanted to get to know us.

Both the groups of students were thirsty to get to know one another. For the Israelis, it seemed like a deep wish to go towards forgiveness. For the German students, well maybe they unconsciously wanted to promote our forgiveness, but they also showed lots of interest in getting to know us as people. The Israeli students were thrilled with the partying and beer that the German students spoke about. We were searching for and evoking the common, the human, the regular. One of the Israeli students told her German peers that her family had their home in Berlin. From the German participants there was the first direct actual reference to our joint tragic history. The moment was heavy with emotion. From our side, the Israeli students sighed with relief that the German handled the moment with appropriate sensitivity; another step toward my forgiveness.

A big deal, the Israeli students were extremely divided about showing our "dirty laundry" to the German students around our current treatment of African refugees who have crossed deserts and wastelands to get to Israel in hopes of a better future. I wonder why. Because it takes us away, distracts us from the underlying core issue in our relations? Or the Israeli students perhaps felt that our ambivalent response to these unfortunate people betrays a searing imperative to not turn our backs on the stranger, on he who is in pain? On she who suffers oppression?

A major discovery for me in the course is the way the German students are so obedient. They do whatever they are expected to do and they don't seem to express any feelings of discomfort in doing so. Compared to the Israeli students, they did not really share much emotion at all. This seemed unreal to me, but as I experienced it first-hand, it sinks in that this is something of cardinal importance in understanding our joint history.

One year later, I sat on the train going to visit Stefan so that we could write together. I was very happy to see him again. I sat beside a couple who was sensitively and kindly comforting their infant son who was tired of the train ride and just wanted to get home. They seemed so loving to him. Across the aisle was a very elderly man; overweight, red-faced, drinking a cup of cola but sneaking into it swigs of alcohol from a smaller bottle he had hidden in a brown paper bag. I felt compassion for him. I have forgiven.

Stefan's story

Thinking back to where this course has its roots, I remember those days when we tried to set up the consortium. Our Israeli colleague, Anat, made contacts with the Russian partners, and we made contacts with European partners. It was interesting to see how people reacted. One of our partners was very hesitant to collaborate with Israel. He would only agree to support the project if all partners signed a paper, a kind of memorandum of understanding, stating that the consortium unanimously condemns Israel's policies toward the Palestinian people and works toward a just peace in the Middle East. We began our collaboration without any such position paper. However, the question of conflict and peace was always in the classroom.

It was in Dublin in 2013 during a meeting of our TACHYwe consortium when I met Itzhak for the first time. Our summer school in Dublin was the second meeting of the consortium and Itzhak joined the delegation from Sapir College. My first impression of him was a person who commented positively on almost everything and everyone.

I'm not sure who had the idea to have joint teaching sessions. Anyhow, it turned out that we both taught

courses in our academic institutions which were considered to be part of the TACHYwe process. I introduced at Hildesheim University a course on international child and youth welfare. As far as I recall, Itzhak taught his course in the winter term of 2013/2014 on cross-cultural migration, also as part of the TACHYwe project. We thought it would be a great idea to have joint courses, though not knowing how this could work out. By chance, our courses overlapped a bit. I had only 10-12 students in my course, but they were highly motivated and open for intercultural communications.

I remember that Itzhak and I agreed to start our first of four joint sessions with the students getting to know each other. I prepared the students for this session by explaining the context, i.e. the TACHYwe project.

What was important for me was that they showed interest in the other students but that they should refrain from why-questions. That was my only strict rule. However, everybody can guess what happened. After introducing each other, we stumbled across the unavoidable topic of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, one major "elephant in the room."

One of my students asked the question which was also a statement: "Why do you act like you do towards the Palestinian people, you, a people who was persecuted so cruelly in Germany?" I have to admit, the question was not totally out of the blue since the Israeli students were themselves critically analyzing the situation of the Palestinians. The question caused great tension and led to intense free-flowing discussion among the Israeli students. Some of the Israeli students agreed with her, some did not. I remember that Itzhak tried to make the situation more understandable, and come to some kind of constructive closure. I was completely annoyed and exhausted after this session. I talked to several German students who were also upset. I did not get a chance to speak with the German student who posed the initial question about Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. She had to leave the lesson prior to its conclusion and did not appear the next two times.

Itzhak and I spoke on skype after this event, but I don't recall exactly what we discussed. I felt like I had to apologize for the student and explain that she did not have any bad intention. I remember what he said – and this was very intriguing for me – that the Israeli

students were relatively open to showing their vulnerability. I never thought of that in this way. Instead, I focused on the guilt of the German student, not the vulnerability of Itzhak or the Israeli students. Anyhow, in the following session we had to reflect on the last session and Itzhak explained his perspective again, also expressing that they were overall comfortable in showing their vulnerability. This changed a lot about the course dynamic, not only for the students, but also for me. I became acutely aware of how important it was to openly address our common history. And – most importantly – Itzhak and I agreed that we should continue with this co-teaching and co-learning experiment and take on an entire joint course.

The next time I met Itzhak was in Moscow. I remember having breakfast together with Wolfgang, a colleague from Hildesheim. Did Itzhak tell me there that he was raised in Canada in a neighborhood where there were many Holocaust survivors? When did Itzhak tell me about his son who was a combat soldier and fought in the Gaza strip? When did he tell me that he immigrated to Israel because of political reasons? I'm not always sure whether I understood one hundred percent. Anyhow, it was important for me to get to know a little bit more about his background. I know for sure that Itzhak only told me later that before Tempus he never met any Germans. Well, I'm not sure how much I told him about my background as a German who is part of the second post-war generation, my father having been in the war only during the last weeks. He was sixteen years old in May 1945, preparing himself for a suicide mission for the Nazi regime, although – or because? – his father was a communist. Anyhow, my father survived, and always claimed to be a friend of Israel. Why? I don't know exactly.

We agreed to teach a full course together in the winter of 2014/2015. I left Hildesheim University and in October 2014 took on a new position in Trier. Itzhak recruited one of the Russian partner institutions to also join the course. This was very impressive since we never were able to get in contact with the social work department of this university. What was an intriguing idea of Itzhak's – I thought and I still think – was to start the course introducing with an article called "Ten considerations in addressing cultural differences in psychotherapy." This article was not only a perfect

theoretical introduction to our topic, but also very relevant for us in trying to develop a joint virtual classroom in three countries. We discussed this article, then asked students to apply the principles to the group itself.

In the initial sessions, our discussions returned to the Holocaust and the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and we also spoke of the Russian-Ukraine conflict. It was interesting to see that the German students were careful in what they said. One very poignant thought that several mentioned was that the dark history of Germany is one of the few things that gives Germans an identity – certainly not a positive one, but yet a clear historical anchor, worthy of substantial reflection.

It was interesting that although most of the students in the course were hundreds of kilometers away, I felt strongly like we were all together in a single classroom. I recall how surprised my students were by the nature of the discussion among the Israeli students: lively, engaged, emotionally charged. This was in stark contrast to my students' opinions about our discussions in Germany – commandingly academic and less practical, and also less interactive and more boring. My students wanted to understand why this was so. They identified a significant difference between the two populations of students. The Israelis were older, and already identified themselves as social workers and were working in the field. However, I asked myself whether this was the entire explanation. Perhaps the difference had something to with my overwhelmingly scholarly approach as a social work educator?

I recall a particular class when Itzhak was the moderator and he referred directly to students in Trier, and started asking them in turn questions about the material. The topic was not so important, rather it was the way in which he asked the questions. He began with a simple but inviting "How do you feel about this?" Despite his openness, my students responded with an impersonal statement referring to some theory about intercultural communication. However, Itzhak insisted on a personal account. It was fascinating to observe how difficult it is to introduce an alternative culture of communication into the learning environment. However, he eventually managed to get through; he insisted three times and my students realized what was going on. And I realized, too! This

had an important effect on how I would continue to communicate with my own German students.

Importantly, this influential process did not end when we finished the weekly Monday afternoon course. Itzhak and I continued our discussions between classroom sessions. Both my students and I had the feeling we needed time to reflect more on the course process, and also the content, to better understand what was occurring. During the classes themselves, we had to concentrate extremely hard to make out all the words in English. This had an effect of fundamentally changing my relation to my students. I had often been aware of the distance between my students and myself, not that distance itself is necessarily a problem. However, I had the strong impression that this had always prevented them from daring to tell me what they really think about my course content and teaching style. I had also often wondered in the past whether my students perceived my courses as meaningful and relevant to their own experiences. Things were very different in this joint course. This was in part connected to the reflection of my students and myself each week immediately after turning off the video conference equipment. All of us, myself included, were part of this teaching-learning experiment and we were enthusiastic to explore its novelty and significance together. I was no longer exclusively an expert, but one person amongst others experiencing something new and important. I felt like I was an integral part of a community.

All these experiences were very meaningful for me as a social work educator. They transformed the way in which I address students, design courses, and conduct class sessions. My point of departure has become the personal experience of the student, and his emotional involvement in the learning process became significant for me. Similarly, I have invited my own person into the learning process and have become much more deeply involved. I now approach content on a personal, as well as professional level.

This transformation is not always smooth. At some point during the course, myself and two students were asked to present our experience with international video conference courses to the prime minister of the Rhineland-Palatinate region. Although the students were still impressed by Itzhak

and his emphasis on classroom processes, they critiqued the relative de-emphasis on content. They wanted more information and less getting to know each other.

All of this seemed to come together for me when Itzhak eventually visited Trier and he and I were able to actually sit down face to face and reflect on all that had happened during the course of the past two years working together. It became crystal clear to me that although both of us had experienced transformative experiences, the nature of each of our journeys was distinct. His was focused around a transformation of himself as a person, and his attitudes and feelings towards Germany, Germans, and our common, if not tragic, past. Mine centered on a deep change in myself as social work educator. I had been stuck in the spider web of classic German academic that places exclusive importance upon theoretical mastery and reflection. Making use of my own experiences, my subjectivity, my own person, feels problematic from this angle. However, it opens up new ways of thinking, but most importantly, new ways of interacting and collaborating. I learned through experiencing it myself that to establish a true community of learning, the establishment of relationship is a necessary prerequisite. I'm curious how my, how our, journey will continue.

Discussion

Both of our stories describe how social work educators themselves become fully engaged with course content and process leading to the emergence of a highly synergistic community of learning. Such engagement involves active and critical reflection on the encounter between academic material and our ever-evolving personal and professional selves. We may frequently expect our students to become immersed in their learning experiences, and we may even consider this as a requisite for their optimal development. The importance of inviting students to seriously and actively explore the points of encounter between the professional and personal seems axiomatic. We as social work educators, however, may sometimes fail to recognize the potential benefit to ourselves, and certainly to the learning process of which we are a central element, of becoming genuinely involved as learners in our own courses. This does involve diving into the waters of academia with our own professional and personal selves, and exposing these to the critical

reflection of our students, and more importantly, of ourselves. Though we may not always be ready or willing to place ourselves as educators in this extremely vulnerable position, we may often tend to expect our students to stand and cope and grow within the shadow of susceptibility.

Our stories show that neither of us expected to become involved in such a manner. In the context of another project, two social work educators were brought together, an encounter ensued and a process that was unpredictable unfolded. The complex composition of partner countries, universities and colleges, and academics challenged collaboration from the very beginning. This complexity and the related tensions are part of both of our stories, but from very different angles with each story highlighting different conflicts and vulnerabilities. Mutual trust was not the departure point for this unique encounter, but rather a willingness to recognize coincidences and make use of opportunities. Such an engagement, without smoke and mirrors, does not necessarily lead to successful collaboration, as the stories show, but does lead to a sort of involvement that can trigger a rich learning process among those who embark on this process.

Without assuming such a fully engaged position ourselves, however, we may be seriously compromising our ability to be role models for our students as learners. This stance may not come naturally for us as social work educators, and may even be difficult, as it has been engrained in us that we should start where our clients are. That is the imperative to give eminence to the experience of the other, and this may be extended by definition to our students as well. Perhaps for teachers to truly join our students in a community of learning, we will need to start with ourselves and first concentrate on reflecting how we as persons and professionals encounter our course materials and dynamics. When this occurs, teachers became learners as much as teachers.

This repositioning in the teaching and learning cycle may be related to taking a stance of mindfulness which leads one to focus on what is happening inside oneself in the here and now, and not to concentrate on the other or even on the actual academic content of the course. Our stories demonstrate the transformation we each experienced

with this repositioning, though the turning inward and listening first to ourselves paradoxically led to the building of a community of interconnected learners, which seemed to have had great benefits for the students as well.

In both of our stories, we can identify key situations where these changes occur, situations in which the past and the present meet, where tensions become palpable and of commanding importance. These transformative moments are based not only upon our individual histories and life stories, but also upon our connection to our collective pasts and perceptions of how these meet. Collective experiences are imprinted in the two stories; they unfold according to their own dynamic.

Sometimes the two narrators refrained from touching upon these collective histories and related tensions; sometimes they exposed the "elephant in the room." Nevertheless, it is the mutual recognition and working together collaboratively on these extremely complex and painful issues that seemed to be the basis for the growing trust among the two protagonists of these stories. There is no single turning point. In fact, each story seems to unfold according to its own dynamic. The stories cannot be fully understood without highlighting this intricate, interwoven process which led to transformation.

In the two stories, we can identify key situations in which these changes are brought on stream; situations in which history and presence meet or in which tensions become palpable. These situations are based not (only) in individual histories, but also in (imagined) collectivities and perceptions of other collectivities. Collective histories and experiences are imprinted in the two stories; they unfold their own dynamic. Sometimes the two narrators presumably tended not to touch upon these collective histories and tensions. They enclosed those dynamics; sometimes they opened up and named the "elephant in the room" – even this article and the reflection on the two stories is part of this back and forth of taming and unfolding.

The transformation we each experienced through the teaching and learning of our joint course was profound, and for both of us, revolved around the integration of our personal and professional selves. Though this is a well-known conceptual anchor in social work practice and supervision, there is relatively little discourse about where the personal meets the

professional in the social work educator. This is despite our great interest in delving into our students' encounters with their personal and professional selves. For Stefan, the deep change he experienced, centered on his sense of himself as a social work educator. Exposure to Itzhak's active use of self in the classroom was central here. Furthermore, the self-disclosure of the Israeli students, as well as their vitality in discussing the course content, was an impetus for the significant critical reflection that he experienced around the possibility of using more of himself in his role as teacher.

This would be a struggle as Stefan had for a long time been guided by the idea of collaborating with students to get a deep analytical understanding of those topics he teaches in social work. This approach, however, is an obstacle to involvement as a person, and undermines collaboration.

For Itzhak, the transformation he experienced centered on his sense of himself as a social work practitioner. Most important was exposure to Stefan's commanding adherence to social work values, especially the inherent worth of the person. Furthermore, the humanity of the German students and their compassion, led to intense self-reflection around the possibility of renewing his commitment to an empathic stance as practitioner. This would be a struggle as Itzhak had for an extended time been restrained by a long standing belief that although excellent, there are some cases where certainly it is beyond our capacity. Itzhak's nascent forgiveness of Holocaust atrocities, facilitated within a newfound community of social work learners, would serve as a catalyst for a renewal of both personal and professional empathy, and unconditional positive regard. Perhaps much of the impetus for the intense transformative processes that occurred for Stefan and Itzhak, and which seemed to be reflected in the learning experiences of students as well, was some kind of overarching imperative to work through a common, and exceedingly complicated, even painful history. There seemed to be an underlying existential demand from the very beginning of the course to make the encounter really matter, and make it more than just learning course content. When social work teachers risk allowing themselves to also become active learners in their courses, where traditional boundaries between us and our students are blurred,

a joint community of learning may be built. When this occurs, social work academia may more fully reach its potential as a vehicle for professional, as well as personal transformation.

Conclusion

Itzhak

The earliest modern day pioneers of Israel who came from Eastern Europe around the turn of the last century faced extremely difficult physical conditions as well as poverty and illness. They desired to establish an agricultural settlement and toiled the land which was either arid desert or putrid swamp. They had largely been socialist intellectuals in Russia and Ukraine, and draped their daily manual labor in rich cultural and literary pursuits.

Perhaps their most well-known motto was "to build and to be built." This reflected their deeply held belief that through a group's devotion of substantial effort toward an important project, a collective of human beings will be inherently and positively transformed.

Early into the joint course with Stefan, I realized that not only had I met an outstanding social work scholar with whom I would teach a course, but also a person of great compassion and sensitivity. This meant that I had before me a valuable opportunity to begin my journey toward forgiveness as a Jew born in the decade following the Holocaust, still bearing substantial hurt and anger.

Reflecting back upon the processes that unfolded in the course, it seems to me that the students' openness was somehow related to their realization that in this course I was a fellow builder, a genuine member of a community occupied by both academic accomplishment and also personal growth.

Stefan

Since I started to teach social work transnationally, I experienced the fascinating and multifarious challenge of communication across cultural, scholarly, national and ethnic differences. Beginning with the assumption that the ultimate goal is mutual understanding, I realized that it is not first understanding, but rather the process of translation itself that I must focus upon.

German academics are very proud of their scholarly tradition and just as desperate when it comes to making these things understandable to persons outside of the tiny realm of German universities. One of those terms of which German professors are very proud of and refer to often, is "bildung" which roughly translates into education. "Bildung" has much to do with how we think of teaching, of learning, and of ourselves as scholars. "Bildung" underscores the specific way that individuals relate to other people and to the world. Therefore, "Bildung" is considered to be a process by which individuals become knowledge bearers and creators. However, this process is geared by the individuals, and not induced by someone else. Thus, teachers or educators are considered to be persons who help others find their way in the process of...yes "building, and being built." But whereas the German thinking of "Bildung" is much more focused on the autonomous process of individuals, the agrarian metaphor of building and being built points out the material roots of "Bildung" and the collaborative effort of building...across nations, across disciplines and across generations.

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