

## Teaching Social Work: Reflections on Pedagogy and Practice

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# BOOK REVIEW

## TEACHING SOCIAL WORK: REFLECTIONS ON PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE

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Csiernik, Rick & Hillock, Susan (Eds.) (2021). *Teaching Social Work: Reflections on Pedagogy and Practice*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. Pages: 291. Price: 55.00 CAD (hardcover).

The book *Teaching Social Work* is a useful resource for scholars new to the field of Social Work as well as experienced educators. As the authors state, the book is intended for educators. Given that the book focuses on pedagogy and in-classroom learning, this is an accurate description of the intended audience. While the book does offer some thinking points that may be relevant to practicing Social Workers, the main focus is on practical applications (e.g., frameworks, techniques, practices, theory) that would be most appropriate in a classroom.

The authors range from Social Work educators and students to practitioners working in the field. These diverse perspectives lead to a rich range of knowledge and experiences informing suggestions for educating new Social Workers. This is important as many practitioners, even beyond the field of Social Work, recognize that learning in the classroom and practice in the real world, though they share some qualities, are distinct experiences.

The book is organized in three main sections: pedagogical perspectives, teaching practice, and common issues in teaching. The book begins with a recognition of Social Work practice as a multi-dimensional and complex field, a thread throughout the individual chapters. The chapters provide a range of applications, from encouraging high-level thought to specific practices that could be applied in a classroom. While some chapters are rooted heavily in research and scholarship, others are based on personal experience and anecdotes.

An important transition for many Social Work stu-

dents is that from classroom to workforce. Accordingly, there are several chapters that explore this transition and offer practical advice for educators helping facilitate this transition for students. The book focuses on this transition, or the bridge from school to real world, through exploration of practicum teaching, community-based research, and preparing students for practice.

There are several important issues in Social Work practice and teaching that this book highlights. These are: issues of race and whiteness, marginalization of certain perspectives, lack of indigeneity, and neo-liberal impacts on education. While exploring these issues, the authors provide strategies to overcome them in practice that could be applied by educators in their own classrooms. All of the authors are Canadian, and practice across the country from the west coast to the east coast. Though the majority of authors practice and teach in Ontario, this is not surprising as roughly half of the accredited Social Work programs in Canada are situated in Ontario. In general, all of the issues explored in this book are relevant to the current Canadian context.

Several chapters emerged as significant, given current events across the world (e.g., the Calls to Action issued by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and the anniversary of the Black Lives Matter movement). Chapter 4: "Tackling Whiteness in the Classroom," explores critical pedagogy, how whiteness may be expressed in the classroom, and offers a challenge to the discourse of the "good" Social Worker. The authors

note current misunderstandings of anti-oppressive practice, a concept commonly taught in Social Work courses, and propose that a deeper understanding of anti-oppression is needed, moving anti-oppression from a concept talked about theoretically to one talked about and taught in terms of practice. In my opinion, the authors were encouraging current and future Social Workers to not only *think* anti-oppressively but to also *be* anti-oppressive and ensure that their practice is anti-oppressive. The authors also put forth a suggestion for moving beyond relying on the teaching of competencies to developing in students the skill of engaging critically and practicing reflexively, challenging students to acknowledge the ways that they may benefit from current structures and practices in society, and encouraging them to see the world as a complex and nuanced environment in which multiple systems can interact. This suggestion strongly resonated with me in light of recent worldwide issues and as someone who currently practices in higher education and sees the complexity of social issues and the need for reflexive practice first-hand.

The importance of critically reflexive (and reflective) practice was echoed throughout the book but was specifically discussed in Chapter 6: "The Crying White Woman and the Politics of Emotion in Anti-Oppressive Social Work Education." In this chapter, the authors offer an astute and insightful exploration of the archetype of the "crying white woman" and how this seemingly innocuous act is in fact rooted in broader sociopolitical histories. As a white woman and Social Worker myself, I feel that both chapters discussed above remind me of the importance of a critical understanding of race and the imperative that "We must work from a standpoint of equity for all..." (p.92).

Chapter 5: "Classrooms as Circles: The Pedagogy of Sharing Indigenous Worldviews," offers insight into the application of Indigenous Learning in the classroom through the authors' sharing of their experiences. They share that incorporating the classroom as a circle into their teaching enabled learning to move beyond the traditional boundaries of education (i.e., learning became a holistic experience rather than one solely of mind). The authors cover several important considerations such as values, student perspectives, and considerations as a non-Indigenous educator. The decolonization and Indigenization of classrooms is broadly recognized across Canada as an imperative, prompting many institutions to create and adopt strategies to enact change. Though

this change is occurring at a high level, "Classrooms as Circles" offers a strategy, from an Indigenous lens, that can be applied in a classroom, but yielding benefits far beyond.

Overall, this book is easy to read. It is written in accessible language that anyone who has a background in Social Work will be able to understand. The short length of the chapters enables the reader to reflect between chapters, while not being inundated by information.