

## BUILDING T- SHAPED PEDAGOGY: A NEW PARADIGM FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Professional Social Work Education has begun its journey in the year 1898 and it has provided social work curriculum that aims to engage, assess, and intervene among individuals, families, or communities to solve problems by using Knowledge, Skills, and Values (KSV) in social work. Since its inception, the establishment of professional identity among Human Service professionals was focused to become a full-fledged Profession among other professionals like Medicine, Engineering, and others. Over the years social work professionals have worked without an interface with other disciplines. T-Shaped pedagogy (Paula S. Nurius, Darla Spence Coffey, Rowena Fong, Wynne Sandra Korr, Ruth McRoy, 2017) suggest the interface between Social Work and other disciplines in Learning, Research, and practice. The trunk of the letter “T” represents the Social Work discipline, and the Crossbar of the Letter “T” represents the meta-competencies required for the interface between the disciplines. This paper describes the relevance of Indian social problems to professional education and suggests the collective-impact model as a heuristic for professional preparation to collaborate in tackling the problems. The importance of integrating the learning and practice of the Social Work profession with other disciplines and inculcating the meta-competencies to the Social Work curricula and preparing students to collaborate and coordinate with other disciplines in learning and practice.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Collective impact Model, Challenges in Social Work Practice, Social Work Education, T- Shaped Pedagogy, Meta Competencies*

### INTRODUCTION

Professional Social Work Education has begun its journey in the year 1898 and it has provided social work curriculum that aims to engage, assess, and intervene among individuals, families, or communities to solve problems by using Knowledge, Skills, and Values (KSV) in social work. Since its inception, the

establishment of professional identity among Human Service professionals was focused to become a full-fledged Profession among other professionals like Medicine, Engineering, and others. Social work as a profession became more visible since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first international conference in the year, 1928 marked the new dawn of Social Work across the globe. From its inception, in 1936 Social Work education in India has strived to make an impact in creating a professional identity. The interdependence of other subjects like sociology, psychology, and other disciplines was vital in forming independent Social Work theories, models, and approaches that are exclusive to social work education. The challenge of establishing Social Work as an exclusive discipline over the years has left social work professionals have worked without an interface with other disciplines. T-shaped pedagogy is a concept proposed in the year 2017 (Paula S. Nurius, Darla Spence Coffey, Rowena Fong, Wynne Sandra Korr, Ruth McRoy, 2017) illustrates the need for maintaining the individual professional identity and collaborating with other disciplines through the Collective impact model (Kania & Kramer, n.d.). This article will bring out the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in Social Work education and practice and the need for meta-competencies for social workers in challenging the Indian social problems.

## GRAND CHALLENGES IN INDIA

In 2016 the United Nations published the Sustainable Development Goals, in alignment with the SDG the Global Grand Challenges was created to challenge global issues in two categories namely, *Resource Needs*: Energy, Environment, Water, Food, Shelter, Space, and *Societal Needs*: Security, Governance, Learning, Health, Disaster Resilience, Prosperity.



**Figure 1 Global Grand Challenges**

*Source: Rob Nail, Global Grand Challenges (2018)*

The Grand Challenges for Social Work (Uehara, E. S., Barth, R. P., Olson, S., Catalano, R. F., Hawkins, J. D., Kemp, S., Nurius, P. S., 2014) calls for active engagement of the disciplines of social work, education, psychology, sociology, health, medicine, engineering, environmental studies, and other disciplines to challenge the grand challenges. The 12 grand challenges announced by the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare (2014)

, these critical issues are 1. ensuring healthy development for all youth, 2. closing the health gap, 3. stopping family violence, 4. advancing long and productive lives, 5. eradicating social isolation, 6. ending homelessness, 7. creating social responses to a changing environment, 8. harnessing technology for social good, 9. promoting smart decarceration, 10. building financial capability for all, 11. reducing extreme economic inequality, and 12. achieving equal opportunity and justice.

The complexity of the grand challenges stems from the individual, family, local communities, State, National, and transnational. To resolve the grand challenges, transdisciplinary, interprofessional, collaborative approaches need to be adopted. It is important to work with other disciplines to create a new ecosystem of innovation and a solution- focused approach to problem-solving. To build this collaborative approach, a new skill set should be taught to undergraduate and Postgraduate Social Work students. The grand challenges compel social work educators to light the social work students to prepare and progress toward achieving the solution-focused collaborative approach and translate it to evidence-based practice. Students should be able to understand the reflexive practice of understanding the need for meta-competencies during interprofessional interactions in challenging global issues. Carnegie Foundation states that the students enrolled in the doctoral program are the “stewards of the profession” (Golde, C., & Walker, G, 2006) has the responsibility to check the knowledge attitude, and skills of Social work graduates in resolving the multilevel complexities.

## **PREPARING SOCIAL WORK WORKFORCE**

Social Work programs in India are under the wings of the University Grants Commission (UGC) which is the apex body for Indian Higher Education. The council for Social Work Education is still in its formative years. The Social Work curriculum framework is given by the UGC (UGC, n.d.). The Social Work curriculum framework has emphasized various skills including teamwork which will be the paramount skill set required to work as a transdisciplinary collaborator. Social Work education also needs to innovate courses that will prepare them to be adaptive innovators with problem-solving capacity. With the introduction to T -Shaped pedagogy which combines Knowledge, Skill, and Attitude (KSA) of the Social Work home discipline with other disciplines such as Medicine, Psychiatry, Economics,

Legislation, Anthropology -social work graduates will be equipped to resolve complex problems.

The T-shaped pedagogy concept will help the educators and students to understand the need for meta-competencies to interconnect the disciplines. The crossbar of the Letter T refers to the capacity to work with the other disciplines irrespective of differences, shared learning, and collaborative thinking. The trunk of the Letter T refers to Social Work as a discipline with knowledge and experience (Paula S. Nurius, Darla Spence Coffey, Rowena Fong, Wynne Sandra Korr, Ruth McRoy, 2017). In preparation of a workforce with a generalist approach inclusive of micro, mezzo, and macro practice individual mental competencies have to be inculcated in the social work curriculum.

## **COLLECTIVE IMPACT MODEL**

To combat the grand challenges, the Social Work curriculum needs to reorganize its pedagogy in applying the interdisciplinary approach as stated in T shaped pedagogy. To operationalize the meta-competencies, Collective- Impact Model (Kania & Kramer, 2011) shows the need for working with other disciplines in research practice and education. The application of this teaching pedagogy will be discussed.

## **A FRAMEWORK TO STIMULATE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

With the grand challenges of Social Work, Social work educators, students and policymakers have opportunities to interact with different professionals across stakeholders and segments. The Values of social work strive for inclusiveness in the way of working with different professions. Social Work education must take advantage of the opportunity to integrate, include, and invigorate other professionals to educate society regarding the social work profession's scope of research capabilities and practice opportunities. The objectives of social work education have to transform in preparing graduates for interprofessional teams to address the grand challenges.

## **APPLICATION OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT MODEL IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

There are five collective-impact components shared by Kania and Kramer (2011).



Figure 2 Collective impact Model

*Common agenda.* Kania and Kramer (2011) note that the shared vision, Common Understanding, and Joint approach are the main ingredient to solving any issues (p. 39). The Global challenges and Grand Challenges for Social Work were brought together by a group of social work educators, researchers, and practitioners in the field. As you see it on the AASWSW website ([www.aaswsw.org](http://www.aaswsw.org)). Social Work

educators must understand the Global grand challenges and the Grand Challenges for Social Workers and curricularize the challenges into courses and unwrap the issues into one or more parts. The grand challenges can be approached in the classroom with practitioners, partnerships, and patronage. E.g. Field Work curriculum can unpack the grand challenges is social work in field practice.

*Shared measurement.* Kania and Kramer (2011) suggest that the measurement should be consistent with all participants which will hold each participant accountable and measure the success and failure. (p. 40). The impact of Social Work students in translating data into action is possible only with the understanding to engage with other professionals and share the roles in gathering quality data to have a better insight towards prevailing issues. The measures to assess the impact of grand challenges will broaden the understanding of Social Work students to undertake innovation and further their research.

*Mutually reinforcing activities.* Kania and Kramer (2011) show that the Collective impact model encourages each participant who works on the issues will in way support and coordinate the actions of the other participants working on the same issue without asking everyone work on the same thing. (p. 40). When one or more grand challenges are addressed in a community, different activities will come about in addressing the issues. Making sure that the activities are mutually reinforcing with the local culture, local knowledge, local resources, local skills, and local processes along with shared experiences in another locality or program elsewhere engaged in the same grand challenge can benefit a lot. Social Work students will be able to indigenize certain methods and appreciate and mutually respect the views of other practical models.

*Continuous communication.* Collective-impact model requires the following, a) commitment to consistent and open communication to build trust, b) assure mutual objectives, and c) appreciation of common motivation (Kania & Kramer, 2011). To unlock the communication barriers, Social Work Non-Government Organizations, International Non-Government Organizations, Government organizations,

National Social Work associations, Social Work Schools and departments, Heads of Departments, Social Work educators, Research scholars – can provide a mechanism to stay connected and keep engaged in focusing the grand challenges. The core of meta-competencies such as networked partnerships -depending on the disciplines is key to the grand challenges with collaborative readiness and communication.

*Backbone organization.* Finally, (Kania and Kramer 2011) observe that it requires an organization working exclusively with specific staff to address the issues will serve as a backbone in working towards the grand challenges. (p. 40). As we see the founders of GCSWI, the AASWSW, likewise the Global Grand Challenges for providing Singularity University, function as a backbone organization. As each School/Department of the Social Work, Social Work faculty, and Field Action Programs begin to work for grand challenges they become the backbone organization. When “Linking learning to life” becomes a real social work students start to embrace the grand challenges and work collectively both in field placements and the agency that they work for serves as a backbone organization.

Every team member becomes valuable by contributing their unique skills, and meta-competencies through Collective-impact efforts. The collective Impact Model is already existing in Social Work Education and Practice, and the interdisciplinary approach to problems was modeled only in a clinical setting with a multidisciplinary team. With a rich Social Work history, and team building in Social Group Work, Community Organization in macro practice has the collective impact model embedded within. With the mammoth task of Sustainable Development Goals, Global Grand Challenges, and GCSW in front of us, it compels us to further collaborate with other disciplines in Social Work faculty, students, and Researchers to become powerful change agents.

## **T-SHAPED PEDAGOGY: BUILDING TEAM (TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE)**

To challenge complex social issues, the professional workforce should be well prepared for solutions-focused interventions. As mentioned before, the use of the collective impact model helps to understand multiple stakeholder perspectives to maximize the potential of impacting social issues. The need for integrative thinking and sustained collaboration, sometimes with difficult differences is required with skills of communication, conceptualization, and Collaboration. The T-shaped professionals -Social Workers have engaged in an expert thinking skills model with experts from others to solve complex problems.

Figure 3 visualizes the independent discipline. Even though the social work curriculum integrates different disciplines in the syllabus, specializations in their educational experience it does not provide the necessary knowledge or skill to solve problems across different disciplines. Students often leave the portals of the college as an “I” (Single discipline) with new knowledge. T-shaped pedagogy targets to fill the gaps.

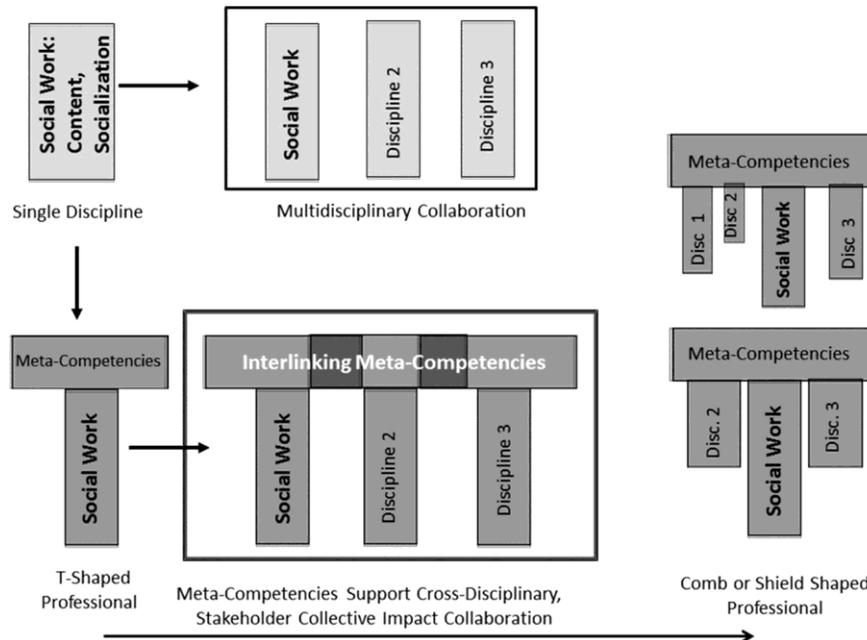


Figure 3. Illustration of meta-competencies within cross-cutting T-shaped collaboration readiness. Adapted from “Individual level competencies for team collaboration with cross-disciplinary researchers and stakeholders” by P. S.Nurius and S. P. Kemp , *Advancing social and behavioral health research through cross-disciplinary team science: Principles for success* (K. Hall, R. Croyle, & A. Vogel, Eds.).

**Paula S. Nurius, et al. *Preparing Professional Degree Students to Tackle Grand Challenges: A Framework for Aligning Social Work Curricula. Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 2017 8:99-118.**

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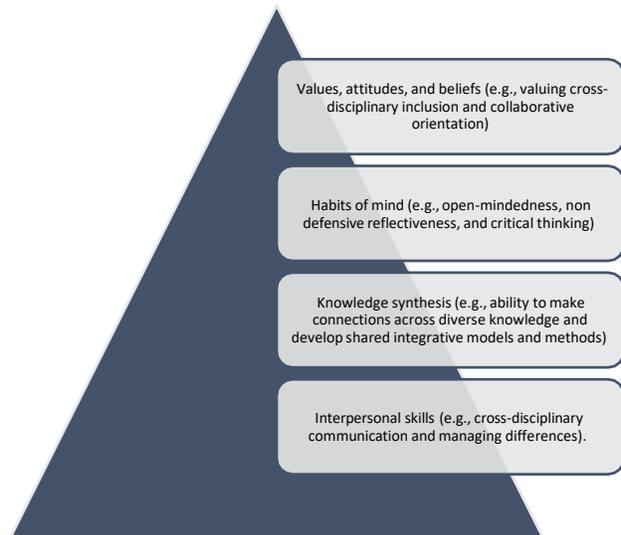
## **THE TRUNK OF THE T: DISCIPLINES MATTER**

A vertical dive on the T-shaped pedagogy is to bring a deep understanding of one’s discipline. Strong disciplinary expertise is essential even when we work with other disciplines. Social Work in India has grown as another profession with other professionals like Medicine, Engineering and Technology, Law, etc. After 85 years of existence, social work professionals have created an identity. Social work professional has their own ethical standards to govern social work practice, however, there is no single professional association as an apex body to govern. But Social work has grown sporadically in different

parts of the country accordingly to market-driven education. Professional Social Work experience and literature has the depth in providing indigenous knowledge and skills. Fields of Social Work have grown extensively with variations in specialization and practice. Oskam (2009) states that “the mere possession of knowledge and expertise in the individual’s own field is no longer sufficient” (Oskam, 2009, p. 5) . With this, we conclude that knowledge transfers and expertise should be sufficiently shared to solve complex issues in society. A social worker involved in practice in a particular farming community with climate change impacts on resources for farming, for example, might have to seek the expertise from the necessary field to plug the problems instead of trying to resolve the issues only pertaining to social work as a discipline. In this example, the social worker’s role is very vital in understanding the livelihood issues of the community and providing immediate interventions for the sustainability of the community. Figure 1, represented by smaller T trunks, the T metaphor is being extended to encompass “shield or comb” metaphors (Bosque-Pérez, N. A., Klos, P. Z., Force, J. E., Waits, L. P., Cleary, K., Rhoades, P., ... Finegan, B., 2016). This brings to a point that Social Work as a professional may still have to acquire a lot of content from other disciplines, which points towards, Social Work education may have to prepare career preparations that involve training across disciplines. Another challenge is that educational institutions need to remove barriers focused on cross-disciplinary training. With the global grand challenges at hand, Social Work needs to mediate with other disciplinary content.

## **THE CROSSBAR OF THE T: META-COMPETENCIES**

Social work profession from its inception has borrowed literature and theory from other disciplines and has a long history of working with other professions. Yet the profession has its own struggle for identity as an independent profession. The graduates of Social Work are trained to work within the professional context as a profession which limits the readiness of the Social Workers to add value to the team with interprofessional (Davis, 2011, January) Commitment to values and Social Justice is no longer an exclusive attribute to Social Work. The attitude and skill for visioning and the capacity for problem-solving across disciplines play an important role in developing meta- competencies. It calls for a deeper understanding and structural changes in academia and the Social Work curriculum in integrating the skills and attitudes and raising the bar for cross-disciplinary effectiveness and equipping Social Work students for better efficacy in the field.



Nurius and Kemp synthesize four sets of individual meta-competencies to work with cross-disciplinary stakeholders as shown in Figure -2. These competencies are intended to be applicable across specific content areas, problem foci, and problem-solving aims. As shown in Figure 1, the competencies provide the link between the different disciplines or stakeholders. The individual meta-competencies are the foundation for building meta-competencies across the disciplines. It aims to think outside the box and move beyond individual knowledge and more responsive problem-solving.

**Figure -4 Individual Meta-competencies**

(Nurius, P. S., Kemp, S. P., Köngeter, S., & Gehlert, S, 2017).

The use of Collective impact model in looking at the Global Grand Challenges, Sustainable Development Goals, Grand Challenges for Social Work calls for readiness for hard work, communication, understanding, and trust across stakeholders, and to intentionally take actions that build differentiated expertise but also carefully interlocking the through the meta-competencies. The goal is to educate students on leadership and as change agents and be successful in the anticipated roles in society as illustrated in the T-shaped pedagogy. Faculty members must identify the meta-competencies that students should be acquiring to lead critical thinking into social action (Freire).

Ten meta-competencies were identified for Social Work and Business by CSWE and others as mentioned by Nurius et al (Paula S. Nurius, Darla Spence Coffey, Rowena Fong, Wynne Sandra Korr, Ruth McRoy, 2017):

1. Work collaboratively with individuals and organizations.
2. Manage projects. Preparing Professional Degree Students to Tackle Grand Challenges 111
3. Identify opportunities and ways to contribute to agency work.
4. Effectively lead stakeholder groups and maintain relationships for the benefit of the agency.
5. Identify intended and unintended consequences of policies and practices with an agency.

6. Identify a plan to achieve desired outcomes for clients and programs.
7. Understand the dynamics of working in a global context.
8. Work with individuals from different professional backgrounds.
9. Navigate working with community groups and coalitions.
10. Organize campaigns for community change.

In sum, the above meta-competencies also intersect with the Social Work competencies and the practice behavior in preparing students for future leadership and provide the knowledge, skill, and attitude for collaborative work with other disciplines in addressing the grand challenges.

## CONCLUSION

Social Work education cannot afford to stagnate in indigenous knowledge building. This new framework gives the impetus to understand Social Work education from a new perspective. The collective impact model and the importance of developing meta-competencies heavily rely on the Social Work educators in framing the curriculum. “Rather than using the single focus on the home discipline, Social work educators should teach students to work in teams with another discipline” states Nurius et al. The T-shaped pedagogy can be implemented through a generalist practice of interventions. The need to transform Social Work education practice in India and equip future leaders to tackle the grand challenges of Social Work plaguing individuals, families, and communities is the paradigm shift required.

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