



An international and unique
**MA Philosophy of Social Innovation:
Reflective Social Practice**
Developing a Social Sensibility

A really different approach to working with complex social processes

We work with what it means to see social situations as alive. There are no frameworks for resolving social problems. We encourage participants to develop new ways of understanding the world and their work, and particularly to develop 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. This programme offers the possibility of understanding and working 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.

The MA Philosophy of Social Innovation: Reflective Social Practice is an Alanus University course delivered together with Crossfields Institute's Proteus School of Reflective Social Practice.

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 social and ecological crises in our world are deepening, beyond the capacity for technical and instrumental responses to find a way through. 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, anyone who wants to work differently and contribute imaginatively and with sensibility to our social future.

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 many theories and practices emerging around alternate worldviews; yet there seems to be little focus on the development of the commensurate faculties required to engage with these worldviews.

We live in a world marked by intransigent social and ecological problems. The core problem with much current praxis is not simply that it doesn't get its 'results' as it defines them. It is more that its very approach severely impoverishes the depth, the integrity, the 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 more 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. We offer a programme that seeks to provide an enlarged picture of the human being (and the world we inhabit). 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

The Reflective Social Practice pathway of the MA Programme will run over three years, with a maximum of 16 participants.

The Diploma part of the programme is divided into six modules, and takes place during the first two years:

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 foundational for the programme; the module around which all the other modules revolve. We present approaches and practices where 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 actively engaging with 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 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 as well, in the understanding that any effective approach to social change has at its root such an ability to see.)

3. Researching Social Practice:

This module too is foundational for the programme – a 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.

4. Self in 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.

5. 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 discernment with respect to professionalism, activism and the needs of social justice and social intervention.

6. Morphology and Organisation

Most social practitioners do their work either working in, or through, the field of organisation. How practitioners work with organisations depends to a large extent on their understanding of the development processes that result in organisations functioning the way they do. This module will explore the morphology of organisations seen as holistic living organisms – as opposed to seeing organisations as mechanisms or mechanical systems – and will investigate the manner in which organisations develop the forms, structuring and practices that characterise them as they develop. Students will explore the metamorphosis, or organic movement, of one moment and form into another, and will learn to appreciate genesis, movement and stuckness in the life of organisations.

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 five) offers the opportunity to work on a number of areas. 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 learning process). 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 Masters project and dissertation part of the programme takes place during the third year:

In this third year you will have the opportunity to research an area of specialisation that explores an aspect of reflective social practice, towards completion of a dissertation. Over the course you will also be able to draw on three general studies modules. These are: Research Methods, Ethics and Professional Practice, Consciousness Studies to inform your reflective social practice learning and professional practice.

The Tutor Group

The Reflective Social Practice specialisation has been developed out of the innovative work of Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff of the Proteus School, who will be core faculty on the course. The programme is also supported by other Crossfields Institute and Alanus University faculty.

Allan and Sue, particularly, have many years experience of work and teaching in the field of social practice, working in Africa, Latin America, Europe and Australasia. Their teaching is informed by a continuing practice with organisations and individuals as well as their own teaching and learning work. They have been developing this particular approach to social sensibility throughout this time, out of several decades experience of running learning programmes in the social field, including their most recent experience over the last six years of working with a Masters Programme first in Central and Eastern Europe, and then internationally.

They draw on a range of ideas and influences that have helped shape their 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. They draw particularly from the practices indicated by a Goethean phenomenology, traditional and contemporary contemplative and reflective practices, and the implications for practice in the social field arising from the understandings developed by the 'new sciences' (from quantum theory to complexity) and by holistic approaches inspired and grounded through observation of living process.

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 as well as environmental 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 have already been 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 and ecological 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

If you are interested in participating in this innovative course we recommend that you have an initial conversation with Allan Kaplan alkaplan@mweb.co.za or Sue Davidoff sued@mweb.co.za to discuss your experience and current situation.

To Enquire

You may send queries about this programme, or simply expressions of interest, or of intent to apply, to Jane Tyler at the Crossfields Institute (Jane.tyler@crossfieldsinstitute.org).

To Apply

Once you have connected with Jane Tyler, and expressed your intention to apply, she will take you through the application process. You will be notified of the result of your application within six weeks after its submission. For application deadlines for the next cohort of students please see the website <http://proteusschool.org.uk/>

Cost of Programme

The full cost of the programme is GBP 18,125, payable at specific – though negotiable – intervals through the three years.

Please note as well that these are the costs for the programme itself; costs for travel and accommodation are not included here.

The location of residential sessions will reflect the geographical composition of the group, to balance the travel necessities of all students.

Dates and Locations

For the latest information on dates and locations of residentials please see the website <http://proteusschool.org.uk/>

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?

"This Masters programme lives inside of me as the generative positive change it intends to see in the world ... as I have immersed myself in it, I have witnessed this change process unfolding through me and around me, in my work and at all the edges of my life. It feeds my life forces in a way that makes the substantial time commitment and consistent rigorous work it takes seem effortless".

Tanya Layne, Deputy Director - Learning Network, South African National Biodiversity Institute

"The Masters has challenged me to see and to feel through a much larger perspective, and to articulate this other perspective into a consistent body of thinking. My practice has transformed, has developed a far clearer and more radical stance, and a capacity for engaging more effectively in the world as it is, with its many paradoxes. My sense of myself – in family, activism and professional life – has been completely renewed".

Eduardo Rombauer, political activist and social practitioner, Brazil

Please Contact

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www.crossfieldsinstitute.org

<http://proteusschool.org.uk/>