

Ethnic Relations in Social Work Education: A Study of Teachers' Strategies and Experiences in Sweden

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Abstract : Research that combines educational science, social work and migration studies shows that ethnic relations tend to be represented from various angles and with different content. As studied here, it is found in steering documents, literature, and teaching that the construction of ethnic relations related to social work varies in education over time. The study has its actuality in changed preconditions to social work education caused by the demographic development and the on-going globalization in the Swedish society. In this presentation we will explore strategies and experiences of teaching ethnic relations at social work educations in Sweden. The purpose is to investigate the strategies that are used and what content is given to ethnic relations in the social work education. University teachers are interviewed concerning their interpretation of steering documents related to the content and how they transform this in their teaching. Even though there has been a tradition to include aspects as intercultural relations and ethnicity, the norms of the welfare state has continued to be the basis for how to conceptualize people's way of living and social problems. Additionally, the contemporary migration situation with a large number of refugees coming to Sweden peaking in 2015, dramatically changes the conditions for social work as a practice field. Increasing economic and social tensions in Sweden, becomes a challenge for the universities to support the students to achieve theoretical and critical knowledge and skills needed to work for social change, human rights and equality in the ethnic diverse Swedish society. The study raises questions about how teachers interpret the goals of the social work programs in terms of ethnic relations. How do they transform this into teaching? How are ethnic relations in social work described and problematized in lectures, cases and examinations? The empirical material is based on interviews with teachers involved in the social work education at four Swedish universities. The interviewees were key persons in the sense that they could influence the course content, and they were drawn from different semesters of the program. In depth interviews are made on the themes; personal entrance, description and understanding of ethnic relations in social work, teachers' conception of students understanding of ethnic relations, and the content, form and strategies for teaching used by the teachers. The analysis is thematic and inspired from narrative analysis. The results show that the subject is relatively invisible in steering documents. The interviewees have experienced changes in the teaching over time, with less focus on intercultural relations and specific cultural competence. Instead ethnic relations are treated more contextually and interacting with categories as gender, class and age. The need of theoretical and critical knowledge of migration and ethnic relations in a broad sense but also for specific professional use is emphasized.

Keywords : ethnic relations, social work education, social change, human rights, equality, ethnic diversity in Sweden

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