

Educating for Acceptance or Action: Bachelor of Social Work Education in Canada

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Abstract : In a challenging era of neoliberalism and managerialism in social services, the status of Canadian social work education at the Bachelor of Social Work level (BSW) was examined to determine how prepared students were to practice in a time of resource cutbacks and insecurity. Curricula in BSW programs was the focus as this generalist degree results in the greatest number of social work graduates in Canada, most of whom work at the front lines in service delivery. The study reviewed the practice frameworks that students in BSW programs were exposed to. Traditionally, schools of social work have embraced two major practice frameworks. The person in environment framework is a well-established practice framework taught in most schools. The framework offers some focus on smaller scale social change, tweaking existing arrangements and is more accepting of the status quo. An alternate practice framework taught in fewer schools has been described as a structural, progressive or anti oppressive framework. This latter framework challenges the status quo, is focused on social justice and social transformation, often incorporating social action strategies to ensure marginalized voices are heard. Using a content analysis methodology of keywords and phrases to delineate framework orientation, practice frameworks articulated in the curricula were determined by reviewing the mission/mandate of schools offering a BSW degree, their core course outlines and core course textbooks. Social action, as one strategy for initiating social change and transformation was considered. Initial research for 28 schools was completed in 2000, with follow up replications of the initial study in 2005 and 2014. These earlier studies displayed that the dominant practice framework taught in BSW programs was the person in environment framework. A lesser number of schools were categorized as primarily offering a structural, progressive or anti oppressive framework. The findings from the current study of 39 Canadian schools of social work are considered to determine how prominent structural, progressive and anti oppressive frameworks exist in current BSW curricula. This study can assist in contemplating the question - are we educating future practitioners for acceptance or action.

Keywords : social work education and pedagogy, social change, social justice, social services

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