



An international and unique MA Degree in Reflective Social Practice

Developing a Social Sensibility

A really different approach to working with complex social processes

The technical and instrumental nature of much contemporary social praxis has become a contributing factor to – rather than a resolution of - the deepening social crisis in our world. This programme offers the possibility to understand and work with radically different, more appropriate, more organic approaches to social understanding and practice. To work in ways that are respectful of the complexity and true nature of the challenges we face in the social field, and that allow us to engage fully and deeply in the relations and processes that are at the heart of any social situation. Engaging with the problems we face in the world today requires an exercise of imagination and creativity that is often stifled by the driven simplicities of dominant practice. This programme gives space and support to explore and develop a grounded, aware, engaged and imaginative interpersonal practice. The programme will be highly relevant for anyone working around social issues - from professionals to social activists; those working on social aspects of ecological and environmental work; those working on social development at local levels, nationally or internationally - who want to work differently and contribute imaginatively and with sensibility to our social future.

Based on a highly successful MA programme recently completed in Eastern Europe

Offered by The Proteus Initiative.

(Allan Kaplan, Sue Davidoff and David Harding)

Accredited by the London Metropolitan University.

To be run over two years – mid 2011 through 2013.

Consisting of four three-week residential sessions (15 working days).

If you are working in the social, ecological / environmental or development field and you are searching for a significantly different way of contributing in a global situation that has become increasingly intractable, fragile and unimaginative, then please read further.

The Context

While there is much conversation and practice around social transformation, much of this focuses on attempts at engineering external realities. There seems to be little recognition that what we see 'out there' is a reflection of our own inner stories, that our own way of approaching the world has a significant role to play in addressing the enormous challenges which we face at this time in world history. There are theories and practices emerging around alternate world views; yet there seems to be little focus on the development of the commensurate **faculties** required to engage with these world views.

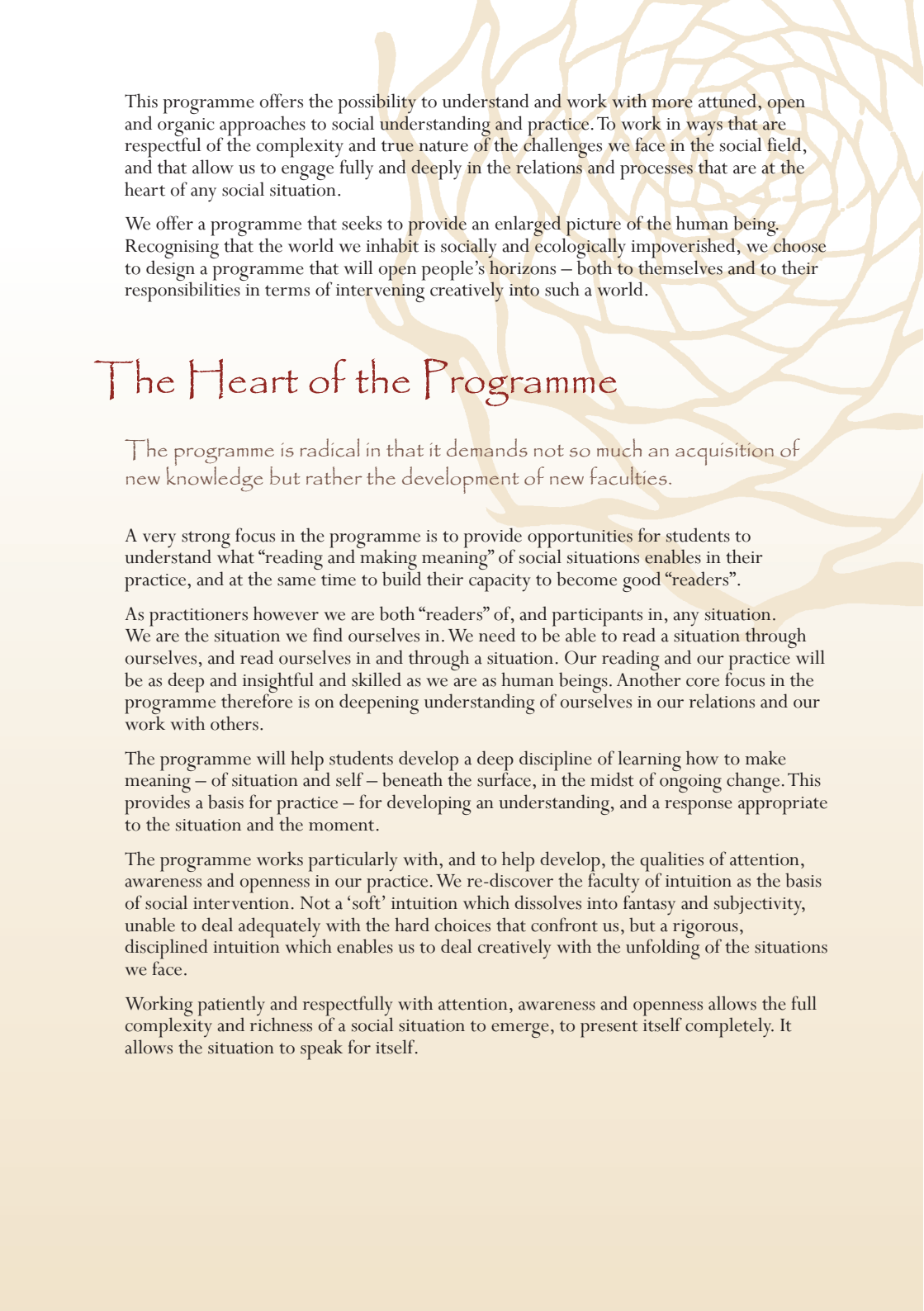
We live in a world marked by seemingly intractable social and ecological problems.

The dominant way of working in this fragile and fractured global situation has developed an increasing urgency and focuses on working with goal-driven, heavily managed interventions and a high reliance on abstract systems and frameworks to both guide and assess performance.

The core problem with much current praxis is not simply that it all too often doesn't get its 'results' as it defines them. It is more that its very approach severely impoverishes the depth, the integrity, the very humanity of work in the social field. The full rich nature and complexity of any social situation is negated – cannot present itself, cannot be fully understood – through the highly reductionist nature of these approaches. *Deterministic project frameworks, models and techniques replace an engaged interpersonal practice.* Much engagement with the social world, and most of the thinking that underpins it, works with approaches that do not enable us to see *living process on its own ground.*

The Response

If we can hold the idea before us that the way through is not via a concern with making the world manageable, but making it more understandable, more visible; this is the key. If we can develop the ability to see into the depths of things, then the processes, relationships and connections that form the living skein of social, and socio-ecological situations become transparent. The situation begins to transform from the inside, out. We gain awareness of a larger reality. We become able to incorporate ourselves within that reality. Our own way of approaching the world has a significant role to play in addressing the enormous challenges which we face at this time in world history.



This programme offers the possibility to understand and work with more attuned, open and organic approaches to social understanding and practice. To work in ways that are respectful of the complexity and true nature of the challenges we face in the social field, and that allow us to engage fully and deeply in the relations and processes that are at the heart of any social situation.

We offer a programme that seeks to provide an enlarged picture of the human being. Recognising that the world we inhabit is socially and ecologically impoverished, we choose to design a programme that will open people's horizons – both to themselves and to their responsibilities in terms of intervening creatively into such a world.

The Heart of the Programme

The programme is radical in that it demands not so much an acquisition of new knowledge but rather the development of new faculties.

A very strong focus in the programme is to provide opportunities for students to understand what “reading and making meaning” of social situations enables in their practice, and at the same time to build their capacity to become good “readers”.

As practitioners however we are both “readers” of, and participants in, any situation. We are the situation we find ourselves in. We need to be able to read a situation through ourselves, and read ourselves in and through a situation. Our reading and our practice will be as deep and insightful and skilled as we are as human beings. Another core focus in the programme therefore is on deepening understanding of ourselves in our relations and our work with others.

The programme will help students develop a deep discipline of learning how to make meaning – of situation and self – beneath the surface, in the midst of ongoing change. This provides a basis for practice – for developing an understanding, and a response appropriate to the situation and the moment.

The programme works particularly with, and to help develop, the qualities of attention, awareness and openness in our practice. We re-discover the faculty of intuition as the basis of social intervention. Not a ‘soft’ intuition which dissolves into fantasy and subjectivity, unable to deal adequately with the hard choices that confront us, but a rigorous, disciplined intuition which enables us to deal creatively with the unfolding of the situations we face.

Working patiently and respectfully with attention, awareness and openness allows the full complexity and richness of a social situation to emerge, to present itself completely. It allows the situation to speak for itself.

The Framing

This MA Programme in Reflective Social Practice has been developed as a course work and (mini) dissertation masters, which will run over two years, with a maximum of 20 participants and three tutors. The coursework is divided into six modules:

1. Social Development Frameworks and Approaches:

In this module we explore various theoretical approaches to social practice, drawing from current dominant social theory whilst also generating an understanding of an alternative approach that has as its foundation holistic or organic thinking. Our intention here is never merely intellectual content but the ability to think with intelligence and heart.

2. Reading and Making Meaning of Social Situations:

We see this module as the foundation of the programme; the module around which all the other modules revolve. We present approaches and practices within which students are given experience and understanding of how to read – and make meaning of – social situations so that through this understanding, this reading, they attain a very real sense of appropriate ways of intervening into the situation (guiding from the inside rather than imposing from the outside). Beyond ‘thinking about things’ (an ‘intellectualist’ approach) is a way of ‘engaging with and reflecting on *experience*’, a realm of knowing which when accessed provides the most powerful and accurate way of understanding our world: a way of knowing that *enters into*, that *becomes one with*, that is able to *accompany an unfolding process* such that the living, qualitative dimension of that process is really seen and experienced in a way that enables constructive engagement. A very strong focus in the programme is to provide opportunities for students to understand what ‘reading and making meaning’ enables in their practice, and at the same time to build their capacity to become ‘readers’ in this sense. (And not only to read but also to convey, so as to enable others to see and read living process well, in the understanding that any effective approach to social change has at its root such an ability to see.)

3. Images of Organisation:

How we respond to organisations, and to the organisation of social situations, depends to a large extent on the image of the organisation that we are working with. What is the difference, for example, between viewing an organisation as an arbitrary collection of parts or as an ordered and intentional whole? Between the organisation as an organism and the organisation as a mechanism, a machine? Between the organisation as instrument (towards social change or stasis) and the organisation as example (of such change or stasis)? Between the organisation as complex system and the organisation as living process? What differences in capacities and faculties are necessitated by these differences in understanding? And how can we realise these?

4. Intervening into Social Situations:

Another unique aspect of this MA programme brings together both the academic and the professional dimensions of reflective social practice. We have therefore emphasised the balance and the relationship between theory and practice and developed creative ways of building this link into an MA degree. We use action research as the methodology for this particular module, and students are required to find authentic and real situations in their professional life where they may intervene within the framework of the action research cycle. This module emphasises the importance and value of becoming rigorous reflective practitioners; actors and researchers of own practice.

5. Self in Process/Practice:

Since this programme is envisaged as a journey of becoming and transformation, and since – in our understanding – each person is their practice, it is important for students to deepen their understanding of themselves, and to stretch their inner worlds. We want them to understand that their practice is as deep and insightful and skilled as they are as human beings, and so becoming a reflective social practitioner means becoming more full and more fully human. We never push students beyond where it feels safe for them to go, but we encourage a focus on the inner aspects of self as a fundamental dimension of meaningful intervention in any social situation.

6. Frameworks and Principles for Professional Practice:

In this module we look at the principles which ensure ethical professional practice, which enable students to develop a sharpened sense of their own professionalism, to build rigour and clarity of purpose into their professional practice, to acquire a sense of quality within which they might judge their own work according to their own professional and personal values, and to practise accordingly. As well, to question the prevailing emphasis on professionalism within the social sector and the manner in which this emphasis may diminish social activism itself. In other words, to develop a real sense of discrimination with respect to professionalism, activism and the needs of social justice and social intervention.

As is probably clear from even a brief reading, the boundaries between each of these modules are extremely porous. Our intention has been to design an MA programme which is holistic and integrated in process and content. And for the purposes of an academic programme it is necessary to develop clear ways of differentiating (and assessing) the various aspects of the programme. While each module is complete and coherent in itself, all the modules knit and weave together into one integrated whole. They are completely interdependent. For this reason, each residential (there are four) comprises every module, with a focus on a specific (and different) module at every residential. Our design therefore reflects the intention of the programme – that students are always immersed in a holistic endeavour (and never have a sense of a fragmented programme with separate modules running at different times). At all times it is vital that students are aware of the relationship between the modules so that they experience this relationship as a living whole.

The Tutor Group

This programme has been developed and will be run by a tutor team of three people; Sue Davidoff, David Harding, and Allan Kaplan. Each of us has over 30 years experience of work and teaching in the field of social practice, working in Africa, Latin America and Europe. We all have a continuing practice with organisations and individuals as well as our teaching and learning work. We all have several decades experience of running learning programmes in the social field, including our most recent experience over the last three years of working with this Masters programme in Central and Eastern Europe. (See the Proteus website for more details)

We draw on a range of ideas and influences that have helped shape each of our work. These range from contemporary, cutting-edge ideas in the social sciences to thinkers and strands of wisdom that have significantly influenced humanistic approaches to social practice over many centuries. We draw particularly from the practices indicated by Goethean phenomenology, Buddhist mindfulness and the implications for practice in the social field arising from the understandings developed by 'new sciences' (from quantum theory to complexity).

But we don't seek to impose our perspectives. We don't pretend to offer yet another "closed" and final framework for resolving social problems. We encourage participants to use the programme to develop new ways of understanding the world and their work, new faculties to read situations and engage in practice. To develop greater attention, awareness and openness. We understand that different context and cultures require subtly different ways of working, and that there is no blueprint for all.

The Participants

This programme is aimed at experienced practitioners, wherever they are situated, who find themselves facing questions and dilemmas about current dominant practice, their own work, and the organisational or institutional settings they find themselves in. It is aimed at practitioners who may be experiencing a frustrating distance between how they want to work, and how they are currently asked to work. Equally, it is designed for practitioners who are already becoming drawn to more living, organic and attuned approaches to social questions.

This is a programme *for all those working with social change*, in whatever guise, position or workplace. We are looking for participants who can bring a high level of commitment and energy for working in social areas to the programme. We ask participants to bring and work with their own experience, and to be willing and open to engage with and talk around that experience in the programme. We ask participants to be prepared to engage openly, and with commitment, with the programme and the participant group.

Towards Participating on the Programme

This is an accredited academic programme developed out of long-term programmes that we have run in the past. This academic and accredited version was run successfully for social practitioners from 12 Eastern European countries during 2006 – 2008. It is a valued programme within London Metropolitan University, which accredits it. We have decided to open this programme out to the future by locating it in a more international context, inviting participation without restricting the programme or participants to a particular region. The location of residential sessions will reflect the geographical composition of the group, to balance the travel necessities of all students. It will be run from mid 2011 through 2013.

We have written this brochure as a first declaration of intent, and as a first invitation to respond (even to apply), and we invite you to circulate it to whomever you feel may benefit and may be interested. It is necessary to note that the programme needs the active engagement of those interested in pursuing this approach. The cost of such a programme is in the region of €14,300 per student (or £290,000 for the programme). It is extremely difficult to raise these kinds of funds in today's climate, despite the programme being an essential contribution in the current development scenario.

We therefore speak to you here of a number of possibilities. If you are interested in the programme at all, regardless of cost, please write to us, simply indicating your interest. If you know of others who may be interested, please contact them, or contact us and we will contact them. If you are able to raise funds for yourself, or for others, please let us know. If you know of donors who may be interested in engaging with such a programme, please let us know – you could contact them yourself or assist us to access them by letting us know about them.

If in fact you are a donor and are even remotely interested in funding towards this programme, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us!

In the meantime, with the successful completion of the previous programme we have ourselves begun the task of fundraising for this one. The cost for an individual participant – noted above – will inevitably come down if and as funding is secured. We will therefore get back, with further information and a final costing, to those who have indicated interest, as soon as we have the responses we need to make more informed decisions about launching the programme.

We are marked by the questions we ask and the language we use. The MA programme presented here is premised on a different set of questions and a different kind of language, and a more engaged, more personal and more tactile way of framing our thinking.

How can we get connected to what is alive in others' processes? How can we develop respect for what is in the state of becoming? For what is about to come, in a person, in a group, in an organisation? How can we become an organ of perception? How can we develop our faculties for really seeing? How can we develop a state of "not knowing", a state of questing or intentional silence that enables us to learn? How can we develop the capacity of describing a situation in a way that helps the situation's essential dynamics to be revealed? How can we centre ourselves enough to help without getting caught up in projections that derail our awareness? How can we help people to value living processes so that they trust in the process of life, so they can see it on its own ground?



Please Contact

Allan Kaplan, Sue Davidoff or David Harding
alkaplan@mweb.co.za
sued@mweb.co.za
hardingdc@aol.com

The proteus initiative
www.proteusinitiative.org
+27 (0)21 794 3677