

Teaching ethics in Social Work schools

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Abstract

Curricula including ethics and ethical practice provide foundational knowledge for SW practitioners. Further the acquisition of such knowledge provides a powerful transformational and political education process for developing professionals. This paper critiques aspects of current SW ethics education, which evidently evade both transformation and politics by presenting an implicit, static, relativist philosophical framework for ethical practice. It is posited that existing models present context specific ethical practice with little critical analysis. Professional social work ethics ought not be about "fitting in" with established context-specific, ethical practice rather it is argued that both educators and students benefit from an ethics curriculum that is founded on an explicit, dynamic, relationist philosophical framework which focuses on the ontological primacy of relations, of both human and non-human entities. An explicit, relationist framework allows the description and analysis of the history and politics of emergent ethical practices, both for the Social Worker herself and for the context she works within, including her relationship with educators and supervisors. Such a framework promotes critical reflection which is an essential process in assisting each graduate to locate herself on a trajectory of personal and professional transformation, and this is the benchmark of effective lifelong ethical practice.