

**Episode 176 - Adalberto Méndez López and Dr. Filomena Critelli: Globally Connected Classrooms: Partnership, Technology, and Human Rights**

[00:00:08] Welcome to in social work the podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.insocialwork.org](http://www.insocialwork.org). We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice research. We educate we connect. We care. We are in social work. Hello I'm Charles Syms and I'm Peter Sobota where your host for social work recently in social work celebrated its 7 year anniversary and its one millionth download. I remember when we wondered if anybody would listen to these. We had in social work and the University at Buffalo School of Social Work wish to thank all of you for your listening support. It is our continuing mission to bring to social work and human service communities. The research and discussion topics that are so important to the work we do. So keep listening and feel free to drop us a line and let us know how were doing. Hey Charles. Two million in this episode our guests Adalberto Mendez Lopez and Filomena Critelli discuss their experience of bringing their respective students together to Cowens struct a course titled disability and human rights. From the perspective of law and social work but this is no mere code teaching endeavor. Mr. Mendez Lopez and Dr. Critelli attempted to bridge not only disciplines specifically on social work but the physical distance between Buffalo and Mexico and the differences in their cultures.

[00:01:51] As if that wasn't challenging enough they would do this through the use of technology as relative newcomers to the technology based format. Our guests describe their initial anxiety and subsequent experiences with their new course. Originally brought together by a mutual regard for human rights they describe their partnership as they facilitated not only learning but a facilitation of cultural competence and the mutual benefits of their collaboration across a globally connected classroom. Adalberto Mendez Lopez LSM is a human rights professor at the law school of Universidad la Siah Mexico City and currently collaborates with the SUNY University at Buffalo School of Social Work. He is the coauthor of two books and is the former dean for academic affairs of the law school of the Universidad la Siah where he previously served as the WA program coordinator. Filomena Critelli Ph.D. is associate professor at the school of social work where her research and teaching interests include child welfare policy and practice family policy immigration and transnational issues. In 2014 she received a research and teaching fellowship from the American Institute for Pakistan studies to examine NGO strategies to address gender based violence in Pakistan. Our guests were interviewed by our own war Lewis associate dean for global partnerships and director of field education. They spoke together in March of 2015. This is loyalists and I'm here today with our colleague from Mexico City university don Messiah professor at Roberto Mendez Pope pads and my colleague here at the school of social work at UB Filomena Critelli. So welcome to you both. Thank you very much. And we're here today to talk about a really groundbreaking approach to education.

[00:03:53] So about a year ago we first met Adalberto at the SUNY center for online international learning and began planning for a course that went brain last unions at the university and Messiah. Together with our school of social work students here and the Koil model brings together students from different countries and faculty together from different countries. Using distance technology and the real benefit of that is just suppose students to thinking different than their own and to build cross cultural competence that their students so mean and Aldaberto can you say a little bit about her experience bringing her students together from the two countries from the two schools and how that worked in terms of building students skills. I say at my end that it's been probably the most exciting part of the course. The ability to use technology to be able to bridge this distance and to be able to bring together students and professors to be able to share in dialogue. So I think that

especially during what we call synchronous sessions when we actually link and have a joint classroom using the technology. The students are very elated afterwards and I have to say I am too. I was a person that was a little scared of some of the technology and being able to master it and to bring the class together is really yeah for me it was the same a lot of my first time like a mole on a landline course and definitely it's a challenge and I really worry because not all students are able to partner enough cross border reality. They don't need to be in the same classroom. They can be in the same space the Internet and they can have a kind of common knowledge.

[00:05:36] But now from the sprint perspective not only from a legal perspective but also now something new for them that will be social it really is a wonderful thing that technology brings. Because for many of our students they won't have the opportunity to go abroad or to study abroad the very expensive option for many of our students however technology can be a really effective way of bringing people together. And so I think that this model of learning really puts technology to good use. So back up a little bit. Tell me about your course. The name of your course is disability and human rights. From the perspective of law and social work. Can you tell me a little bit about what you're covering in the course. Well in general terms I workers try to bring a common ground for lawyers and social workers. We want one advice from a human rights perspective. We want to highlight what this is and how we should be advocating for people with disabilities more even more. All the content that we are like custodian case law legislation and similar readings of social work in law. I think that the most important point of course is how lawyers of social work can collaborate together for better advocacy of human rights of people with disabilities. I really agree and I think one of the real benefits of the course is that students are able to really gain from the perspectives of the two disciplines because we are able to read in particular cases of important case law from the Mexican Supreme Court and from the U.S. Supreme Court and we actually had an opportunity to observe.

[00:07:15] You know when you had the guest speaker Howell long classes conducted in the way of legal reasoning the way the lawyers looked at a case. I think likewise when we have our discussions and we analyze the cases the social workers bring in the psychosocial aspects and the law students are broadening their thinking about the case by hearing that content. So I think it's been mutually beneficial in that each is broadening their perspective about how to use their expertise to advance human rights. Positive from a legal perspective. We'd like to act like now we're lustreless has Lyca expanded point of view and expanded understanding from that case until now they are thinking in different ways not only like lawyers will now they are like interacted with social workers and others have a better understanding of social issues and I think particularly for professional degrees like law and social work to have this opportunity while they're being trained while they're in school. It's very important and potentially will make them better practitioners later. I think that you know this was an excellent fit. The partnership between our two universities and I know from the end of the Beat It really fits a lot of our strategic goals me a few years back reframed our curriculum to focus on using a human rights framework and we're really working hard to infuse that into our curriculum so that social work students really begin to look at social issues with a human rights framework. And I think disability was an issue that we both really felt very passionate about and was a really great starting point for this kind of collaborative course also for social work students in the United States where a lot of times you know the training can be very much focused on micro level issues and somewhat insular.

[00:09:03] We're helping the students to move from more of a local to a global look and international and global perspective on the issue. So it's really interesting to see how things are different in Mexico and how sometimes some of the issues are really similar and what's being done in these various contexts and I think like from the legal perspective now in Mexico Human Rights seems like something pretty neat. Since 2011 when being involved in a human rights discussion I'm in a constantly discussion on the legal field think that now that we are starting this global course

we're like I say the international objective of human rights law and human rights is also it's something really global. It's something really international. And not only be partnering we social workers students both white American students for Mexican student having a really really really challenging because now they are able to practice their English. They are able to know another background different from law like social work. Now they are involved in other perspectives from the social work perspective. And I think that after these courses at least the Mexican students will have a better outcome covertly with their older classmates because they have this international experience that I come from that is unique. I'm glad you touched on that because I think you are talking about helping to build more of the global sharing values around human rights and how we share common issues. But an important goal in social work training is also building cultural competence and helping students to be able to work with diversity and people who are different from them.

[00:10:48] And I think this class has been a real exercise in that in terms of communicating and I have to say from our end you know your students deserve to be audited and that they are working with two languages English and Spanish. We are trying to inculcate in our students more of an interest in learning a second language more of an interest and learning about another culture. And I think one of the values of this course is that I mean it's just natural. I think it's such a great thing that we're partnering with Mexico who's a very close neighbor and one of the biggest group of immigrants in the United States are people from Mexico. So this course has multiple new and different levels because I think it's very important for social work students to learn more about Mexican culture to become interested in learning Spanish and to understand what's going on with it. One of our closest neighbors. So I think these are just some of the real benefits of this kind of partnership. So tell me a little bit about how the students have responded in Mexico. These students at the beginning were frightened about this new course for them just like of course they know English and they listen to a lot of English from The CGG they are all the time watching English movies but is told something completely different when you are going to an academic fields because they now are forced to read on English and are forced to discuss these forced to say works on English. And at least for a non English speaker it's challenging because now they will be evaluated.

[00:12:22] They will be reading under a more rigorous standards that it's like to write something or something at the paper but I'm ready for the language from Spanish. And the second one is that not only the language I read it was important also that background by reading lawyers they're used to being the pay cut rates on in everything they say. But when you are faced with a social worker then you realize that we have a lot of things to learn from a social work because maybe we're used to do out of focusing for people with disabilities to do because you know human rights are not so sensitive that social workers and they have real know how to do the things to and how to get more with them. And that's different from a legal perspective. Give us a more effective approach on litigation and when you say the same for social work. Well I think that it's very important for social workers to understand the law is an important tool and a way of approaching and advancing human rights. And sometimes I mean I love my field of social work but sometimes you know we think we should just do things because it's the right thing to do which is you know that's a good position but it's good to know what the law says and what maybe the law needs to also be changed sometimes and how antiquated and how to think using that kind of reasoning. So I think that the students are getting that extra added value in terms of just you know for some of the students I've had to gently remind them if they get a little frustrated around language barriers.

[00:13:52] And again I say this with all the kindness that it's actually US students are the ones that have the limitation that so few American students and some of the statistics say it's about only 18 percent of American students have a knowledge of a second language. And so you know the expectation that everybody in the world is going to meet you and speak English is unrealistic. And I

think for a better global engagement and for them for students who are interested in working in human rights and working on a global level having another language it's a very important skill. So it's sort of you know helping to reframe and helped them think a little bit differently about our role as citizens of the United States regarding those kind of skills. So I mentioned earlier that the vision for this course really began about a year ago. And in fact most of the planning took place in Mexico City in October of last year. And so it's really not been Maring long. And now you're about halfway through A.M. I wonder looking back what's been surprising to you about teaching this course. I think it's a very ambitious course to connect students and that's way. Well I have to say I'm a lesson learned but I'm in the process of learning a lot because I thought I knew a lot about Mexico and learning so much more about the legal system. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Mexico has universal health care law and it's been very exciting to be able to expose myself and students to the context of Mexico and all the exciting things that are going on there I think and I'm really pleased with how it's turned out given the circumstance teaching that class but you always miss just such a wealth of information.

[00:15:35] There's so many excellent materials out there and teaching tools and choosing what kind of platform and what kind of pedagogical tools we're going to use. Has been really interesting. Like for instance we're using Facebook quite a bit. I think that's been really a great thing I was a little hesitant about it because I thought of it as being very informal but I think it's been a great tool. The students are extremely comfortable with it and they approach it very readily and they post lots of thoughts and ideas and sharing of resources that surprised me that that worked really well as well in my case. Hey I bristle at how many look out because we have them in glass. Julia was Laura and I met a once before at a conference. I never expected the level of what I suppose are was going to have right now. I think the three of us are probably about 9 percent of the course in Washington. Don't try trying to be considered for publication in a rented location in Australia and now are here like doing the scores pretending at the second quick conference the year after and we never suspected that we are going to broke our own barrier about what the online education was. When I was starting this discourse I was reluctant to say that we're going to get caught up on some land. Now I'm but any comments about that really feel that we are doing a change in our lives without giving into their students a different approach on social issues.

[00:17:11] Because we want to have our rights advocates feel a human rights perspective from a legal perspective and of course we also need to say that we need to prove the court. This is the first time that we are doing it but I'm pretty sure that these really successful experience then next semester will have a better course. Especially the one we are going to continue our knowledge Tjing the friend of success things even eager to think that our cost could be also expanded in that because the more the merrier and we can't stop thinking on a master's degree or social work under a law in a future or summer program generated on human rights from a social work perspective. I think that our course it's just like the first step for us something bigger. Yes. That's one of the things that's really wonderful about working with Alaberto because he thinks big and you know you're very energetic and passionate about it and that really confuses me with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement and it makes it easy to try to write articles and you try to present it more conferences and to think about new ways to develop this. So I think you know the reception of this course that you asked about a surprise that's I mean it's been viewed so favorably by so many different people and people who recognize the ambitious nature of it and that's been surprising and rewarding and it just gives you a lot of encouragement to keep thinking about ways to expand and make it better. So I'm very very excited about the possibility of launching a study abroad.

[00:18:49] The exchanges that we will be able to bring students from Mexico to the U.S. and then we will take students there and some of the ideas about fundraising and really expanding the scope of this course. I mean I just see this is just the beginning. There's a lot I think that's going to happen. Aldaberto mentioned the fact that we presented about our course at the International Conference on

Human Rights Education. I really think that's one of the reasons this course is so groundbreaking. First you have that it's a globally networked classroom which I think in itself is really cutting edge and innovating breaking new ground but also the fact that it's a new approach to teaching human rights education I think is also very groundbreaking definitely from the US perspective and talking to a lawyer of this field. I think that one lack of human rights in general around the world is like people used to think that it's only for years of human rights. Democracy is not exclusive for lawyers. Human rights advocacy should be open to any professional background. And I think that we are now breaking the background barrier. It will be helpful to show on an international context how our human rights are the LaCasse we differ and backgrounds in bold its more successful than an isolated background of LaCasse for human rights. At the end I think that if we do or we get the social workers from University of Buffalo and lawyers and Mexico from Europe you kind of start partnering on potential future projects that will be the best outcome that our students now can be sure that they have a potential partner in another country in another. Barbara before I come on cost human rights. Well thank you very much to me and I congratulate you both on a really wonderful outcome.

[00:20:53] Well thank you so much. But we also need to congratulate you because you were the catalyst kind of brought us together. And so you also deserve credit for that. Was there anything you'd like to ask before we say goodbye. Do you think you want anything more about the score. We were really happy to send information or we receive any good suggestions are also welcome. These courses not only for Masaya Buffalo is for the entire world. Thank you you've been listening to our Aldaberto Mendez Lopez and Filomena Critelli we discussed globally connected classrooms and in social work. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our online and on ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our Web site at W W W dot social work dot buffalo that each of you. And while you're there check out our technology and social work research center. You'll find it under the Community Resources menu.