
Sustainable community development through decolonial social work education: A South African

perspective

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Abstract

Education is a tool for emancipation not only of students only but of the communities to be served. Social Work education in particular focuses on advocating for human rights and social justice for all others. This suggests a need for education that is founded on the needs and experiences not only of students but of the society to be served. This also suggests an avoidable link between communities, universities; curriculum and the workplace. This chain needs to feed and speak to one another. An imbalance or shift to any component of the chain means the destruction of the whole system. A concern for the balanced chain for sustainability in the societal system evoked the writing and presentation of this paper. As South Africa celebrates twenty-five years of democracy, most South African citizens' lives are still characterised by injustices of the past and continue to experience and suffer from the colonial legacies. This has been evident in South African higher education institutions in the past few years, 2015 and 2016 which have been dominated by the #FeesMustFall student protests. These protests have been towards 'free, decolonised higher education. Moreover, the students have called for more contextually relevant curricula that would be free from colonial influences (Kreitzer 2012; Makhanya 2016). In South Africa, social work education and training have been deeply affected by colonialism and apartheid. Dumbrill and Green in early 2008 also posit that, despite the commitment to diversity and inclusion, social work continues to be taught in Eurocentric philosophies that do not value the indigenous knowledge system. Mkhize, Mathe and Buthelezi (2014) particularly highlight that the social work code of ethics continues to be dominated by the epistemological paradigms of the Western colonial conquerors. Maringe and Ojo (2017) have also argued that while South African universities offer local degrees, the content and epistemologies presented in such courses have not changed from colonial idealism. This means that Western European philosophies still dominate the African academy. This study adopted a qualitative approach in engaging with literature that speaks to decoloniality and sustainable community development through social work education. Adopting the principles of community development alluded from Maringe and Ojo (2017), this paper discusses how these principles can be adopted in social work education to ensure sustainable community development.

Keywords: Decolonization, S. Africa, social work education
