

# Walking between the Lines: Towards a New Teaching Paradigm in Social Work Education for Sustainability

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# Social work: A profession in (ongoing) transition

- Academic programs for social work education around the world undergo changes reflecting the internal discourse developing within the profession. The most recent definition of social work is:  
*"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (IFSW, IASSW, ICSW, 2014)*
- Recently, in addition to this discourse, there is also a discourse encouraging social workers to critically examine the interaction between climate changes, natural disasters, environmental aspects of life in different regions of the world, and social policy and social work (e.g., Dominelli, 2012). The link between society and the environment has even begun to appear in some cases in professional ethics codes of social workers worldwide (e.g., IASW, 2018).
- Despite these changes both in the professional discourse and in the content of social work education programs in different countries, traditional teaching methods still seem to dominate the schools of social work.
- Global insights and the professional context that is shifting from a narrow view of social work to a broad, transdisciplinary view of the great challenges facing humanity raise fundamental questions regarding the methods of teaching and education in social work, as well as the kind of social workers produced using these methods. One such central question can be: *are traditional teaching approaches appropriate for social work education for sustainable environments and societies?*

# Paradigms currently prevalent in social work education in many countries (Levin, in process)

- The Modern-Positivist paradigm
- The critical paradigm
- Critical pedagogy



# A new, nameless paradigm:

Addressed based on Guba & Lincoln's (1994) essential traits for paradigms:

1. **Ontological traits** (Or, what is the nature of reality?) - a suggested combination of value-based realism (based on the trinity of equality, fairness, and social justice), the acknowledgment of multiple perspectives, and developing the ability to listen to others with the constant intention to learn and the constant willingness to change.



2. Epistemological traits (or, what is the nature of the relationship between the student, the teacher, and the subject learned?)

An offered challenging of the hierarchies currently present in different aspects within and outside the classroom, while acknowledging the socio-historical significance of dominant interpretations of social situations.



### 3. Methodological issues (or, how do we know what we believe can be known?)

Encouraging links/partnerships between academia and community and the necessity of reciprocity to promote effective solutions to current challenges.





We are all a work in progress..

I'm happy to stay in touch.

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