

Reflecting and Teaching on the Dialectical Nature of Social Work

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Abstract : Dialectics theory perceives two or more forces or themes as mutually opposed and negating on the one hand and as interdependent for their definition, existence, and resolution on the other. Such opposites might never be fully reconciled but might, simultaneously, continue to produce a higher level of integration and synthesis as well as tension, contradictions, and paradoxes. The identity of social work is constructed by poles; an understanding that emerges through key concepts that shape the profession. The key concept of person-in-environment creates dialectical tensions between the psychological versus the social pole. Important examples that reflect this focus on the psychological versus the social nature of human beings. This meta-perspective influences and constructs the implementation of values, ways of intervention, and professional relationships, e.g., creating a conflict between personal/social empowerment and social control and correction as the aims of the profession. Social work is dynamic and changing, with a unique way of perceiving and conceptualizing human behavior. Social workers must be able to face and accept the contradicting elements inherent in practicing social work. The basic philosophy for social work education is a dialectic conceptualization. In light of the above, social work students require dialectics as a critical mode of perception, reflection, and intervention. In the presentation, the focus will be on reflection on teaching students to conceptualize dialectics as a frame when training to be social workers. It is believed that the focus should emphasis two points: 1) the need to assist students to identify poles and to analyze the interrelationships created between them while coping emotionally with the tension and difficulties involved in containing these poles; 2) teaching students to integrate poles as a basis for assessment, planning, and intervention.

Keywords : professional ontology, a generic social work education, skills and values of social work, reflecting on social work teaching methods

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