Looking Back to Move Us Forward: Social Workers Deliver Justice as Human Rights Professionals

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Abstract: Social work was a progressive profession at its founding, and social workers sought to transform people's lives through wide-ranging reforms and work with individuals and communities. Over time, social work has evolved into a more conservative profession. Social workers have perpetuated oppressive policies, structures, and practices that marginalize vulnerable populations. This paper revisits the history of our profession and presents a human rights approach toward justice in social work practice and education that is more in line with its roots and the intentions of its founders. This renewed approach requires the participation of communities and the full inclusion of client voices, creating an atmosphere supportive of human rights, different curricular methods of delivering human rights and justice content, and new skill development in courses and fieldwork. This paper demonstrates how a rights-based approach bridges the divide between macro and micro practice and permeates all professional education and practice aspects. The paper shows how social work education can orient classroom and field curricula to promote human rights by emphasizing community-based practice frameworks and system-wide changes.

Keywords: Human rights, social work education, justice, social work curriculum, rights-based approach

Social workers worldwide have a long history of working to achieve human rights, as they have been defined in international law, including an explicit grounding of practice in human rights principles: human dignity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability (Androff, 2016; Gatenio Gabel, 2016; Mapp et al., 2019). These principles advance justice and guide social workers to move away from the deficit model of the needs-based approach by contextualizing individual issues in a larger human rights framework. Yet, social work education in the United States has not fully embraced the human rights approach nor adequately prepared social work students to practice from a human rights perspective. As a value-based profession, as evidenced in our Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021a), social workers cannot be "value-neutral." They must be working to achieve these aims. Therefore, practicing from a human rights framework is essential if justice is at the core of the social work mission.

Scholars continually debate the definition of justice, and their work has shown us that conceptions of justice vary by individual, culture, time, and power (Barry, 1995; Haeffele

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& Storr, 2019; Rawls, 1971; Resich, 2002; Sen, 2009). Human ethnocentrism (i.e., preferences for practices and values reflective of our culture) determines an individual's or community's definition of justice (Rawls, 1971; Resich, 2002; Sen, 2009). Majority views or those of the powerful often inform a culture's definition of justice, which can further marginalize or "otherize" the vulnerable. "Justice" to a marginalized community may look very different than the dominant culture's view of justice (Haeffele & Storr, 2019), as we can see in the current U.S. debates over gender policies, mass incarceration, policing, access to public welfare, and many other issues. Justice is fluid and varies across cultures and times (Barry, 2009; Haeffele & Storr, 2019; Rawls, 1971; Resich, 2002; Sen, 2009). A culture's sense of justice often emerges from the interaction among contending perspectives of justice; thus, a culture's definition of justice evolves as new practices and ideas arise (Barry, 2009). The benchmark used to determine just or unjust treatment of societal members will differ depending on the period and the cultural conflicts of that period.

As a profession, social work's articulation of justice best resembles the basic human rights principles. These internationally recognized principles include the equality of each individual as a human being, the inherent dignity of each person, and the rights to self-determination, peace, and security. Respect for all human rights is the basis for all civil, political, social, and economic aspirations that seek to establish well-being standards for all persons. Rights-based efforts see people as active rights holders and place accountability on policymakers and other actors whose actions impact their rights. Human rights offer a normative standard to guide justice as it evolves within and across cultures (Androff, 2016).

Unlike charity-based and needs-based approaches that determine who is worthy or unworthy of assistance by assessing their behaviors and viewing those behaviors as the causes of marginalization, poverty, and disease, rights-based practice is built upon a foundation of universal human dignity and deservingness. Furthermore, rights-based practice emphasizes a participatory process and the need for a shift in power, thus making it political (Androff, 2016; Gatenio Gabel, 2016). Therefore, placing a rights-based approach at the heart of social work practice has the power to transform the profession by elevating human respect and dignity, participation, accountability, and transparency. To promote justice, the social work curriculum, both implicit and explicit, should educate social work students about human rights principles and documents and prepare them to practice from a human rights perspective. To do this, we begin by reviewing social work's roots as a human rights-based profession and how the profession has diverged over time. It is important to note that our interpretation of this history is rooted in our own time and is fully informed by international human rights documents and treaties–beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, U.N., 1948) – which early U.S. social reformers were necessarily unaware.

Social Work's History as a Human Rights Profession

The birth of social work as a profession was, in part, a reaction to an era in U.S. history known as the Gilded Age, a period roughly from the 1870s to about 1900. Mark Twain's 1873 work, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, satirized an era of serious social problems masked by a thin gold gilding (Twain, 1873/2001). The era is remembered for its rapid

economic growth, especially in the North and the West, and dominated by the building of railroads across the U.S. and the emergent prominence of manufacturing, mining, and finance across the country. However, beneath the gilded, highly-concentrated economic growth and prosperity for a few were millions of immigrants as well as migrants from rural areas of the U.S. who were drawn to cities seeking economic opportunities and higher wages but who ended up living in poverty without access to their rights as human beings (Trattner, 1998). Moreover, despite abolishing slavery in 1865, most Southern localities re-stripped formerly enslaved persons of political power and economic rights following the Reconstruction period that ended in 1877 (Foner, 2014).

The dominant social philosophy of the time, Social Darwinism, championed the survival of the fittest and condemned government assistance for those living in poverty, living with a disability, or who were uneducated, claiming that charity would only weaken the human race (Trattner, 1998). The growing levels of inequalities and suffering, particularly in urban areas, led advocates to adapt two English approaches in the U.S. – Charity Organization Societies and the Settlement House movement. Most large U.S. cities, beginning with Buffalo in 1877, established Charity Organization Societies (COS), seeking to organize a city's voluntary relief associations "rationally" by interviewing persons in need of assistance, determining the relief needed, and arranging for home visits to dispense caring and advice (Lubove, 1965). COS workers believed poverty could be remediated and prevented from spreading if the poor adopted middle-class values and ideas (Chapman & Withers, 2019).

Settlement Houses, also based on an English model, were established in large cities in the U.S. during the 1880s. Settlement houses, like Chicago's Hull House, provided services to help immigrants assimilate and build bridges between the classes in an increasingly stratified and fragmented society (Addams, 1893/1969). African-Americans migrating to northern cities found themselves excluded by many of these early settlements and developed their own settlement houses, many with roots in southern missions and Black institutions like the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes (Luker, 1985). Unlike the COS, the Settlement House movement believed that efforts should be directed at social and economic reforms rather than reforming individuals.

Charity workers, settlement house workers, and social reformers concerned with juvenile delinquency, known as child savers, created the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1880. This became the National Conference of Social Work in 1917 – knitting the different threads of social work into one profession (Bruno, 1957). In this way, early social work organizations understood themselves to be united with a common purpose - to give dignity and respect to individuals living in poverty and precarity and to help individuals and families navigate the complex social and economic challenges before them. Advocacy became the bedrock of the new profession. Still, many leaders and individuals who first identified as social workers in the U.S. were White people from privileged class backgrounds who did not reflect the values, goals, and cultures of the populations they sought to help. Indeed, many of our well-respected early agencies excluded African Americans (Carlton-LaNey & Hodges, 2004). In the U.S. Black community, social work thus developed separately as mutual aid and institutions, including

orphanages, settlement houses, and other social services (Brantley et al., 2021; Harty, 2020).

In the first part of the 20th century, social workers worked with a widening range of populations and social issues. Social workers sought to address the needs of those in poverty, children and youth, immigrants, migrants, those who were or had been previously incarcerated, those with mental health and physical disabilities, and soldiers. Social workers also advocated for peace, human rights, improved sanitation, housing, labor protections, and much more. The biographies of pioneering social workers make clear that they were fighting social exclusion and discriminatory practices that denied persons their rights as humans (NASW, 2021b). The diversity of the populations served by social workers even in the early decades of the profession led to the development of a range of social work methods. Some methods emphasized interpersonal interventions, while others accentuated the need for societal reforms. Still, advocacy for human rights and justice was a critical component of all efforts.

Over time, social work divided itself into two dominant forms of practice – micro or macro. This was a response to myriad political, economic, and social factors, including the drive for professionalization, the ascendance of the medical model and concomitant psychological approaches, and the rise of managed care health insurance. This micro/macro division delegated the advocacy for human rights and justice primarily to those practicing at the macro level. In its quest for professionalization, social work turned to specializations that then overshadowed core social work values and promoted clinical approaches over advocacy and societal reform (Abramovitz, 1998; Reeser & Epstein, 1990; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). During this time, social workers such as Bertha Capen Reynolds argued for a holistic practice that would see clients within the bigger picture of their social conditions (Abramovitz & Sherraden, 2016). Unfortunately, such voices, which we would now consider advocating for a human rights-based approach, were repressed and silenced within the mainstream profession (Reisch & Andrews, 2001).

The focus on clinical methods was detrimental to social work's mission to build just societies. Breton (2006) notes that social work became locked into a mold privileging clinical/micro work over community/political/social action/macro work. There is no doubt of the need for both clinical and macro work in social work; rather, the tension centers on casting clinical and macro work as a mutually exclusive dichotomy and simultaneously heralding clinical approaches as superior. Specht (1991), a well-known critic of social workers' prioritization of clinical techniques, especially for those who opt for private practice, explains that the issue is that these practitioners "remove themselves from the problems, settings, and populations that social work was created to deal with" (p. 107). Instead, the profession should support practice models that promote justice (Parker, 2003). A human rights approach brings justice as the focal point to all forms of social work practice: micro, macro, community, policy, and international (Androff & McPherson, 2014).

At the inception of the profession, human rights and justice were at the core of social work practice. However, over the decades, calls for the professionalization and legitimization of social work triumphed over social action, eventually widening the

micro/macro divide (Haynes, 1998). For example, the "Rank and File" movement beginning in the 1930s called for social work to be the profession at the forefront of social and economic rights and justice, but the focus of social work at the time was on legitimizing the profession and building social work education (Haynes, 1998; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Consequently, the profession again turned away from strengthening its activism and instead focused on professionalization by developing scientific rigor in the field (Abramovitz, 1998; Haynes & Mickelson, 1992).

The path creating a dichotomy in social work was also affected by political context. The onset of McCarthyism in the early 1950s further dampened efforts to seek wide-ranging social and economic approaches to social change for fear of being persecuted or labeled Communists (Abramovitz, 1998; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). In the 1960s, the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty, the civil rights and peace movements, women's marches, and other social service reforms rekindled hope for social action to be a more salient aspect of social work, but the ultimate failure of the Great Society resulted in a retreat once again (Reisch & Andrews, 2001). This retreat was deepened by the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency. The Reagan Administration made massive cuts to social services and challenged individuals to be self-sufficient and free of government assistance (Reisch & Andrews, 2001). In addition, Reagan's remix of Social Darwinism portrayed poverty, illness, and disability as personal failures and favored clinical approaches in social work practice. As a result, social action during the Reagan era prioritized defending existing programs rather than building social infrastructure in ways that promoted human rights (Karger & Stoesz, 1993; Reisch & Andrews, 2001).

The resulting micro/macro divide throughout social work history has implications for incorporating social justice and human rights in social work (Androff & McPherson, 2014). Strategies to promote justice, human rights, and social change are generally relegated to policy and community work - the macro part of social work practice (e.g., policy analysis, development, and advocacy; community organizing and development; and the promotion of organizational change; Mattocks, 2018). Within a dichotomized model of social work, clinical work is thought to be built on scientific objectivity (Breton, 2006; Haynes, 1998), and its objectivity is protected by remaining outside the realm of advocating for human rights and justice. In this way, direct work practice has been cast as a value-free approach, and infusing it with social work values for rights and justice can be viewed as tainting professional objectivity (Abramovitz, 1998). This division within social work threatens the future of the profession. Clinical social workers, without question, dominate the profession today, but without anchoring their practice in human rights, social work's role as an advocate for justice will continue to recede (Mattocks, 2018).

Social work education focuses on transmitting knowledge, skills, ethics, and values and contextualizing situations within larger environmental forces. Without this, social work professionals are therapists like all other therapists, are bureaucrats without a vision for improving systems to better the lives of beneficiaries, are administrators who value efficiency over service, and community workers who administer government programs without raising consciousness.

Human Rights Education in Social Work

As stated, the U.S. has lagged in its commitment to human rights, and U.S. social workers are similarly behind their international peers in understanding human rights. For example, while other national social work bodies such as in Australia, Canada, and Great Britain include human rights in their Codes of Ethics, the U.S. NASW does not. In addition, human rights were again omitted in 2021 when an update to the Code strengthened cultural competence and anti-oppression standards (NASW, 2021a).

The U.S. national social work education accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), however, did add human rights to its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) in 2008, 60 years after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (CSWE, 2008; United Nations [U.N.], 1948); the human rights focus were expanded in subsequent versions (CSWE, 2015; 2022). The 2022 EPAS explicitly places human rights as central to the purpose of social work in Competency 2 - to Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice e - as well as in the description and practice behaviors of Competencies 1 on Ethical and Professional Behavior and 5 on Policy Practice (CSWE, 2022). In addition, as noted by Steen (2018), human rights can also be easily integrated into the other competencies by reconceptualizing the practice behaviors through a human rights lens. Still, state licensing boards typically do not assess this mandated human rights competency (Human Rights Educators USA and University and College Consortium for Human Rights Education, 2018).

Social work students have a fairly high endorsement of human rights principles (Witt, 2020), and exposure in the curriculum increases their engagement with and support for human rights (Steen et al., 2016). A survey of U.S. social work education programs found that the accreditation mandate beginning in 2008 spurred many programs to add content on human rights. Among respondents, 45% said they had added content – either as stand-alone content (22%) or appending it to the material on social justice (22%); one-third stated that they did not need to add content because they already had it, while 12% said they had not added any content on human rights (Gatenio Gabel & Mapp, 2020).

However, despite this mandate, how schools and programs integrate human rights education into the social work curriculum remains uneven. Some researchers emphasized the content of human rights instruments and principles rather than how to actualize a rights-based approach in social work practice (Chen et al., 2015; Swigonski, 2011). In contrast, Gatenio Gabel and Mapp (2020) found that when administrators were asked about the aims of human rights education in their program, respondents prioritized a rights-based approach for students to use in their work over knowledge of the major international human rights instruments.

How and whether human rights are taught can be affected by faculty preparedness and level of interest. The number of faculty who identify human rights as an area of specialty impacts the number of methods used to educate students about human rights, as well as the level of knowledge programs want students to have about human rights and rights-based practice (Gatenio Gabel & Mapp, 2020). Many faculty members have little preparation in

human rights (especially if their education was completed before the CSWE human rights competency was established in 2008), and they may believe that human rights belong only in macro, international or policy classes, rather than viewing the issues that confront U.S.-based service users as human rights violations (Chiarelli-Helminiak et al., 2018; Richards-Desai et al., 2018).

As noted in the book edited by Libal et al. (2014), rights-based social work practice can be integrated into social work education in a variety of ways. For example, it can be integrated throughout the curriculum, be a focus of particular classes, or infuse experiences such as study abroad. The most common methods are integrated into classes (especially cultural diversity, policy, and macro classes) and through the implicit curriculum, such as seminars and talks (Gatenio Gabel & Mapp, 2020). In contrast, some programs have developed an intentional integration across the curriculum, such as Fordham University, the University at Buffalo, and West Chester University.

At Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Service, all syllabi are required to demonstrate how the course furthers human rights and justice. At the University at Buffalo, the mission, vision, and curriculum were updated to integrate a trauma-informed, human rights approach, and "the school's curriculum development guidelines stipulate that human rights content must be included and measured through critical assignments in each course" (Richards-Desai et al., 2018, p. 172). Similarly, West Chester University linked experiences of trauma and human rights violations and updated the department's mission, vision, and goals and the MSW specialization year competencies to include human rights (Quzack et al., 2021). The West Chester social work department revised foundation classes, learning agreements, and evaluations for fieldwork to "foster anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and human rights-based practices" (p. 34). Assessing the impact of these changes, Quzack et al. (2021) found high levels of student exposure and engagement among their graduating MSW students, as well as a tendency to view their work through a human rights lens.

Much like other forms of student learning, experiential and critical learning are needed to help students learn how to apply human rights principles, values, and approaches to their work. These methods should include experiential, reflexive, and reflective opportunities for students to assimilate knowledge and incorporate it into their skill development (Chen et al., 2015; Swigonski, 2011). While study abroad opportunities can be one way to educate students about human rights (e.g., Bell et al., 2015; Gammonley et al., 2013; Gonzalez Benson & Siciliano, 2021), not all students are able to participate. Therefore, field education is the prime setting for social work students to hone this skill, as they do with all their other skills.

A special issue of the *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* (2021) focused on field education as a method to teach human rights (Steen, 2021). It examined topics such as the training of field instructors, inclusion of human rights in different types of field placements or with particular populations, as well as human rights issues within field education itself, such as unpaid internships creating disproportionate impacts for poverty-affected students (Smith et al., 2021). Like social work faculty, many field instructors have not received formal training in human rights and may lack the competency to do this as they guide social work students' field practice experiences (Banks et al., 2021; McDermott

et al., 2021). McPherson and Libal (2019) found that while field instructors generally rated their knowledge of human rights as high, many also reported never having read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When surveyed, these instructors neither understood their U.S. service users to experience human rights violations nor recognized the human rights to food or an adequate standard of living (McPherson & Libal, 2019).

Thus, a review of the literature finds that despite the CSWE mandate that social work educators prepare their students to advance human rights, the application is spotty. While some schools integrate human rights throughout their curriculum, others report that coverage is uneven and dependent on having faculty who happen to have human rights as an area of focus. Similarly, while field practica are the place for students to practice and demonstrate all the competencies, field supervisors need the training to help them support student learning in this critical area.

Righting Social Work Education

In order to prepare students for rights-based practice, social work programs can build on the core concept that human rights are universal and interdependent. As such, human rights education can fit all levels of social work education and forms of social work practice (Androff & McPherson, 2014). Rights-based approaches can be applied to work with children, older adults, and in settings such as anti-poverty, health care, and mental health, and across all methods of practice such as clinical practice (Berthold, 2015), community practice (Libal & Harding, 2015), social policy (Gatenio Gabel, 2016), and research methods (Maschi, 2016).

Rights-based approaches embrace fundamental human rights principles congruent with social work ethics and values. Human rights-based principles for social work practice are human dignity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability (Androff, 2016). The principle of human dignity encompasses the concepts of universality, inalienability, and dignity and worth of the person. It reconceptualizes all people as deserving rights-holders, not passive objects of charity. Non-discrimination means that social work practice does not discriminate based on identity characteristics such as gender, age, sexual orientation, ability status, nationality, race or ethnicity, language, religion, and migrant status. This principle is also about remedying the historical exclusion of people from access to social services, policy benefits, and resources. Participation is a principle that requires social workers to work with people, not on their behalf, but in solidarity so that they can influence decisions, policies, and programs that affect their welfare. Transparency refers to openness and reflexivity in assessment, monitoring, evaluation, and research. Accountability involves activism, advocacy, community development and organizing, lobbying, and social movements that build and apply power to advance human rights.

To facilitate a rights-based approach in social work education, human rights should be at the core of social work education and integrated across EPAS competencies with an emphasis on human dignity across the curriculum, as illustrated in Table 1. Promoting human dignity in social work education would emphasize a "do no harm" philosophy and support people to self-determine their own practice methods and goals. Non-discrimination requires that students are taught to challenge discrimination on any basis, including that of

race or ethnicity, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, national origin, political opinion, or other social difference. Non-discrimination in social work education provides a needed focus on how certain groups are excluded from society, including from social work services. Students are trained in anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and inclusive social work practices and take affirmative action for equity, repair, remediation, and reparations.

Table 1. *Translating Human Rights Principles into Practice*

Human Rights Principle	Putting the Principle into Practice	Examples of Social Work Practice
Participation	• To practice the principle of participation is to ensure that service users & community members are not passive or powerless beneficiaries of services but are active participants in their own development & in agency decision-making.	• Service users are full partners in the processes of assessment, intervention, & evaluation. • Agencies seek service user participation in agency decision-making. • Agencies help service users develop any skills needed for them to participate fully as effective partners & engaged citizens.
Non-discrimination	• To practice non-discrimination is to identify & undo the specific patterns of discrimination, so that community members who have experienced such discrimination can achieve equality. • The practice of non-discrimination calls for cultural sensitivity. • To practice non-discrimination is to specifically combat stigma by focusing on compassion & strengths.	• Social workers identify service users' strengths & work with them to overcome social stigmas. • Social workers empower service users to change unfair personal & social conditions & join with them to advocate for change. • Social workers make information accessible in multiple languages as well as to those who live with disabilities.
Transparency	• Rights-based agencies are accountable to their service users & therefore practice inclusive decision-making & operate with transparency.	• Social workers are clear with their service users about why they are collecting any personal information & how that information will be protected. • Social workers explain all interventions, along with their purpose & intended effects. Social workers collaborate with service users to evaluate their practices.
Accountability	• To practice accountability requires professionals to educate government leaders about their rights-related duties, as well as to partner with rights-holders in their efforts to claim rights that have been denied. • To practice accountability requires professionals to be reflective about their practices & to rigorously evaluate its impact.	• Social workers educate local leaders to increase their knowledge of human rights & advocate for the expansion of service users' access to rights. • Social workers help service users develop skills to effectively assert their rights & join with service users to lobby for access to rights. • Social workers & social work agencies promote accountability to their service users by including service users in program evaluations & sharing the results.

Adapted from McPherson (2015).

Human rights-based social work education centers on the right of people to participate in decisions and processes that affect them at the core of all social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation. Rights-based practice counters the disempowering and paternalistic model of practitioners speaking on behalf of service users and openly incorporates the voices of service users in all research and funding decisions that affect them. Finally, rights-based social work education ensures that practitioners are prepared to both be accountable and to hold accountable the institutions that bear responsibility for upholding human rights. To change the way we practice, social work curricula should facilitate knowledge acquisition of human rights, new perspectives on social issues, and new skills.

In 2013, CSWE created a Human Rights Committee to strengthen the integration of human rights into social work education. The Committee holds events at CSWE Annual Program Meetings to introduce social work educators to U.S.-based human rights practitioners and provide educators with deeper exposure to U.S. human rights concerns, such as environmental justice, the death penalty, criminal justice reform, and higher education for undocumented students. The Committee also advocates for the integration of human rights into the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs (EPAS) by submitting suggested revisions. Much as Mapp et al. (2019) called for "righting the *Code of Ethics*" (p. 264), the committee works to "right" social work education to ground the profession's purpose in the realization of human rights.

Table 2 summarizes the Human Rights Committee's proposal, which reviewed the 2015 EPAS (CSWE, 2015) and offered suggestions on how to integrate a rights-based approach. This table presents a human rights critique and re-frames EPAS for the purpose of social work education, each of the nine competencies, as well as field education. For example, Competency 2, Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice, did not link oppression to people's human right to be free from such experiences, even though the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is one of the few that that U.S. has ratified. Competency 9, which relates to the evaluation of service provision, could be "righted" through sharing these evaluations with people and communities in order to promote transparency for social work practice and organizations. These revisions called for a rights-based perspective, knowledge, and skills to be infused throughout the curriculum, some of which were included in the 2022 revision. For example, related to field education, the 2022 standards state, "The field setting is where students apply human rights principles from global and national social work ethical codes to advance social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2022, p. 20).

Table 2. *Righting Social Work Educational Standards*

CSWE 2015 EPAS	Human Rights Critique	Rights-Based Reframe
Purpose of social work practice, education, & EPAS	Reactive, remedial, residual framing	Social work creates the conditions that facilitate the realization of human rights
Competency 1: Demonstrate ethical & professional behavior	Ethics tangentially linked to human rights & justice	Connects to the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) & the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) Global Statement of Ethical Principles; mandates technology use in a way that promotes human rights
Competency 2: Engage diversity & difference in practice	Oppression not connected to human rights	Explicitly frames oppression & discrimination as human rights violations
Competency 3: Advance human rights & social, economic, & environmental justice	Human rights are not presented as actionable; they are not linked to practice	Social work is linked to the human rights movement; it recognizes people as rights-holders; shifts from needs-based to rights-based approach; highlights human rights-based approaches for social work practice; emphasizes human rights principles for the practice of human dignity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, & accountability
Competency 4: Engage in practice-informed research & research-informed practice	Research not linked to human rights or other ethical obligations	Research must respect human rights; the science of social work is anchored in rights principles
Competency 5: Engage in policy practice	Human rights are framed as a policy goal, not a process; no focus on changing structures	Human rights-based policy advances justice; understands how policy can violate human rights; facilitate people & communities' participation in the policy-making process
Competency 6: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, & communities	Power differences & hierarchies not addressed; no focus on educating people about rights within systems & institutions' responsibilities to people	Value non-hierarchical human relationships; understand how to manage power differences; educate people on their rights & the obligations of duty-bearers in systems; engage in a way that respects human rights;
Competency 7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, & communities	Needs-based, deficit-based model of assessment; upholds expertise of the practitioner	Assess for human rights violations & the duty-bearer with responsibility for protecting any violated human rights
Competency 8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, & communities	Emphasis on meeting needs, as the current symptoms of structural problem	Intervene to achieve human rights
Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, & communities	Preserves hierarchy of the practitioner over others	Share evaluations with people & communities; promote transparency for social work practice & organizations
EPAS 2.2 – Signature pedagogy: Field education	Field is not linked to human rights	Field is the setting where students apply human rights principles to advance social, economic, & environmental justice

Righting the Social Work Curriculum

However, social work programs do not need to be dependent on EPAS to be teaching their students and faculty (including field instructors) how to be rights-based practitioners, regardless of practice level or population of focus. Human rights must be integrated into social work education in two ways: first, as a basis, social work students and practitioners should be knowledgeable about human rights instruments so that they can transfer this knowledge to stakeholders; and then, critically, how to actualize them in practice. We must provide our students with human rights content that feels applicable and approachable (more than a compendium of treaties and protocols), and most importantly, we need to teach (and model for) our students how to practice social work in a way that promotes human dignity and human rights for all. Human rights must be taught as a set of powerful tools for ensuring that we practice ethical, justice-focused, liberatory social work. Social work programs should be structuring their curricula to ensure the achievement of these two levels of knowledge and practice.

Much as students cannot jump fully-fledged into being rights-based practitioners, neither can social work programs expect an immediate full transition as centers of rights-based education. Programs must ensure their instructors – both classroom and field – have the knowledge and understanding to guide students on their learning journey in this area since it cannot be expected that social work faculty would have studied human rights in their own social work education. Programs can then conceptualize a multi-year approach, focusing first on the knowledge and then on the actualization, as students will. Human rights should not be segregated into one class and expect students to gain the requisite skill. Rather programs must demonstrate the importance by prioritizing it throughout students' educational experiences in both the explicit and implicit curricula.

Introducing Human Rights Knowledge

To provide the basis for rights-based practice, students must first be taught the major human rights instruments and the interdependence of rights work, as well as the core principles of the rights-based approach. This will provide the requisite foundational knowledge of what human rights are, that we are all rights holders and that as social workers, we are also duty bearers to help fulfill those rights. Students need to fully grasp the concept that in the rights-based approach, the outcome of fulfilling rights is important, but centering on human rights principles is essential to ensure the process is also rights-based. Thus, the rights-based approach is inherently political because it requires a change in power relationships not only in a society but also in social work practice. This is true whether the social worker is primarily working on the micro or macro level; all social workers are change agents.

Thus, when introducing human rights, it is important for instructors to provide students with the political context of human rights in the U.S., starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948). The UDHR is the founding document of human rights, unanimously affirmed at the U.N. on December 10, 1948. The UDHR lays out our human rights briefly in 30 articles; however, it is not a treaty and does not have the

force of international law. For a treaty, also known as a convention, to become law, a country's government must ratify the treaty. Typically, this means that nations agree to be bound by the terms of a treaty under international law.

There are nine core international human rights instruments: International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICMW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CEPD, U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021). Some of the treaties are supplemented by optional protocols addressing specific concerns. Though the U.S. was a leader in the development of the UDHR, it has only ratified three of the major conventions: the ICCPR, CAT, and ICERD, reflecting the U.S. view that its sovereignty reigns supreme and should not be subject to international scrutiny (Kahn, 2000).

Notable is the U.S. non-ratification of the ICESCR. The U.S. non-ratification of the ICESCR helps students understand why social and economic rights are still so disputed in the U.S. context, and also to explain why so many U.S. citizens—including social work faculty and field instructors, as discussed previously—may be unaware of the existence of social and economic rights, such as food, medical care, housing, work, and leisure. This discussion should then move on to discuss why the U.S. has ratified a few of the other human rights treaties as well, including being the only nation not to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Mapp et al., 2019).

Teaching human rights as a practice. Human rights must be taught both as a content area—a list of rights and treaties that are recognized in international law—and a practice rooted in the human rights principles of human dignity, participation, non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability. As noted by Reynaert et al. (2019), "Social work needs to develop its own approach to human rights and implement this approach in social work curricula, *emphasizing the fact that human rights need to be practiced*" (p. 23, emphasis added). Field education is a prime vehicle for human rights education (Steen, 2021).

Students can begin to see how human rights violations occur in their everyday practice by learning to complete a Human Rights Assessment using the UDHR (e.g., Mapp et al., 2019). Completing such an assessment is ideal for use in field instruction to help students understand the impacts of various systems on those they serve; further, it introduces students to the human rights lens and how that lens shines a light on how rights violations are experienced by individuals, as well as by entire communities (Mapp et al., 2019). Students should evaluate their service user's access to each of the rights listed in the UDHR or one of the other major conventions and consider the level of access to that right across the whole community. In policy and other macro courses, students should practice framing a social issue/problem from a rights-based perspective. In clinical courses, students should

reframe the intersection of the personal situations of people with the realization of their rights. Students should be learning to contextualize clinical issues within socio-economic and political climates and discuss the consequences of policies on the self-identity and emotional well-being of individuals and communities. All students should be learning that advocacy is critical to practice as a social worker, regardless of one's chosen method of practice. The micro/macro dichotomy should not be promulgated by deferring advocacy to macro practice. All social workers are change agents.

Finally, rights-based intervention requires social workers to practice, as has been described earlier in this article, in ways that promote human dignity, service-user participation, non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability and students need to practice this approach in the field the same as they hone all their other skills. Instructors must help students identify how the everyday interventions they complete in the field are rights-based—or not. For example, when students cultivate democratic and clear engagement with their service users, they are communicating respect and promoting human dignity; when they work together with the client in the selection of interventions, they demonstrate participation; being open about the content and purpose of interventions practices transparency; and when they are choosing to be nonhierarchical in their communication style, they are promoting non-discrimination (Table 1 provides additional practice examples).

Teaching students to give rights-based labels to the actions they take with individuals, families, and communities, underscores how human rights practice emphasizes process, not just goals. Of course, rights-based practice aims at rights-based goals like expanding the rights to non-discrimination, housing, healthcare, and a living wage, but it also aims to promote human dignity more generally. Certainly, working on expanding individuals' access to human rights without listening to their voices and fully including them in the process is not rights-based practice.

Implicit Curriculum

Human rights and the rights-based approach must also be integrated into the implicit curriculum for maximum benefit. Social work educators should model rights-based practice in their teaching by treating everyone with respect (human dignity); being proactive about including the voices of students from marginalized groups (non-discrimination); inviting students to co-create assignments (participation); by being very clear about course policies and grading (transparency); and by modeling a reflective, critical approach towards their teaching and the social work profession (accountability). It is particularly important that educators who wish to teach rights-based practice reflect on their own practice. Similarly, social work programs should model these principles in their policies and procedures through the inclusion of both students and service users. In Britain, it is a requirement that service users be given a voice in social work education (McLaughlin et al., 2016).

Programs can hold events on their campus to highlight human rights concerns and explicitly link discussions of social issues to human rights and social workers' role as duty-

bearers. Programs can also promote participation in other events, such as Social Work Day at the U.N.

Conclusion

During this critical time in our history and the current attention to social justice, human rights offer a path to guide equity and justice efforts. Given social work's identification as a human rights profession, practicing from the rights-based approach aligns with the profession's values and ethics, and thus all social workers must be trained in human rights instruments and their application. It is not sufficient to focus only on educating students; faculty and field supervisors need to be better trained in rights-based approaches to social work practice. Online or in-person courses should be available to faculty and field supervisors to learn about the ways that a rights-based approach could be integrated into social work courses and field experiences.

To achieve the goal of social justice, we must eliminate the deficit model of the needs-based approach by contextualizing individual issues in a larger human rights framework. It is not for social workers, or anyone, to determine who deserves to have their rights met. To encompass this framework, we must move past the false micro/macro dichotomy within social work. All social workers must be advocates for change and are agents of transformation. There have been recent efforts to eliminate the micro/macro divide in social work that are a very good sign (Association for Community Organization and Social Action, 2021); however, these efforts must be rooted in human rights to achieve justice.

A rights-based approach is much more than identifying human rights violations and castigating authorities who have not lived up to their responsibilities to promote, protect, and realize human rights. It is important to recognize human rights violations and the consequences of rights not being realized, but all social workers should understand that this is the beginning of change, not the end of their advocacy efforts. A human rights approach also requires us to challenge ourselves and our practices: for example, knowing our history of excluding African Americans from services, we must be vigilant to hold our profession to its promise to promote the human rights of all service users.

A rights-based approach seeks to transform societies in ways that care for one another with respect and dignity for one another. To transform our societies into just societies, social workers must elevate dignity, participation, equity, accountability, and transparency. In doing this, we allow more voices to be heard and power relations within communities to change. Social workers trained to do this will help societies evolve, moving us away from elite groups determining how justice will prevail and leading us to justice for all.

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