

SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: A LABOR DISPUTE AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Ayala Cohen, Ph.D., Tel Hai College, and
Atalia Mosek, DSW, Tel Hai College, Upper Galilee, Israel

This article documents the reflections of an academic professor on her students' involvement in a labor dispute. This dispute provided the data for an assessment of the connections between students' academic study in the area of policy practice and their ability to translate the theoretical material learned in class into social activism within the practice arena. The article traces the developments that led to the labor dispute. Insights are gained through listening to the voices of students, social workers, colleagues and academic superiors. With these reflections, the author generalizes from her experiences, and weighs the possibilities and limitations involved in teaching policy through the involvement of students and staff in militant action for change.

*"If I am not for myself, who is for me?
And when I am [only] for myself, what am
I? And if not now, when?" Ethics of the
Fathers, Chapter 1, Episode 14*

It was an ordinary day at Tel Hai Academic College, the day after the end of the social workers' labor dispute that ended in a "surrender agreement." A social worker, evidently depressed, said to me, "I feel so humiliated and frustrated by the agreement. It conveys no respect for me as a person nor for my professional work. I don't know how I can face my clients."

I (A.C.) was concerned about her mood. In an attempt to encourage her to look ahead, I said, "It is not over...our struggle for social change is just beginning."

Ongoing dialogue with a colleague (A.M.) that included in-depth narrative interviews and reflective explorations of the data served as the foundation for this article. It reflected my belief that this social workers' protest went beyond a mere labor dispute. Rather, it presented a challenge to the status and significance of the social work profession in Israel. It highlighted my mission as a social work educator: to train social workers who view social activism as a personal and professional commitment and as an integral part of their identity and practice. Reflecting on the students' participation in the labor

dispute provided me with a unique opportunity to understand this experience as a product of the students' academic learning and a testimony to their ability to translate their theoretical study in class into action in the practice arena.

Personal and Professional Background

Our college advertises itself as being "on the frontier of Israel's education." This definition relates to its geographical position on Israel's northern border and to its social commitment to involvement in and contribution to the region. Its vision of community involvement is stated as:

"...being a social and economic engine for the development of the Upper Galilee and the entire Israeli society. Its deepest commitment is to produce caring and socially conscious graduates. The students are engaged in numerous programs that reach out into the community and bring about real social change."

The roots of Israel's welfare state go back to 1942, when the first welfare department was initiated by the mandatory government. With the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the welfare department was integrated into a national social welfare system developed

to cope with the diverse needs of the residents of the new state, many of whom were new immigrants (Gal, 2005). During the early years the foundations of a welfare state were laid, designed to care for the general population with particular focus on those living in poverty and deprivation (Doron, 2007). Since 2000, however, a regression has been noted in all areas of welfare services, but particularly in social security benefits, which became selective in nature rather than universal. This was a function of the transition from a European-style welfare state run by a social-democratic regime, to an American-style neoliberal welfare system typical of the conservative United States Republican regime. This resulted in a gradual erosion of the welfare state.

The privatization and commodification of social services is a concern for policy makers in Israel, as in the rest of the western world (Spiro, 2010). Although this is not a new phenomenon, its consequences are becoming more evident in many areas of social services such as education, welfare, housing, health and employment. As a result, many services that were previously regarded as the government's responsibility are now provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operated on a voluntary or commercial basis. This process has accelerated during recent years, encouraged by social policy-makers and economic, political and professional factors (Katan, 2007).

Social workers need to understand the significance of these changes in order to cope with their damaging consequences for their clients as well as for themselves. The proliferation of managed care services has led many social workers to be employed by contractors who do not provide employment benefits, and in some cases even violate the minimum salary law.

Social Activism and Social Work Education

Values are regarded as essential aspects of the professional socialization of social workers (Pike, 1996). The two value domains of social justice and personal caring were identified as key ideologies within social work

education. As a caring profession, social work emphasizes ethical practice that relies heavily on one's personal and professional values. Carpenter and Platt (1997) reported that the values most important to social work students at the time of graduation were compassion and caring, respect for humanity, altruism, moral values, and missionary zeal.

Another study, using a developmental perspective on the process of professional education, indicated that social work students began their studies with an abundance of motivation and values. Second-year students showed a marked decline in both motivation and values and placed growing emphasis on their use of self and skills. During the third year, a slight rise in motivation and values occurs, alongside greater focus on social justice (Mosek & Ben-Oz, 2010). These findings suggest that the firm value base that draws students to the profession is eroded during the educational process.

When I began teaching at the social work department at Tel Hai College in 2004, the dominant orientation was 'casework.' This was in line with the primary career path of social workers in Israel, which favored casework over group and community work, and psychotherapy over radical social action (Weiss, 2005). A close look at the curriculum revealed a preference for casework-therapeutic methodology, whereas community practice occupied a marginal position. Most students did not see a substantial reason to learn or practice community work. In my early days at Tel Hai College, I realized that a change of attitude was required within the social work department in order to create a legitimate foundation for my professional mission: training social workers who are aware and able to create social change through social activism.

I began by collaborating with colleagues who were teaching and practicing community work. Together we proposed a curriculum that integrated knowledge, practice in community work and, eventually, involvement in social activism, as an integral part of the three year program. The ecological systems perspective, which uses the person-in-environment approach, provided the framework for a better

balance between casework, group work and community work, and policy.

Our first year "Introduction to Social Work" course imparts knowledge concerning the development of the profession, based on a dual focus on charity and community. Second year students participate in a "community practice" course that runs for two semesters. During the first semester they learn the theory and practice strategies of community work and spend the second semester planning a viable community intervention. During their third year of study, they are involved in developing and implementing a small-scale supervised community intervention, designed to empower members of the community to act for themselves. Students are required to invest at least six hours a week on this intervention. One result of the strong community work emphasis in this program was a significant increase in the value attributed to social justice by third year students (Hantman et al., 2006).

Additional courses that were added to the curriculum are "The Welfare State" during the first year, and "Social Policy" in the third year. I believe that the "Welfare State" course, during which students are exposed to social welfare policy, plays a significant part in directing them toward social activism. Policy practice is gaining recognition as a crucial practice skill for social workers who intervene at the organizational, local, national and international level (Weiss-Gal, 2006). It is therefore considered to be an essential part of social education programs (Adams, 2004; Council on Social Work Education, 2001; Moore & Johnston, 2002). By effectively using policy practice, social workers can influence decisions made by political leaders, thereby impacting social policy.

The final assignment in our "Welfare State" course requires students to complete a challenging experience in policy practice. They are asked to choose a practice domain that interests them; investigate existing policy; and interview clients, workers and stakeholders in order to evaluate the fit between needs and solutions offered by current policy. They are then asked to suggest viable options for policy change. The students' output shows that this assignment contributes to the development of

critical thinking and trains students to plan for social change.

The Social Forum, a structural element of the program, enables us to appreciate the extent to which the students' commitment to action and social justice is embedded in their developing professional identity. For the past eight years we have run a face-to-face discussion group for professors and students as one of the committees within the social work department. Initially, the forum was used to provide feedback and evaluation and to develop initiatives for the improvement of the academic program. When I became the forum's chairperson, the students expressed their need for action and talked about improving a playground for Druze children. This made me aware that we should move the focus toward social action. These aspirations were, however, not brought to fruition. During the meetings, which were held far apart, positive energy flowed, but between the meetings nothing seemed to happen. The intent to act was declared, but in practice it was difficult to initiate activity. My fellow professors lost interest in participating in the forum. The advent of the social workers' labor dispute captured the interest of the participants in the Social Forum, induced them to create contact with the national students' union and local social workers' organizations, and thereby prepared fruitful ground for activism.

The National Labor Dispute

Two major demands sparked the labor dispute: a call for a significant raise in social workers' salaries, and an "extension order" to ensure that all social workers, irrespective of their place of employment, would receive equal payment. These demands were considered to be imperative to the preservation of the status of social workers since the processes of privatization continue to create quasi and non-governmental organizations (QUANGOs) and a growing number of social workers, even in the governmental sector, are being employed through manpower companies. Both these approaches are employed to bypass laws and regulations governing compensation for social workers.

Following 17 years of stagnation in salary updates and the latest failure to reach an equitable labor settlement with the treasury, the social workers' union, with the support of the general labor federation, declared a labor dispute. Two weeks after this declaration, the union called upon social workers in the public sector to begin an open-ended strike, since they were the only workers who were organized and protected by the union. Compliance with this directive was impressive, as social workers who have always found it difficult to fight for their own benefits by withholding services from clients were this time determined to fight for the cause. A letter circulated by email conveyed the significance and resoluteness of this move:

"Today, we are struggling for the image of our welfare state in general and the face of the social work profession in particular. Let us stand firm against all pressures imposed by the treasury. We will not surrender until all our demands are met."

Ending the labor dispute without an extension order would have rendered the struggle worthless. Messages posted by a social worker on the web conveyed the need for perseverance:

"The field is burning! Social workers and students are ready to fight, and they will continue doing so until we achieve genuine change. The public is with us, and is beginning to understand that our struggle is a public issue. This is a fight for the State of Israel as a nation we can be proud of. Ending this dispute with no real achievement will, within a few years, result in a return to the conditions that prevailed before the dispute, forcing us to settle for these unthinkable work conditions for the next 17 years. At this historical moment we must not surrender! What we fail to achieve during the

dispute will not be gained after its termination!"

To me, the outbreak of the strike was the realization of a dream. All my own and my students' energies, charged during our mutual work in courses and in the Social Forum, erupted. I felt ecstatic, celebrating this moment with a sense of destiny and awareness of its urgency. The national social work union actively recruited students and social workers. They used slogans such as:

"We have no time, the battle is now, it will determine our personal and professional fate."

"Let's give it all we have, unite together in a shared effort."

"Let's not look back and regret that we did not do enough."

I felt that the 'strike' had acquired an independent personality. She was simply dressed in a red t-shirt associated for me with the clothes of the early pioneers: khaki trousers, flip flops, a round, brimless hat. Her voice was heard through a demonstration kit that included megaphones and drums, decorated with red ribbons (the symbols of working class demonstrations), posters and whistles. Her volume alternated between boisterousness and serenity, like an orchestra that begins with a very strong staccato followed by a quiet, serene section, and repeats this sequence incessantly. A sort of ritual was created. It began with attempts at organizing that resembled a chicken coop. Students were chatting, speaking together, tossing around ideas and questions and then falling silent. Slogans were yelled, and the silent interludes were tense with a readiness that signaled waiting for further action. To me, the strike had a distinct smell. It smelled like soil! It was grounded, basic, and sweaty. I figured this was the demonstrators' sweat, but to me it signified the lack of beautification, real substance, something very simple, such as folk dancing.

The strike continued for three weeks, during which I devoted myself completely to her. I talked about her in all my classes. The students used our classes for updates, to pass

and exchange messages. I permitted this to go on. I felt unable to continue my regular academic teaching, and was delighted by the extent of the students' interest and involvement in the strike. I spent all my time at the college talking with students, both individually and in groups. I did not have a minute to myself. It was insane and exciting.

In general, we regard our students as being in need of information and guidance. By contrast, during the strike, I chose to be at the end of the parade. I made sure, in a conscious manner, to provide them with what they needed in order to function on their own. I purposely refrained from leading activities which I could easily have done. For instance, when the media came I refused to be interviewed, leaving the stage to the students. It felt important to allow the students to take center stage. To me this was not an act of concession, since I felt that it made no difference who would be interviewed because the students represented me and echoed my thoughts.

The strike and the demonstrations were a critical event for the students. It enabled them to express and to channel their enthusiasm, commitment and involvement into social activism. When asked to sum up his experience, a student said:

"The activities had rich smells and tastes, like in India. The close contact we had with social workers, not as young students but as people who explained, guided, encouraged, was flattering. We were in contact with authoritative personnel at the college, officials of the Social Workers' Union, and members of the National Association for Social Change. We were exposed to the media. There were endless interactions with students, quarrels, friction, anger, which at times reached high volumes. Everything was so moving, vulnerable, and significant – everything was simply more than usual."

Another student's perspective:

"My involvement in the strike was geared to 'social work in the public view'. It comprised several stages. At first it was mostly a matter of salvation. The demonstration felt to me like a social workers' battlefield. There were the same slogans relating to complaints about the salary ('we want justice not philanthropy'), and gradually they began to acquire a social nuance, such as 'the people demand social change'. Our vocal chords were strained and we shouted, jumped and danced to the sound of the drums. In light of what eventually became clear, the second stage took on a different shade. The focus changed from social injustice to preparing ourselves for the inevitable disappointment that would result from the likely outcomes. Our actions became cumbersome; the burnout was beginning to take its toll. The strike began to acquire a bitter taste. But despite the harsh disappointment, the bitter taste did not last. I sense a change in the unity of social workers, their perception and understanding of the value of their professional work. This is to me a source of great hope, and I was therefore left with a sweet taste and a smile on my face."

Students took part in demonstrations that were held in the vicinity of the college as well as in other parts of Israel. They possessed organizational capabilities and the power to get people onto the street. The dean of students provided them with resources for their activities, such as organized transportation. They gained a sense of their own power and strength, and the admiration and appreciation of the wider public for their active involvement, and this encouraged them to continue. This enthusiasm is apparent in a letter sent to our school by the National Students' Association:

"Today we had a remarkable day of demonstrations with many activities and interviews in the media. Credit to you all! You are doing admirable work! We see amazing work throughout the country, in which students are taking a central role."

Additional reinforcement regarding the contribution of our students was a phone call I received from a demonstration organizer who told me, "Where are your students? Without them our demonstration is so quiet."

Throughout this period, students met frequently to discuss their position and plan activities. They included me in their debates through phone calls, corridor discussions and emails. I felt that they were seeking my approval for their actions. I can't deny the fact that this made me feel important, special, smart and significant. It reinforced the sense of mission that originally led me to choose social work as a profession.

During the demonstrations I met social workers who had been my students. They told me how much this struggle signified for them and what they had learned in my classes, which in turn had generated and shaped their commitment toward their clients and the profession.

Suddenly I understood the meaning of being a supportive professional model of social activism. I was ecstatic and floated during the demonstration like a bride on her wedding day. But I was also conscious of ambivalent feelings. I felt that the stage belonged to the students, and I was somewhat uncomfortable at being the center of attention. I moved from mingling with the students to standing on the sidelines with the head of the social work department and another professor. When several students were detained by the police, I felt committed to defend them. My plea to the officer in charge to release the students went unheeded. This contributed to a more humble assessment of my sphere of influence. I felt that the students had, throughout the demonstrations, deliberately stressed the

importance of my presence as a positive stimulant for them.

Throughout this period I continued to be a facilitator for the students' activities. I made a point of updating them with information gained from personal and professional contacts, at the local and national levels. I arranged the liaisons needed to support the students' activities with functionaries within the college and beyond. I chose to be *with* the students rather than to act *instead of* them. I used my clout only when this was essential (such as defending their absence from classes, or enlisting the help of a social lobby consultant).

The responsibility and logistics involved in field organization were handled by the students themselves remarkably well. The students' abilities were unquestionably acquired during the command training Israeli youngsters receive during their military service. The student community was divided into commanders and soldiers, those giving and receiving orders. But they were all dressed in red and equipped with whistles, drums and posters, prepared in advance. Social workers who observed the students were shocked and amazed.

I found myself moving between the commanders and soldiers. This reminded me of my own experience in the army as a mental health officer. On the one hand I was responsible for training the team of leaders, and on the other for providing encouragement, support, ventilation, consolidation and unification. My role in the strike was to help the commanders to make reasonable and effective decisions (for example, how much force to use in demonstrations, the appropriateness of making coalitions with political associations), and to address the individual soldiers' reactions (for example, dealing with absence from academic work, or feeling unheard, left out, or unappreciated).

The End of the Strike

For 23 days, active protests continued in parallel with the negotiations over a new labor contract. An atmosphere of secrecy and filtering of the information transmitted from the negotiators to the field activists prevailed, stimulating fears of surrender and

acquiescence to an unacceptable agreement. This suspicion grew when, after two weeks, despite the unmistakable support of the public and the media, the negotiators were inclined to accept an agreement that failed to meet the rank and file's expectations. The student leaders pulled their fellow students out of the classroom, and within minutes a spontaneous demonstration was in place. This protest, which was duplicated throughout the country, prevented acceptance of the proposed agreement. However, the heads of the Labor Federation, the Social Workers' Union, and the Ministry of Labor criticized the protest, and the latter threatened to file a court action that would require essential social workers to return to work. There was a feeling that the wide support for the strike had been lost, and that continuing the strike may jeopardize the meager gains that had been achieved.

The final agreement provided for a marginal increase in salary spread over a number of years. The Finance Minister claimed that it was not in his power to enforce an 'extension order' (to ensure that all social workers, irrespective of their place of employment, would receive equal payment) and suggested that social workers working outside the public sector would receive at least the statutory minimum wage. It was important for me to prepare the students for the imminent end of the strike, since I suspected that their disappointment would be as great as their expectations had been. After the event I found out that the students were angry with me since they perceived me as a representative of the organization, who was conveying a message of agreement to the concession. They felt that I had not been prepared to fight to the end. The dispute that began with loud applause, ended in a whisper and feelings of loss and anger.

When reflecting upon my personal response, I discovered an association with a collective narrative widespread among Israeli community workers that highlights the balance between opportunity and risk involved in social action. The course taken by a demonstration and its outcome are clearly unforeseeable. This narrative is linked to the "Black Panthers" movement created in 1971 by Israeli

youngsters living in a poor neighborhood in Jerusalem to protest against the discrimination they felt as descendants of immigrants from Arab countries. Although encouraged to protest and fight for their rights by their community worker, some of them were physically and emotionally damaged by the brutal police response. This recollection raised my awareness of the potential risks to my students and to me, entailed in continued demonstrations. I found myself reconsidering my intention to encourage social activism in light of the diminished support to be expected from the college and the degree of trust and investment of effort to be expected from students.

The end of the strike struck a sour chord, as can be concluded from this message passed on to the demonstrators by the students' union:

"Shalom, we had an angry and frustrating night. We all feel a sense of disappointment at the agreement signed and even more so at the way it was done, and rightfully so."

Like many others, I had the feeling of a missed opportunity, but at the same time also felt great satisfaction and pride in our students. I was not alone in sensing the potential for creating partnerships and moving ahead, as can be seen from a message sent to the school by the national students' union:

"It is not yet time to draw conclusions; there is still a lot of hard and difficult work ahead. The amazing thing we created together must turn into a significant and influential force."

At the end of the strike, a number of students who shared my feelings said: "We know we can do it, and the field expects us to do it." We decided to continue to work together for social change. The students devoted many hours to discussions, and shared their action plans with me. They decided on an "arousal march." They allocated responsibility for the different tasks and I joined the "content committee." In order to help them recruit

support for the march, I contacted my friends in other academic institutions and asked them to "spread the word" among their students. Following this step, I was invited to a meeting by the head of the Social Work Department. He began by praising my activism and expressed his belief that my actions stemmed from good intentions, but demanded that I coordinate all action with him, as the representative of the college. It became clear that the college now took the position that since the strike was over, I as well as the students should return to normal academic life.

The planned march encountered further obstacles. The police would not approve our walking along main roads. Considerable resources were needed for such an operation. I approached people in the college who had previously assisted us, but was rebuffed. I felt that doors that were previously open were now closed. After a while I realized that the students and I were functioning independently. The student leaders were finding it difficult to re-involve the students in activities. They urged me to continue planning activities together, so as to maintain the momentum. I personally believed that we needed a time-out for reassessment and evaluation. However, I was apprehensive about disappointing them further or being the one to discourage them. I therefore continued to support their initiatives. Finally, a small group of students made their way by car to Tel Aviv where they managed to hold a small rally, returning exhausted but satisfied.

Reflections on what was for me a stormy emotional period led to significant personal and professional insights. This analysis helped me to make connections between this labor dispute and the possibilities and limitations of teaching policy practice, and of involving social work students and colleagues in social activism.

What did the Students Learn?

The students learned that social work has a social manifestation, in which they have a role to play. They were given a mandate and public support to act and felt that it was within their competence to implement social change. Specifically, they learned a series of operations that constitute social activism, which include: organizational politics; working with the media;

enlisting resources; formulating social messages; team work; allocating roles; delegating authority; building public awareness; social marketing; strategies for inducing people to act; and more. The students' experiences during the labor dispute enabled them to internalize theoretical material through critical evaluation (What do the concepts mean? How are they applied? What is their sphere of influence?) and in a personal sense (How is this related to who I am? What is my comfort zone? What are my current abilities and what do I need to work on?) Among the major social activism issues that were explored were: How important is it to let people act alone and be there for them as a source of support and encouragement? How difficult is it to sustain a long-term process of change while kindling the motivation for this in ourselves as well as in our clients? How important is it to discuss the relationship between the expected change and actual outcomes (since frustration and a sense of missed opportunities may become overwhelming)? How difficult yet important is it to maintain a social network that supports mutual interests relating to social solidarity? Students learned what it meant to act professionally, beginning with data collection and analysis and raising social awareness as a foundation for action. A paramount lesson was learned by experiencing the importance of expressing one's voice on all issues and situations and acknowledging that, even if there are no immediate outcomes, this is part of the inevitable process of change.

Social Activism is Reinforced through Experiential Learning

The labor dispute brought home the significance of experiencing as a learning process. When the students applied the content of their learning in practice, the 'gleam in their eyes' was apparent. In their own words: "We only did what we talked about in class, but now it is alive, breathing and kicking." Their active participation in the dispute led to internalized learning that could not have been accomplished through listening to a lecture or reading an article.

Another significant area of learning for the students was the recognition of their ability to create change. Their meaningful engagement with the social workers' labor dispute contributed to their proximity and sense of belonging to the social work profession, in which they are investing a great deal to gain membership. On the other hand, when the students initiated more radical activities they lost the support of authoritative figures. These experiences enabled students to sympathize with the feelings of silenced clients, whose voice is often ignored in decision making processes.

What did I learn? Dedication to Policy Practice

Teaching policy practice is a mission that requires passion, loyalty and commitment to theory and action. As a social worker who believes in social activism, this event clarified for me the balance between my personal and professional priorities. All my life I have navigated between family and career, without setting clear priorities. I surprised myself by making a clear choice to devote all my resources to the labor dispute for its duration. I was even more surprised when I realized that this devotion persisted even after the end of the dispute.

My experiences during the dispute confirmed my belief in social activism and affirmed my commitment to it. I realized that my major source of strength was my ongoing dialogue with the students, and I therefore now actively seek to be involved in mutual activities with them. Establishing clear priorities enabled me to liberate myself from the endless attempt to meet the expectations of my family and of academia and to connect to the personal and professional mission that I have set myself in life. The interesting aspect of this outcome is that, since my decision, I seem to receive more agreeable feedback at home and in the college, and to enjoy my interactions with the students.

Awareness of the Power an Academic Professor has on Students' Consciousness

Reflections on the kind of relationship that developed between the students and me during

the labor dispute raised my awareness of the strong impression I made on the students, for better or for worse. I feel that my tendency to express resolute attitudes based on ideology excites them, but leaves no room for critical evaluation. I feel that this negates to some extent my teaching goals, which underscore the development of a critical perspective toward social policy. I realize that in my dialogue with the students I need to adopt a listening position and to make fewer categorical pronouncements.

Moreover, I feel some remorse. There were students who chose not to participate in the demonstrations and felt uncomfortable about this. Although I stated that participation was voluntary, I felt the need to apologize for making them feel uneasy. I did this by saying that social work is a diversified profession, in which social workers are at liberty to choose the area of intervention that appeals to them.

Relationships with Students

The labor dispute offered an opportunity to develop intensive relationships with students that confirmed my perceptions regarding the kind of interaction that is beneficial to them as well as to me. My relations with the students reflected a basic characteristic of all my relations, namely, adherence to the idea of 'personal responsibility.' To me, this entails a continuous process of self-awareness and clarification of expectations, and an ongoing assessment regarding delivery on my promises. It is of paramount importance to me not to raise expectations that I am unable to meet. The labor dispute made me aware of how significant this aspect is. I feel that my relationship with the students is rooted in the dialogue on division of responsibilities and constant feedback about expectations and their fulfillment. I tell them straightforwardly what our goals are and they tell me what they need in order to succeed. I encourage them to give me feedback about my teaching, and I therefore often hear at the end of the class remarks such as:

"This was an interesting lesson."

"This lesson left me with many open questions."

"You did not leave enough room for our participation."

I value the students' expectations and believe they know their learning needs better than anyone else. I find that students value lessons that present new material and add to their reading assignments, especially if they feel they will be able to apply these lessons in their future professional work. They value learning that challenges their ideas and thoughts, and appreciate teaching methods that stimulate criticism, independent thought and self expression.

As part of the socialization process, I believe students need to experience the type of relationship they are expected to create with their clients. Therefore, I make a point of stressing elements of partnership, sincerity, commitment, respect and collaborative empowerment. In my relationship with students I make an effort to leave them room to express themselves. I often feel that students are not fully involved in designing their academic framework, and furthermore are frequently silenced and thought to be unable to assess their well-being and needs, rather like other marginalized populations.

Relationships with Colleagues and Superiors

My relationships with my superiors and colleagues during the labor dispute period were markedly different than usual. I deliberate in which ways these differences facilitate or hinder my goal of enlisting partners to my drive toward social activism.

The relationship with my superiors and colleagues was influenced by the complexity of involvement in social activism on the part of an academic person. The head of the social work department reprimanded me for what he considered to be my overly zealous involvement in the dispute, and reminded me that my role in the college was that of professor rather than social worker. Therefore, I should not lose sight of my primary commitment to insure that the students' academic achievements are not compromised. This concern, in my opinion, was his way of rationalizing his ambivalence about supporting

students who actively participated in the labor dispute. When I conveyed to him the students' feelings of lack of support by the department and their need for a clear understanding of his position regarding their academic duties during the dispute, he replied by asking me to modify my involvement and to allow the students to act on their own. I felt bewildered and betrayed by his approach.

Throughout the years, I had been encouraged, and even required, to run a college forum for social activism. When the opportunity for action presented itself, however, our wings were clipped. In a meeting between senior personnel at the college and students' representatives, convened to explore how the college could assist the students in their activities during the labor dispute, it was made clear that the college would only support academic activities. I felt betrayed again, but at least the message was clear. I suddenly realized that my understanding of their expectations may have been incorrect. I recognized the familiar gap between declarations and deeds. I once again came to a familiar conclusion encompassed in the saying: there are many partners to success, but in times of difficulty you stand alone.

These feelings were reinforced by my interaction with my colleagues during the labor dispute. At the end of the strike our secretary asked me: "Are you with us or with them?" Suddenly I understood that in the eyes of my colleagues there were two camps. On one side were the students and me; on the other side stood the other people in the department. I was astonished by my lack of awareness. It appears that I was not aware of my colleagues' desire and need for a leader who would involve them in the labor dispute. People felt that I was responsible for my colleagues' behavior and asked me: Why don't other professors come to the demonstrations? The students also expected me to create consensual support within the department for their activities. I realized that, in contrast to other relationships, I had refused to take personal responsibility for my colleagues' behavior. During this period I chose to share my experiences mainly with colleagues who had a similar agenda to mine. I was not receptive

to different opinions or experiences. I began to wonder to what extent this behavior was equally typical of routine times, and how it influences my status and ability to collaborate with colleagues in the department, I find this revelation important, since from my perspective such partnerships are essential to reach our mutual goal: socializing social work students to strive actively for social justice.

How can Policy Practice be Applied?

The academic institution leaves teaching content and methodology to the discretion of the professor. Activities in the field enable students to choose where and how to intervene and whom to approach for assistance and guidance. Therefore, their field experience enables students to put their abilities into practice, and leads them to relate their success to their proven efficacy. Reflections on my position as an academic professor convinced me that remaining outside the limelight and offering ongoing and significant support from the sidelines suits me. Although most people regard me as having self confidence, I often feel a lack of confidence that protects me from embarrassment. For example, a photo of me drumming during a demonstration was uploaded to Facebook with the caption: "Protestor Number One." This made me very uncomfortable. The students saw this as a token of their appreciation for me, but to me it was highly embarrassing.

Reflections upon my conduct during the labor dispute led me to realize that my leadership style is emotional and ethical. I chose to take an active part in the students' "content committee" in order to ensure that everyone understood that this was not an ordinary struggle for better wages. We were fighting for moral and ethical recognition of the revival of our welfare state. During the demonstrations I paid special attention to ethical considerations pertaining to the effect of the strike on clients who joined us in the demonstrations. We spent a lot of time thinking about the statements we issued, and how to relay important messages without hurting the people involved.

What Lies Ahead?

My hope is to attain legitimacy from the college to continue to act with students to change our society and profession. An example of this could be the college's acknowledgment of students' involvement in the Social Forum by awarding them academic credits for their participation. My leadership of the Social Forum could be acknowledged by regarding it as part of my job, rather than expecting me to perform this task voluntarily. Such actions would demonstrate that policy practice is not only a subject taught in the curriculum, but also a topic worthy of resources.

I have emerged from this experience more certain of my professional agenda and of my desire to be active in promoting social change. I find myself thinking about my future path toward social activism. I wonder whether this activity should be carried out within academia or outside it. Perhaps I should turn to politics and operate within the sphere where actual decisions are made? Even though the labor dispute left me confused and troubled, it enabled me to make a connection between my academic teaching and my love for social activism. I learned from my own experience the tremendous potential in actual experimentation, as well as the need to let go and to deal with situations of uncertainty and lack of control. I see myself in the future developing the area of experiential learning in social activism by working in different cultures together with colleagues around the world. My vision is that social activism will one day be an integral part of social work education programs.

In sum, my involvement in the labor dispute contributed greatly to my personal and professional development, as a parallel process to the students' experiences. The reflective process led me to understand that when I am engaged in something that I believe in, there is progress in all areas, even those I regard as less significant or feel less sure about.

Through the reflective process, I felt that I achieved balance and integration between personal and professional aspects of my life. I reaffirmed my identity. I realize that I enjoy my work as a social work educator and believe in my ability to contribute to shaping the

students' identity as agents of social change through the unique relations that developed between us. I feel that my sense of purpose and mission has been revitalized. I have noticed that, following the reflective aftermath evident in this article, I breathe more freely, and the people around me notice that I am more agreeable to doing things that I previously regarded merely as chores.

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Ayala Cohen currently lectures in the Social Work Department at Tel Hai College in Israel, and is involved in community work and consultation.

Atalia Mosek is a senior lecturer and the head of the Post-graduate Social Work program at Tel Hai College in Israel. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: ayaladrcohen@gmail.com

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