

Extending the Story: Weaving the Strengths Perspective into Study Abroad Initiatives

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Social work educators are active in their pursuit of authentic and experiential learning about different cultural norms, people, and environments. Study Abroad Initiatives (SAI) vary in length, purpose, focus, and form across the social work curriculum (Clapp-Smith & Javidan, 2010; Graham & Crawford, 2012; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Jones, et. al, 2012). SAI are primarily based in social work educational settings. However, professional-based SAI are increasingly available. This paper primarily addresses social work education but also includes professional social work development through SAI. Generally, SAI seek to foster transformative learning experiences by exposing social work students to dramatically different cultural environments through immersion into another cultural context.

Increased interest and focus in globalization in social work practice and education has heightened participation and interest in SAI. However, they can also be interpreted as imbalanced and invasive (Bandyopadhyay, 2019; Nordmeyer, Bedera, & Teig, 2016; O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2019; Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006, Smith, 2018). SAI usually involve travel by privileged, primarily white northern social work students to contexts in the global south where there are people with less privilege, darker skin, and a greater likelihood of social and/or economic disparities, which can be problematic. Traditionally, SAI tend to reinforce learning dichotomies that focus on difference, especially extreme differences. Social work strengths perspective pioneers Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, & Kisthardt (1989) outline the dangers of a dichotomized perspective in social work:

Dichotomies pervade human life. In trying to cope with complex realities, human societies have created stark divisions between the good and the bad, the safe and the unsafe, the friend and the enemy. It is a curious fact that greater attention invariably is paid to the negative poles of the dichotomy: to the bad, the unsafe, the enemy. This pull toward negative aspects of life has given a peculiar shape to human endeavors and has, in the case of social work and other helping professions, created a profound tilt toward the pathological (p. 350.)

The objective of learning/understanding a different context is important and necessary in a field that prides itself on understanding multiple perspectives. However, social work engagement in SAI, by focusing on dichotomized norms from different cultures, can also reinforce colonization, the centering of white privilege, and voyeurism. Thurber (2019) identifies many concepts that problematize SAI, including voyeurism, voluntourism, “instagramability,” white saviors, privilege tourism, orphan tourism, and migrant tourism. Doerr (2016) warned against initiatives that favor personal growth over cultural interaction and social change.

Just as Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, and Kisthardt (1989) warned of dichotomized perspectives in social work, other strengths-perspective scholars offer suggestions to the field that have the potential to bolster SAI and make them less abrasive and more sensitive to the populations with whom we long to connect. Chapin (1995) in her discussion of strengths-based policy initiatives suggested that an “emphasis on common human needs rather than social problems mitigates the labeling process and helps to illuminate the various ways people get help in meeting needs without being labeled as deviant or deficient” (p. 509). Probst (2010) called for a paradigm shift in social work teaching that avoided biases toward the negative and fostered a willingness to examine power and authority in social work. And Roff (2004) applied the Strengths Perspective to macro practice in nongovernmental organizations that shifts the emphasis toward affirming and developing community members. This paper examines these concerns about SAI in the light of the Strengths Perspective, and argues that social workers need to re-examine the deficit-based model of SAI, and reimagine the development and facilitation of initiatives that focus on capacities, hope, and potential instead.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

SAI are an important component of social work learning in education, research, and professional practice. It is important to understand them within the context of theory. The following section of this paper provides an overview of the strengths perspective in social work and transformative learning theory in order to propose a new frame for SAI that could move the field of social work forward.

Strengths Perspective in Social Work

The strengths perspective is a postmodern approach to social work that prioritizes process, shifts in expertise, and a profound belief in potential (Weick & Saleebey, 1998). Prior to this approach, social workers trended toward problems, deficits, and looking for what was “broken, gone wrong, or failed” (Blundo, 2001, p. 297). Strengths perspective pioneer Ann Weick and her colleagues argued for extending the story to include client-identified knowledge and hope that could be found whenever the social worker stepped away from the “norms” of psychoanalytic and/or moral judgment in assessment. They argued that social workers needed to focus on accurate assessments, with an open stance that fostered creativity and authentic collaboration with client populations of all sizes. This, according to Saleebey (1996) took “courage and diligence” (p. 297).

Critics of the Strengths Perspective argue that it ignores pain, is naïve, and/or simplistic (Brun & Rapp, 2001), and that it does not do enough to challenge systems of oppression (Dans, 2001). Gray (2011) also states that it is too individualistic and focused on individual responsibility, self-control, and self-interest. Others argue that the distinctiveness of the Strengths Perspective is not well operationalized or measured and that there is not enough evidence or conceptual clarity for it to be useful to the field (Staudt, Howard & Drake, 2001).

Even so, scholars argue of the danger of privileging pathology in social work, and the ways in which it reinforces power imbalances and false dichotomies of good vs. bad (Grant & Cadell, 2009). The primary problems with social work in the late 80s (as identified by Weick, et. al, 1989) included an assumption that social workers had a special ability to fix problems, that problems were centered in individuals more than contexts, that the role of the professional was to define and solve a problem, and that treatment plans were focused solely on problem-alleviation. Their proposal for strengths addressed these issues in three primary ways: (1) A call to return to the basic core values of the social work profession, centering on dignity, hope, potential, and relationships, (2) A shift in focus that emphasized the potential for growth and learning, believing that “all people possess a wide range of talents, abilities, capacities, skills, resources, and aspirations” (p. 352), and (3) The mandate to expand conversations about capabilities beyond individuals and use them to create systemic change.

Transformative learning theory

Transformative learning theory describes a process by which learners move from prior understandings (frames of reference) to new perspectives through learning that is self-reflective, thoughtful, and critical. For Mezirow (1997), a frame of reference includes two dimensions: the “habits of the mind” and a “point of view.” The former relates to the understandings we have assumed based on our cultural, social, economic, political, or psychological background. They are more fixed and difficult to understand without some degree of exposure to other worldviews. The latter is more subject to change based on reflections of experiences, our problem solving

and exposure to challenge. Malleability depends on environmental and/or interpersonal influence.

A frame of reference is transformed through the challenge of problem-solving and an interactive dialogic process with others. Mezirow (1997) contends that empowerment and the development of autonomy is intrinsic to the learning process. In order to be effective in collaborative problem solving, the learner needs to be critically reflective of their assumptions about others. In order to be effective in the personal transformation of a frame of reference, the learner needs to be critically reflective of self. Both involve critique, challenge, and reflection. It is a simultaneously active and affective process (p. 10). Educators in this model serve as “provocateurs” who offer support and a respectful space for discovery.

There are various interpretations of the transformative learning theory. Rather than focusing on specific processes or objectives to be met, a holistic approach to learning is encouraged, which includes engaging in affect, intuition, and relationships in the learning process. The emphasis, therefore, becomes to understand learning through honoring alternative, non-traditional ways of knowing. In addition to challenging the students, this approach challenges the instructor or facilitator, as it also requires their own self-reflection and openness to change (Snyder, 2008; Taylor, 2010).

Many theories of transformative education for social change are based on a Freirian model of conscientization (Freire, 1970), and the call in peace studies for a “moral imagination” (Lederach, 2005, p. 5). This moral imagination requires a loose acceptance of feelings balanced with concern and includes creativity, the ability to imagine potential alternatives to an unsatisfactory situation, setting goals with multiple ways of reaching them, and making a plan to reach these goals (Rivage-Seul, 1987).

Transformative learning relies heavily on a dialogic process of meaning-making through new experiences. It is often prompted by stressful experiences (intercultural experience, personal identity crisis, natural disaster, loss, or accident) that make the individual question their existence and their purpose in life (Taylor, 2010). Bourjolly, Sands, Finley & Pernell-Arnold (2016) conducted a case study analysis of a multicultural program called Partners Reaching to Improve Multicultural Effectiveness (PRIME) using transformative learning theory. Their study used multiple methods to explore uncomfortable micro-aggressions that happened in the class and resulted in emotional reactions that led to transformative learning. They recognized the complexity and intersectionality of their participant perspectives and confirmed their prior assertions that “pathways to intercultural sensitivity are nonlinear” (p. 97).

Another primary element in this theory posits that in order to learn about others, it is important to start with the self. In order to be effective in collaborative problem solving, the learner needs to be critically reflective of their assumptions about oth-

ers. In order to be effective in the personal transformation of a frame of reference, the learner needs to be critically reflective of self. Both involve critique, challenge, and reflection. It is a simultaneously active and affective process (Mezirow, 1997). This theory informs perplexity by the challenges it gives to prior assumptions/understandings of the world.

Rossiter (2011) calls for an “unsettled social work” (p. 990), where the ethics of the philosopher Levinas encourages us to examine the status of the profession of social work and the ways in which it may deny expertise from everyday people. She argues that we need to put these ethics before knowledge, by moving beyond particular positions that totalize and be open to new understandings that come from the lived experience and uniqueness of whomever we are with (e.g., migrant populations). We do this by suspending judgment and moving beyond critical social work that is based in knowledge, to a place of “sociality” that promotes this Levinas ethic of the other as unique and valuable. Specifically, we use active listening, with an “openness to revelation” (p. 993) where we value the answer more than the question.

According to Ruch (2002), reflection includes an analysis of structural and personal power, identifies the importance of effective and sensory perceptions, and integrates the use of multiple sources of knowing (experiential, intuitive, non-hierarchical, non-gendered and tacit). The emphasized skill in reflection includes curiosity and “not knowing” (p. 352). Fook & Gardner (2007) described a facilitated model for group reflection. During this process, there is a recognition of the perplexity faced by the practitioner: “In particular it acknowledges the place of emotions and especially anxiety, in professional practice and recognizes them as valid sources of knowledge and understanding that need to be embraced” (p. 356). The process is emancipatory and empowering. It encourages a deeper level of understanding that is inclusive and embraces ambiguity. The educator’s role in this model is presented as a “co-explorer.” The author explains the “metacognitive” part of practitioner development, which requires tolerance of uncertainty and a willingness to be vulnerable.

Saleebey & Scanlon (2005) also employed Freire in their argument for critical pedagogy in social work education. They see a need for a radically altered pedagogy that challenges traditional and hegemonic tenets that are accepted by the status quo. They think transformation in the classroom could happen through the use of more group processes/group work, dialogic learning, more reflection, and sharing of personal experiences with oppression. In this process, a “healthy appreciation for ambiguity and disagreement” (p.13) will be fostered. This, in itself, is social work that contributes to social action through a facilitation of shifting perspectives and new understandings. Blunt (2007) agrees: “Transformative learning occurs when learners develop an enhanced awareness of how their knowledge and values guide their own perspectives. Acts of learning can only be referred to as transformative if there exists a process by which primordial questioning and reconstruction of how an individual things of behaves occurs during the learning” (p. 96).

Transformative learning theory relates to critical theory through feminism. Feminist principles of attention to process, connection, empowerment, and integration also contribute to transformative dialogue on this topic, where there is an integration of ideological perspectives and social/experiential process that helps empower people to understand, potentially even accept a different perspective (Coates & McKay, 1995). These are the key elements for a change in perspective.

Both Transformative Learning Theory and the Strengths Perspective require careful self-examination and reflection, call for a re-evaluation and shift in the “frames” or “habits of the mind” through which we see the world, a “suspension of disbelief,” and call for a more collaborative, dialogical, and mutual approach to learning and connection, based on the strengths and resilience of humankind (Blundo, 2001; Guo & Tsui, 2010; Perkins & Tice, 1994; Saleebey, 2000).

This theoretical discussion illustrates the ways in which the Strengths Perspective and Transformative Learning Theory can be paired to expand the story of how and what we do in SAI. This is increasingly important to the field during a time when we are compelled to re-evaluate traditional structures of knowledge-development and global understanding. The following section of this paper reviews scholarship specific to SAI.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY ABROAD LITERATURE

Through SAI, students and instructors can benefit from moving beyond a simple educational model of acquiring facts to a deeper, more meaningful, even transformative learning process. This may begin with both a physical and personal immersion into a foreign context. Most scholarship in this area focuses on young adults or college students and academic-related learning, with limited data on adult or non-academic learning (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Scholarship in this area illustrates that these processes are full of complexities and contradictions (Kubota, 2016).

Study abroad offers students access to “real-life” experiences that challenge them and provide opportunities for new growth and understanding. With increases in globalization and transnationalism, a “global mindset” requires flexibility, mental plasticity, multiple frames of reference, and cosmopolitanism (Cseh, Davis, & Khilji, 2013). The demand for thinking and understanding the interrelatedness of the world has never been higher. A global mindset involves the willingness of a person to step outside their cultural norm and accept that there are multiple ways of knowing, behaving, and understanding (Ranker, 2020). This can be taught through SAI, and various contexts, depth of reflection, lengths of term, cultural background, and pedagogy can lead to different outcomes for study abroad learners.

Clapp-Smith & Javidan (2010) found that in study abroad experiences between one and six months there were increases in a “global mindset.” Between six months and two years, there was no additional variance. However, in international exchange

experiences lasting longer than two years, there was an increased development in a global mindset. Length of study abroad is also associated with shifts in cultural identification and willingness to dialogue with local partners (Hamad & Lee, 2013), which can facilitate new understandings. Of primary importance in this process is the ability to be critically self-reflective and to engage in experiential learning. There is some evidence of the benefit of even short-term immersion programs, including “getting out of the bubble,” crossing a boundary, and meaning-making (Jones, et. al, 2012, p. 207). These effects are especially prominent when the participants are able to integrate their learning and experiences into their “normal” life (Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011).

Graham & Crawford (2012) evaluated three different models for study abroad programs that facilitate transformative learning experiences. They found that while different pedagogical models prompted different types of learning, all resulted in learning that stemmed from some kind of disorientation of previous knowledge and a shift in personal worldview. Likewise, Mills, Deviney, and Ball (2010) asserted that study abroad experiences need to stretch students beyond their comfort level, but not to the degree that they are shocked and cannot sufficiently adapt from the experience.

The sweet spot of transformative learning in SAI occurs when there is an increase in reflective and reflexive learning, and not just an acquisition of facts or exposure to a new context (Orbe & Orbe, 2018; Witkin, 1999). Some scholars have criticized learning/study tours imperialist or oppressive, exacerbating power differences and encouraging a feeling of altruism for the participants because of the perception that they are giving something or doing good (Bandyopadhyay, 2019; Nordmeyer, Bedera, & Teig, 2016; O’Sullivan & Smaller, 2019; Rotabi, Gammonley, and Gamble, 2006, Smith, 2018). Instead, the focus of these initiatives needs to be on inter-cultural dialogue, personal, professional and social development, and challenges to identity/self (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006; Tack & Carney, 2018). The most effective way for this to happen is through cultural mentoring, dialogue, and relationship building during study abroad (Engle & Engle, 2003; Paige & VandeBerg, 2012). Mutuality, understanding power dynamics and colonialism is a key element to the success of SAI.

The theme of giving oneself (through self-reflection, immersion, and critique of past assumptions) is consistent in the literature (Perry, Stoner, Tarrant, 2012; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011; Witkin, 1999). This deep learning can lead to reduced judgment and more self-confidence, social flexibility, and cosmopolitanism. This is especially evident with experiences of immersion, the identification that things are not “normal,” attempts at communication in a second language, and sufficient time allowed for self-reflection (Clapp-Smith & Wernsing, 2014).

A second important ingredient in transformative learning and SAI is experiential learning. Students immersed in a culture get direct experience interacting with and

dialoguing with local experts, which may suggest that going alone or more immersive programs may be more effective. These interactions spark a more intimate challenge to personal assumptions and, through affect and relationship, allow for a more personalized opportunity for reflection.

John Dewey's (1938) contributions in experiential learning included challenges to prior understandings (or frames of reference), recognizing challenge or conflict between self/other, reflective interpretation for making meaning through a critical examination of self, and a claim of on-going transformation of one's own perspective. He suggested that this process happens because of three key elements: 1) a meaningful transaction between the student and the environment; 2) a personal connection made between the individual and the education; and 3) critical reflection about the experience/environment. This process helps us become more open and aware, increasing cultural sensitivity (Velure & Fisher, 2013). According to Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant (2012):

The sort of educative experiences that Dewey referenced are related to life, based on problems to be solved that awakened curiosity, of interest and intrinsically valuable to the learner, and brought with them a level of perplexity, doubt, or what Mezirow (1997) referred to as disorienting dilemmas (p. 680).

A study by Greenfield, Davis, & Fedor (2012) evaluated differences in learning between an international social work course taught in a domestic setting as compared to a study abroad setting. While there were strong learning outcomes in both settings, the students in the study abroad class reported increased skills in cultural sensitivity, functional knowledge, and awareness of global interdependence and interpersonal adjustment. The authors posit that these increases were a result of the experiential learning opportunities and direct personal contact and dialogue the students had while studying abroad.

In addition to setting, SAI can have different outcomes for people who identify as multicultural or monocultural. Nguyen, Jefferies, & Rojas (2018) found improvements in self-efficacy and cultural intelligence after a short term study abroad experience, but only for monocultural students. They suggested that multicultural students already have a high degree of cultural intelligence, so the change was not significant.

Depth of understanding and reflection is certainly an important consideration. Pike and Sillem (2018) argue that a student's sense of marginality at not belonging in a particular context can be constructive to their aptitude as a global citizen. However, it can also backfire because the perception of threat to their identities by understanding differences may exacerbate binary or polarized views of the world (Nguyen, Jefferies, & Rojas, 2018). There are also arguments that the illustrated "benefits" of SAI simply support "...a neoliberal social imaginary [which] constructs an image of the neoliberal subject as equipped with communication skills, a global mindset, and

intercultural competence and thus as competitive in global labour marketplaces” (Kubota, 2016, pp 348-349). Or, that SAI outcomes reinforce stereotypes and power differences instead of breaking them down (Thurber, 2019).

The question of transformation requires consideration for both the hosts and the visitors involved, especially considering that the majority of SAI participants are white and privileged. O’Sullivan & Smaller (2019) interviewed host communities in Nicaragua and found that hosts did not have a transformative experience and found that the students involved in an international service-learning experience were not sensitive to local needs or interests and that the experiences were disruptive. So while there is evidence of attitude shifts, there is less evidence of shifts in structural or systemic issues that perpetuate power differences (Pike & Sillem, 2018). So, transformative learning at what cost?

Velure, Roholt & Fisher (2013) suggest that engaged and decolonizing pedagogy methods that include counter-storytelling and question hegemonic structures and privileges previously unknown to the student. This understanding of power difference is much more evident in contexts where the student is encouraged to think about identity, culture, and the “the other.” If the goal of the study abroad experience is to help facilitate transformation through dialogue and exchange, pedagogy that reflects critical theory and structural/power dynamics is necessary. Students can return to their cultural base and share new understandings and meaningful interactions in a way that fosters a broader shift in perception.

Lindsey (2005) proposed a connection between study abroad experiences and an enhanced commitment to social work values, including the following: open mind-sets; increased awareness of personal values; a challenge to societal norms and increased social awareness; an increase in awareness of discrimination and appreciation for difference; an increased desire for social justice; and increased development related to professional identity. There is a strong alignment with study abroad objectives and social work values, specifically related to self-determination, social justice, and the dignity and worth of the person (Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble, 2006). This paper extends these suggested connections to specifically incorporate the Strengths Perspective.

STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE AND SAI

There is an important opportunity in social work scholarship, education, and practice to expand our understanding of SAI to include more components of the Strengths Perspective and Transformative Learning Theory. These shifts will help us expand the story of SAI to include more reflective, sensitive, and anti-oppressive practices and to begin addressing the identified concerns about SAI related to dichotomized perspectives, colonialism, and imperialist approaches. Table 1 outlines specific recommendations for expanding what we have learned from these two frameworks into SAI.

Table 1: Alignment of the Strengths Perspective, Transformative Learning Theory, and Study Abroad Initiatives

Key Elements of Strengths Perspective	Concepts from Transformative Learning Theory	Recommendations for Study Abroad Initiatives (SAI)
Resists dichotomies	Relies on new experiences that perplex and challenge assumptions or “suspends judgment”	It is important to avoid single-story narratives and be open to the nuances and alternative perspectives that show up in SAI.
Systematic assessment of strengths and power through multiple sources of knowing		SAI participants should understand and analyze power dynamics in the relationship between and within their home and host environment.
Requires self-reflective and critical service providers		SAI participants must critically reflect on their own background and assumptions about people and contexts that are unfamiliar to them. They need to adopt a questioning and open stance for understanding.
Challenges previous assumptions or frames of mind through a shift in perspective		The critical analysis of power includes identifying and challenging previous assumptions about a different context for learning (i.e. all migrants are poor or have dark skin).
Environment is seen as rich in resources	Perceptual malleability depends on environmental and interpersonal exposure to new ideas	SAI initiatives should be developed and planned with an emphasis on environmental strengths that reinforce new perceptions in participants and counter-narratives of negativity and despair.
Goal-oriented with emphasis on common human needs	Process-oriented examination of potential alternatives	SAI should have clear goals that focus on mutual learning and exchange but also understanding the problem-solving process in an experiential way.
Builds collaborative relationships of hope, dignity, empowerment, resilience, and possibility		SAI should not leave participants feeling hopeless or doubtful about solutions, but should inspire them to be proactive about social change and to focus on stories of resilience and hope.
Prioritization of client system perspective and emphasis on choice and local expertise	Changing perspectives is interactive and mutual.	Local expertise and local perspectives should be prioritized, with collaborative partnerships in planning and participation.

Social workers have an opportunity to make improvements in SAI, and the Strengths Perspective can expand our strategies by engaging these recommendations to address four key impact areas in social work.

First, SAI needs to be shaped by a social work values-based pedagogy, centered on dignity, empowerment, and hope. An important component of dignity includes a clear analysis of power relationships. For example, Pike & Sillem (2018) suggest that SAI should primarily be done between similarly developed countries, in order to avoid a sense of exploitation or voyeurism. Social work students can do this by maintaining a nonjudgmental attitude, and by critical self-reflection. Social work educators can do this by incorporating multiple narratives (not a “single story”), power analyses, attending to the sensitive and respectful use of language, incorporating experiential and reflective activities, investing in local economies (rather than multinational corporations, and focusing on local and “regular” life events. In doing so, they have “...opportunities to prepare students in challenging the dominant social forces and power relations behind the reproduction of inequalities” (Jönsson & Flem, 2018, p. 905).

Second, SAI need to center their work on fostering the potential for mutual growth and learning, which leads to professional developed social workers. Saleebey (1996) suggested this when he called for “a mutual sharing of knowledge, tools, concerns, aspirations, and respect” (p. 303). Social work educators and practitioners need to increase pre and post-trip preparation so they can expand their learning to include various perspectives and critical thinking (Nguyen, Jefferies, & Rojas, 2018; O’Sullivan & Smaller, 2019). In that vein, SAI should only be one part of broader learning, and not just a token course (Passareli & Kolb, 2012). Pipitone (2018) argued that SAI should include “...pedagogies that engaged students with local rhythms, meanings, and histories; social interactions; and cultural tools that engaged students in alternative ways of knowing and being in the world before, and during the trip.” (Pipitone, 2018, p. 54).

Third, there should be a broader attempt to incorporate non-western theories and frameworks for understanding cultural differences (Blundo, 2001; Canda, Furman, & Canda, 2019; Chappell Deckert & Koenig, 2019; Deardorff, 2016; Jönsson & Flem, 2018; Koenig, et al, 2017; Pipitone, 2018). This would be beneficial for social work students and professionals. Koenig & Spano (2010) illustrated this when they argued for social workers to redefine their understanding of expertise in the helping relationship, expand their knowledge & understanding, take on a stance of non-action, and foster “all-at-one-time knowledge” (p. 57). It helps to shift power dynamics and move towards mutuality and away from dichotomized perspectives.

Finally, SAI can expand capabilities and the potential for systemic change, and the drivers of that systemic change should be local. Local leaders and social work professionals from the host setting should be the role models for students as they learn about strategies for community change (Nguyen, Jefferies, & Rojas, 2018). These

partnerships should be encompassed in respect and authentic, long-term relationships (Thurber, 2019). SAI should not focus on consumerism or tourism, but rather “...engage students in critical thinking and nurture a commitment toward responsible social action, ultimately contributing to a more just global community” (Pike & Sillem, 2018, p. 36).

Globalization has certainly changed the face of social work education, leaving social work educators with the challenge of how to incorporate important global learning objectives in a way that is sensitive and does not create more damage through colonialist, racist, and/or voyeuristic strategies. Social work educators and professionals now have an opportunity to take leadership in the development of strengths-based SAI that foster critical and reflective learning, prioritize dignity and respect for local cultures and economies, and encourage social action for long-term and sustainable solutions to global problems. One way to begin those shifts is to weave more of the core strengths perspective principles into the development and implementation of these initiatives. In that way, social workers across the world can develop and experience SAI more critically, and use them as a springboard for movement toward sustainable and authentic social change.

END NOTES

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