September 1992

Alive On the Street, Dead In the Classroom: The Return of Radical Social Work and the Manufacture of Activism

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Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol19/iss3/9
International evidence is presented for a renewal of radical social work. After a decade of monopolization by neoconservatism in all aspects of public policy and private consciousness, a new commitment to radical analysis and transformation is detected. Radical social work, the second time around, will need to avoid the earlier mistake of abandoning action for critique. In the context of social work education the manufacture of radicalism in the classroom is explored.

This paper starts from the observation that radical social work is again in an emergent state. If social work is to avoid one of its past mistakes, radical social work must attend more to its own teaching mission, hence the title of this paper. The continued deterioration in the capitalist condition sustains radical outposts of social workers reaching for a structuralist analysis and an activist style of intervention. In that sense radical social work is "alive on the streets". Whereas the street cannot but host the dreadful sick parade of capitalism (homelessness, poverty, militarism, corruption etc.) the classroom avoids street realities and turns inward to its ostensible agendas of education, when in effect it is tutoring us how to live in and not against capitalism. In that sense the social work classroom is dead.

I would like to record my gratitude to Professor Peter Leonard (Canada), Assistant Professor David Wagner (USA) and Professor Norm Smith and Drs. McCouat and Peile (Australia) who commented on an earlier draft.
This paper picks up this issue by exploring the question of how students come to radicalism. It speaks of radicalism by default and intentional radicalism. The latter notion becomes a focus as the paper explores the question of whether, and to what extent, radicalism can be "manufactured" in schools of social work. It should be noted that this is a discursive and theoretical paper. It will be rejected by readers seeking empirical assurances. No apology is made for this emphasis. The new radical social work will have to be more theoretically sophisticated than its predecessor of the 1960s and 1970s, and will have to continue to challenge the distorted and power-laden realities that issue from empiricism (De Maria, 1982).

To hold to its focus on radical pedagogy this paper must avoid some critical issues. Three that come to mind are the politico-strategic question of how to develop and defend a radical social work "corner" in orthodox curricula, the ethical issues that arise in the inevitable race between the radical and nonradical educator to the hearts and minds of students, and the formidable obstacles that the profession, agencies, and governments mount to the practice of radical social work. This is a reluctant avoidance because these issues have been ignored for too long. I am not aware of any efforts to respond to the first two. The third issue has been picked up, but not to any satisfactory extent, (Reeser and Leighninger, 1990, pp. 88-89).

Some of my colleagues may well conclude that, notwithstanding these omissions, the paper is not radical enough. No space is given to how to teach students radical strategies like alliance building, collectivism, whistleblowing, protesting, and activist interpersonal helping. Important as they are, these issues are not directly part of the paper's analysis, which in a small way, attempts to contribute to an understanding of radical social work education by examining some of the methodological principles on which a radical pedagogy should proceed in the 1990s. The paper is in two parts. In the first I corroborate my claim that there is a significant renewal going on in radical social work. In the second part, I explore this issue of intentional radicalism.
The Radical Social Work Phoenix

While I am conscious of the necessity to avoid a simple periodicity whereby social work history is staged like Freudian psychodrama (Kauffman, 1991, p. 5), and equally skeptical about “cycles” in social work history (Franklin, 1990), it is now a truism of our profession’s history that the 1970s witnessed a call for the radical reconstruction of western forms of social work (Rein, 1970; Cloward & Piven, 1972; Bailey & Brake, 1975; Throssell, 1975; Galper, 1975, 1978; Leighninger & Knickmeyer, 1976; Lichtenberg, 1976; Cowley, Kaye, Mayo & Thompson, 1977; Dean, 1977; Hunter & Saleebay, 1977; Statham, 1978; Leonard & Corrigan, 1978; Skenridge & Lennie, 1978; Leonard, 1978; means, 1979). That the call was taken up is beyond doubt, despite the appearance of some notable reactions inside (Pinker, 1971; Donnison, 1975) and outside (Bell, 1973; Lipset, 1976) the profession, and the qualifications offered in a recent study into American social work activism (Reeser and Epstein, 1991, 29-30).

If social work had “entered its radical hour” (Pearson, 1975, p. 132) in the 1970s, the following decade saw a dramatic decline in the power of the radical message, (Wagner, 1989b, pp. 275-276; Kauffman, 1990, p. 13). The 1980s had the radical social work movement fighting its own Hasada against the international reappearance of conservatism in politics, social policy and social work. The radical message was again marginalised by mainstream social work in America, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Austin believes that American social work activism did not decline in the 1980s. I am not too sure whether this is a contrary view to mine or not. I suspect not. My point goes to the power (legitimacy) of the radical message. I am of the view that that declined. Austin seems to be talking programmatically, reflecting on how the activist agenda widened in the 1980s from its class base to encompass issues of gender, AIDS etc. My only quarrel with Austin’s view is that what he saw as activist social work may not have been radical social work, which by the 1990s, I claim, had its back to the wall, (Austin, 1985). I comment on the dangerous (but understandable) fashion of changing the word “radical” to “activist” further on in the paper.

For a while there in the 1980s it seemed that the radical message was being kept alive by loosely organised enclaves of feminist social workers (Brook & Davis, 1985; Hudson, 1985; Becker & MacPherson, 1988) and leftist community workers (Craig, Derricourt, & Loney, 1982; Lees & Mayo, 1984). In a real sense that was true. However, one must guard against overstatement here. Radical literature in the early 1980s was still being written for, and read by, the ordinary discontented practitioner who was not necessarily solely identified with feminist and community orientations. The works by Leonard, Simpkin, Withorn, Galper, Bolger, Corrigan, Docking & Frost, and Walker & Beaumont, come to mind here (Leonard, 1984, Simpkin, 1983; Withorn, 1984; Galper, 1980; Bolger, Corrigan, Docking and Frost, 1981; Walker & Beaumont, 1981). These books tended to stand out as the radical social work bibliography slowed down during the 1980s, a casualty of the ideological blitzkrieg that saw the effective and resolute plundering of the welfare states across the western world (Leonard, 1990).
By the end of the decade a new stirring in radical writing was to be observed. In the United Kingdom Langan and Lee edited a collection called Radical Social Work Today (1989). This book seemed conscious of being the last in an unplanned trilogy, after Bailey & Brake’s, enormously influential Radical Social Work (1975), and their equally important Radical Social Work and Practice (1980). Langan & Lee started off their collection with a piece pertinently titled “Whatever happened to radical social work?”. They offer no sad, reminiscent piece on a past era. Far from writing a thanatology of radical social work, the editors proclaim a radical influence in current British social policy that is both strong and continuing.

A fresh interest in radical consciousness is also detectable in American writing (Wagner, 1988a,b; 1989a,b; 1990). Taking an ethnographic position, Wagner has collected biographic data on social workers involved in the production of Catalyst, the radical social service journal (of which he was one of the founders). Wagner constructed a social work history typology to explain the ebb and flow of radicalism in American social work. It seems that an understanding of what are the critical triggers for the reemergence of radical thought and practice are as important as insights into the absorption of radicalism. Hence lies the strength of Wagner’s work. Reeser and Leighninger have also noted a willingness to reexplore radical issues through the establishment of a social justice specialisation at Western Michigan University’s school of social work (Reeser and Leighninger, 1990). In Canada, Moreau has recently returned to his structural approach via the concept of empowerment (Moreau, 1990). Moreau first presented his structural approach in 1979, at the tail end of social work’s first radical period. Now at the beginning of the second radical period, he appears again, restating his case for wider and more critical analysis and action and focusing this restatement on empowerment. Still on the Canadian scene Lecomte has recently documented the issues and conflicts thrown up at Carlton University School of Social Work as it moved to de-emphasise its clinical orientation and embrace a structural understanding of human suffering (Lacomte, 1991).

In Australia the reemergence of a radical consciousness in social work has been commented on and developed by Fook,
(1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991b) and De Maria, (1991, a,b). Fook has worked in the important area of integrating radical theory into casework practice. one of her central premises being that casework is not inherently conservative, therefore it holds radical potential, (Fook, 1990, p. 22). Cole, another Australian social worker, has exemplified Fook's idea in the way she worked radically with a long term expsychiatric patient called "Bruce". She explains;

...I was trying to free [Bruce] to take more control of his life and relinquish the “sick” role, and in the long term, to challenge a society which condones a mental health system which creates victims out of people like Bruce. (Cole, 1990, p. 134)

In addition to these aspirations, the strength of Cole's work is visible in the way she weaves her practice into the contemporary radical social work literature. We can also note that the professional journal of social work in Australia (Australian Social Work) will carry for the first time in its history, a special issue in 1992 on radical social work. This is a result of the editorial committee being petitioned by social workers who wanted radical issues raised in the professional literature (Fook, 1991a, p. 2).

One can also expect that 1990s radical scholarship will build on the important rewritings of welfare history that occurred in the 1980s in Australia and elsewhere (Kennedy, 1982; Kennedy, 1985; Kennedy, 1985; Watts, 1987; Garton, 1990).

It remains in this section to note research that concludes radicalism was not just a 1960s fad, nor was it washed away by the reappearance of conservatism. Wagner's findings suggest that the popular view of the 1960s and 1970s radicals growing up and out of their radicalism and returning to the mainstream is simply that, the popular view (Wagner, 1988b). McAdam confirms this in his recent study of the activists involved in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project (1989, p. 745). Works by Whalen and Flacks (1989) and Marwell, Aiken and Demerath (1987) also point to the durability of radical commitment. In 1990, Socialist Review published four special issues in honour of the journal's twentieth anniversary. These issues (particularly No. 4) attempted to attack the notion that radicalism is not alive in the Nineties. Notwithstanding this counter evidence,
one must concede the point made at the beginning of the paper, that the great majority of the international social work community practice is conservative and liberal frameworks. I mention this to signal an attitude to the reader that the central presupposition of the paper — that a radical resurgence is on the way in social work — speaks of a minority movement to radical consciousness and action. Our history seems to indicate that radical consciousness is irrepressible. However, whether this irrepressible minority actually grows in numbers is a new question entirely — and one that I am happy to keep outside the confines of this paper.

That Word “Radical”

It would be reckless to proceed any further into this paper without some common understanding about that much feared and abused, yet taken for granted word radical. The radical social work education debate has often stalled in the past partly because the word radical was not conceptually defined in such a way as to encourage dialogue. Rather the word was usually found fluttering on ideological banners as divisions within social work engaged in overheated and seriously misinformed contests over purpose and strategy alike. The post 1990s radical education debate will be well served if and when some standardisation of usage is established.

It is important that this article reveals some attempt to meet this call. Otherwise we will continue to find ourselves in the position that Reeser and Epstein were recently in when they were scared off by the term radical and substituted the more upmarket and benign word “activist”, (Reeser and Epstein, 1991, p. 4). This substitution, driven I suspect by methodological as well as ideological considerations, does not assist as it ignores if not renounces on the dual criteria of radicalism, whereby change is fundamental and intervention transformative.

I propose to talk more about both these matters in the pages to come. I would only add here that it is recognised that this dual criteria put a high hurdle in front of social work. For the purpose of achieving a real identity for the new radical social work, this is the least we have to demand. The reason for this is that radical social work has lost much of the inner consensus it
had in the 1970s as a result of it no longer being socialistically aligned. The word radical in radical social work of the 1970s was based to a great extent on a class analysis. Today its fashionable relation activism appears to have floated free of this perspective. Indeed, Reeser and Epstein now talk approvingly of the social action issues of the 1980s being those that “transcend [ed] class” (Reeser and Epstein, 1991, p. 131).

I struggle with the issue of what (if anything) can transcend class. I think the struggle is important because unlike radicalism the first time round, 1990s radical social work will quickly succumb to anachronism if it insists that the transformative agenda can only be energised through a class-organised socialist framework. We can expect, at least for the visible future, that socialist conceptions of reality will continue to decline (Cowling & Wilde, 1989, p. 2). Radical social work operates now out of a multi-prescriptive community of radical feminists, radical Christians, radical community workers, critical policy analysts etc. Kauffman talks about the “politicisation of previously non-political terrains”. He refers to sexuality, interpersonal relations and culture as “crucial sites of political contestation” (Kauffman, 1990b, p. 67). In the last twenty years gender and race have emerged as the two great arenas for the struggles against capitalist oppression, and radical social work has responded to these in very robust terms (De Hoyes & De Hoyes, 1986; Nes & Iadicola, 1989; Dominelli & McCloud, 1989; Dominelli, 1989). Radical social work can handle a waning in the class based nature of conflict as long as it holds onto the centrality of conflict deep within the nature of capitalism and the importance of fighting capitalist oppression on new sites.

While this multisite conception of capitalist oppression necessarily broadens and enriches the radical social work agenda, (Kauffman, 1990b, p. 67-68) it does pose problems of paradigmatic competition. For example, feminists have been active through the western world in getting strong pro-women legislation onto the statute books. The sad irony is that these statutes (and the oppressive bureaucratic practices so legitimated) sit alongside once relatively fair and generous social security legislation that now shows the effects of a twenty year campaign of stigma, cutbacks and victim-blame. Yet the feminists do not cry
much over this matter — a matter that I believe is properly understood as a class matter (the welfare class). So in this case we have the transcendence of gender over class. Women on welfare read about the successes of their better off sisters as one devours an escapist novel, yet the reading is done within the ostensibly intractable circumstances of their own impoverishment.

Given that the socialist alignment is gone or going, given that the emergent radical community is consequently multi-prescriptive, now more than ever we need a broad, non-ideological definition of radicalism.

The word radical has a Latin derivation, *radix*, meaning root. The etymology of this word is traceable at least back to the fourteenth century where it was used in the botanical context by medieval philosophers to refer to the “humour” or moisture naturally present in all plants (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 91). By the sixteenth century the word was being used to refer to qualities inherent in the nature or essence of all things. Thus the following statement, dated by philologists at 1560; “Idilnes is Mother Radycall Of All Vicis” (Simpson and Weiner, p. 91). A meaning was emergent at this time that was associated with the root or foundation of phenomena. By the seventeenth century this meaning was popularised within a political context. In his treatise On Parties, Bolingbroke was able to say in 1735, “Such a Remedy might have wrought a radical cure of the evil that threatens our Constitution” (Simpson and Weiner, p. 91). By the eighteenth century the word also came to refer to English political action that sought fundamental change — hence radical reform.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this meaning again changed to refer to the revolutionary acts of people on the extreme left of politics (radical left). It was in this broad period that the word probably picked up its pejorative sense. In 1819 Scott wrote, “Radical is a word in very bad odour here, being used to denote a set of blackguards” (Simpson and Weiner, p. 93). In 1873 Herbert Spencer added, “...the Radical does not see the benefit that there is in that which he wishes to destroy”. This quote raises another popular element in the word’s history. Radical is readily a description given by someone with interests in the status quo, to someone else interested in changes to that
prevailing order of things. People are usually called radical long before they accept the word as a meaningful self-description.

It ought not to be inferred from this simple history that the word went through various meanings in a clear-cut way. Some little time after Scott's statement we find Thompson saying:

The term radical once employed as a name of low reproach, has found its way into high places and is gone forth as the title of a class, who glory in its designation (Simpson and Weiner, p. 93).

The meaning that needs to be recovered from this baffling tradition is one that emphasises a belief and interest in the fundamental. Muller sums up this denotation when he said: "There is a true radicalism in scholarships which despises all measures which do not go to the root of things" (Muller, 1885, p. 921).

Our task is still incomplete since we have to trim and tuck for a better fit into social work, because ours is a pragmatic, not a speculative enterprise. The social work radical is someone who has a philosophical leaning towards the importance of fundamental analysis. Within the radical social work context we can restate that as a commitment to discovering first causes of oppression. That however is only half the story and many social workers who are called radical end here. The next stage is to extend the insights gleaned from cause analysis into social action that is a direct logical contingent of the radical analysis. In other words, to move on from structural analysis to structural practice (Moreau, 1979, 1990; Fook, 1988, 1989, 1990), with the sobering awareness that the latter is far more difficult to achieve than the former. The connection between discovering the foundations of disadvantage, and acting upon these insights is, I suspect, crucial to any definition of radical social work and, by extension, is the basis upon which one builds a radical pedagogy. On that point we can note Paulo Friere's words to the 1988 World Conference of Social Workers; "The role of the educator, the dream of the educator, is the permanent transformation of the world" (Friere, 1990, p. 5).

The Forgotten Student

Encouraging as these findings and developments about a radical renewal are, it is hoped that the new post-1980s interest
in radical social work will not replicate the blindspot inherent in the literature of the past twenty years, i.e. a clear, but nevertheless hard to understand neglect by the radical social work movement of its own teaching mission. The focus had been very much on radical practice after graduation, not radical education before graduation. One can make the same point about the radical writers in this period that has been said about Marx. It was observed that the person was not recognisable in Marxist writing until he or she donned overalls and was ready for factory work. The radical social work writers have similarly ignored the social work education process and, by extension, the social work student.

Galper (1976; 1980, Ch. 11) has been one of the few (until recently) to make published contributions in this neglected yet important area. He has spoken of the American social work student experience as "joyless and demoralising", with some schools trying to "casework" nascent radicalism out of students, and other schools ignoring the radical analysis altogether (1980, p. 231). Herrick's later study on why American social workers leave the profession corroborates Galper's view (Herrick, 1983). In a similar vein Vayda, commenting on Canadian education practice, reminds us of the commonplace betrayal of the critical, analytic mood in social work students for the acquisition of marketable skills (1980, p. 105). Speaking of Australian conditions, Watts sees what Galper sees. He juxtaposes the client experience onto the student experience and finds an educational process "fraught with anxiety and a foreboding and chronic sense of imminent failure" (Watts, 1983). Another recent Australian study points to a deep reservoir of discontent amongst social work students who feel let down by their professional education, (O'Connor and Dalgleish, 1983).

Implicit in all these observations is the notion of the suffering student caught within a system unable or unwilling to practice what it preaches. Commitment is deflated by the grading policy, hierarchies of credibility are imposed by didactic teaching, and creativity downgraded by the pressure on students to accept a faculty map of the world. That the combined effect of all these forces produces a noncritical, nonactive, yet fully self-explored master of compassion, is of no surprise.
What is intriguing is that some students, salmon-like, each year go up the curriculum river against these currents. We have much to learn from these people, and the native educational — survival processes they use. Regrettably the student voice in social work education research is usually muffled, organised, and sanitised by the empirical and taxonomic procedures involved.

Some of these salmon students have travelled by default to radicalism. In other words, their prestudent life conditions of oppression offered ripe contexts to clearly perceive and respond to curriculum oppression. These students appear to have intuitively (if that is the right word) exploited the contradictions in their various learning settings to great personal effect. It needs to be said that no grandiose claims are being made here. Preradicalised social work students have to deal with enormous pressures that seek to delegitimate prior experiences or at best, reframe them so that they become respectable (if not neutralised) configurations on the faculty map. The little amount of research on this point confirms this observation. Philip’s examination of preferred students in a conservative social work department offers clear examples of ideological discrimination, (Philip, 1991). Likewise, McCouat has drawn parallels between student oppression and client victimisation, (McCouat, 1991).

In Wagner’s sample, just under half of his subjects saw themselves as being radical prior to their social work studies, (Wagner, 1987a, p. 391). This path to radicalism is usually not wide enough to take the whole class. If that were the case we would speak of intentional radicalism, because a curriculum purpose would be active. This paper wants to explore the unusual — the intentional radicalisation of social work students.

Radicalism Through Curricula Intent

Wagner found in his study of social work activists that their radicalism was influenced by their social work education (Wagner, 1989a, pp. 390–391). In another paper he is more specific about this observation;

One of the most interesting findings of my study was the tendency of professional social work education (whether in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s) to radicalise idealistic, but non-radical, entrants, and to
activate previously radical but relatively inactive entrants. Subjects attributed this not to the overall political environment of social work school[s] but to a limited number of radical faculty, field instructors, or fellow students and to their reading. (My emphasis.) (Wagner, 1989b, fn.25).

I have no reason to quarrel with Wagner's findings but they do raise the issue of the ghettoisation of radical pedagogy, protected by the yet to be totally destroyed university ethos of freedom of thought and expression. I think it is important to not only touch the tenuity and fragility of these teaching arrangements, whereby the radical agenda in a department is carried by one or two teachers, but also to reflect on what learning the radical student gets from these tokenistic or marginalised arrangements.

I am not talking about learning radical perspectives and content. From Wagner's results we note that radical teachers seem to effectively impart these things. I am talking more about learning how to be a radical social worker from modelling the radical teacher, when the model stands a big chance of being marginalised and victimised. I can offer no more poignant example of this than an experience I had in 1991 with Roy Bailey. I heard Roy sing in a Brisbane nightspot. Sitting in the audience, I was conscious of two things. I was listening to a man of utmost sincerity, with a marvelous voice who sang protest songs that were keenly inspirational. I was also conscious of listening to an exradical social worker; a man whose writings and teachings were remarkably influential in radicalism's first phase that I referred to above (Bailey, 1989, p. XVII). After the show I went with a social work friend up to meet him. She said that his writings had changed her world. While he remained courteous, the mention of social work blocked any further communication. We were emissaries from a world he had erased from his map. I was left with contradictory feelings. His loss to social work was a gain to worldwide radical consciousness, as he is probably a better radical as a folk singer than as an academic. Why? Probably because he is unfettered and is with friends. I also started to feel what the pressures must have been like on him; particularly as Thatcherism unravelled more and more of the fabric of public welfare.
If the social work student is offered a model that is radical, what does she or he learn of this? Although I am not aware of research on this point, it is logical to assume that many students would get scared off at the prospect of life on the fringe.

If radicalism is not marginalised in a social work department it either means that the school totally embraces it (like the department at Warwick University under Professor Peter Leonard) or there is a healthy dialectic struggle going on that has got beyond the sterile conflicts traditionally engendered in false dichotomies such as helping vs activism. I think it has to be admitted that I am talking about rare and infrequent departmental realities now. The more usual scenarios are marginalisation and indifference. With marginalisation the philosophy and content of radicalism is pushed to the edge of departmental life. Often this is done under the cloak of indifference, whereby resource and staff issues determine a need for a radical place in the curriculum for reasons such as widening the subject menu.

What are our options, demarginalisation? Probably not as that is another way of saying ideological cohabitation. In dialectical terms the frameworks (orthodox and radical) need each other. Cohabitation bleeds off the conflict and reduces tension. Without these we have lost the change dynamic. In the true spirit of dialectic contradictions we need closeness and distance between the contending frameworks. Radicalism needs to hold to an identity whereby it is, and is seen to be rebellious, transgressive and transformative. It also needs the context of the other, and vice versa, to achieve change.

What is the answer — peaceful coexistence? While this appears to be a common modus vivendi in schools of social work, it is a nonsolution, being based as it is on liberalist tenants emanating from the university ethos I spoke of earlier; rather than on dialectic principles, (De Maria, 1983). I can offer no answer to this question (in terms of finality) only the endorsement of a permanent process of paradigmatic conflict and struggle. Presently departmental realities are governed by tyrannies of consensus. The politics of homogeneity needs to be refashioned as a politics of difference, with this difference making its presence felt in the everyday life of departments; assessment, field
work placements, subject planning, resource allocation. If these matters are reformed from temporary sites of consensus to permanent areas of conflict then we have met the preconditions for the development of intentional radicalism.

Space requires that I push on to the final aspect of my paper; selected pedagogical features of intentional radicalism. The first thing that can be said about this is that intentional radicalism has to be influenced (if not infused) with a notion of critical pedagogy. I use Simon’s definition here;

[Critical pedagogy] consists of three inter-related moments. First transformative critique views knowledge as socially produced, legitimated, and distributed . . . Second, knowledge is apprehended as expressing . . . particular interests and values . . . Third, seeking to negate the “objective” nature of knowledge and forcing the educator to confront the relation between knowledge, power and control . . . (Simon, 1985)

These moments can be pressed onto educational engagements in the social work classroom in the following way.

**Revisionist Welfare History**

Social work education suffers from amnesia. The huge vocationally driven enterprise either has no memory of the past, or that memory recollects a rosy history studded with liberal heroes. One of the important contributions from Marxism was the detailing of a connection between history and domination. Giroux and Friere refer to this as “. . . the loss of historical memory [being] the precondition of all forms of domination”, (Giroux & Friere, 1987, p. XI). The student going through a social work radicalising experience would need to enter a process with her or his educators that confronts a masked past. The process must be energised by a determination to rethink if not rewrite welfare history so that it no longer serves the interests of orthodoxy. The valuable work done by feminist historians in the last decade to find the lost women in the past is a paradigm case. Poor peoples’ history, and race relations history are further examples. Revisionist and orthodox histories should be available to students, so they can understand historiographical tensions.
The Street as a Classroom

Historical revisionism is not just an unmasking affair. It is also a form of practical learning which involves listening to the survivors of past oppression (this is why oral history is so critical at this time). And then it is not just listening, rather developing new critical understandings.

This reasoning can be extended from the past to the present; a denominator remains common, social worker students listen to the wise counsel of the poor and disadvantaged. This can only be achieved through a dramatic heave-ho of the orthodox pedagogy which uses the poor as teaching material through the reificatory presentation of cases. The teacher, traditionally at the important intersection points of student learning, is replaced by the poor. The street becomes the classroom. The classroom, noted for its institutional separation from social life, is reformulated through the radical involvement of the poor in the education of social work students.

Contextualised Dialogue

This street-centred approach to learning appears unremarkable. What separates it from the way schools of social work commonly involve students with clients is that the client is not expected to relate to the student as tomorrow's professional, and the student is not expected to relate to the client as a source of compassion or interest. Rather a mutual, depowered dialogue is encouraged within a context of emancipation. Both student and client want from their relational moment what they want for the world, a liberation from the things that oppress both.

Central Place of Subjectivity and Experience

Contextualised dialogue infers a heightened priority for subjectivity, which in turn proclaims the often ignored significance of student experience. Orthodox social work education, as evaluated in works already cited, often denies subjectivity in favour of objectivism, whether it be in the way we conceive our professional values or the way we construct our empirical methodologies, and experience (specifically student experience of themselves as students and in other roles) in favour of training. To centralise student subjectivity and experience in these
alien conditions is to reframe the school as a site, for political struggle. In the first radical period Pearson and Galper developed this issue, (Pearson, 1975b, Ch. 2; Galper, 1980, Ch. 11). In recent times the debate has been found in the writings of critical pedagogy. Although it has to be noted that the way the texture of classroom education speaks the dominant values of patriarchy and racism, has engaged feminists and antiracists for years (O’Brien, 1987).

Radical Utopianism

Finally, the radical teaching enterprise must be held together by a conflict-based dialogue on utopian possibilities. Giroux and Friere call this linking, “... the language of critique with the language of possibility”, (Giroux & Friere, 1987, p. XIII). I say conflict based dialogue because of the aforementioned multiprescriptive nature of the radical community. Without a busy market place of normative projections, emancipatory strategies remain incoherent. The feminist dream of depowered patriarchy conflicts with the multi-cultural ethic, with the one-class goal, the vision of the demilitarised state, etc. But together they contest against the neoconservative nightmare and the liberal wet dream.

Conclusion

While an obvious deficit of this paper is its failure to set up discourse among these pedagogical elements, the paper has attempted in a limited fashion to explore ways of addressing the long forsaken agenda of radical education. The thrust of this paper was based on the proposition that teachers, students and clients in social work can and should participate together in constructing contentious frameworks for critically reflecting and acting on dominant constructions of reality. The social work school culture and curricula theory should be subject to constant radical critique and renewal, as an educational corollary to and apprenticeship for the other sites of social conflict that are positioned across the terrain of social work practice. Said another way, the paper calls for a student based critical praxis. An enormous task, and one that, I suggest, can only be actioned through
the development of a pedagogically sound theory of radical social work education.

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