

## **SOCIAL WORK PRINCIPLES AND THE INTERFACE WITH THE CULTURE OF PEACE**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to unveil the interface of the culture of peace with social work's principles. Social work's principles are based on freedom, autonomy, equality, social justice, and respect for human rights. It envisions a society without any type of discrimination based on religion, race, social class, gender, age and ethnicity. Based on these principles, we can conclude that social workers are peace builders by nature, because of their ongoing commitment with overcoming oppressive realities and their constant pursuit of social justice.

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**Keywords:** Culture of peace, the work process, social work

### **Introduction**

The challenges of our society today lead us to face different realities and occupy diverse professional spaces. One is the school environment, a rich and challenging learning space. However, a space in which violence and social exclusion takes place. Within this context, social workers can seek for alternative strategies to schools' violence and reduction of social exclusion processes that affect students, family and the whole community as well.

According to Almeida (2000, p.21), there is a new project of education in the Brazilian national agenda that promotes changes in the educational approaches that could meet diverse social, political and ideological needs. Since the access of education is universal, the State needs to be able to attend students from different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds. Social workers should occupy this space due to this broader view of education, and they should address the challenges educators face today within the context of structural change. Therefore, the principles of the culture of peace and non-violence will be useful to address the root causes of violence, to promote citizenship, to learn human rights, to increase the participation of the family within the school, to stimulate students to engage in social movements and educational politics, and to increase their protagonism and power decision-making in the learning process (Brandão, 2005). These elements are part of the social worker's intervention and can help schools to develop their role in promoting citizenship as part of an integral education. Thus, the educational field acquires a new meaning to social workers' professional field. It creates a possibility to strength the role of the school both as a place for strengthening the rights of children and adolescents and for addressing inequalities.

There are many possibilities for professional intervention in the school setting, according to Alessandrini (2001, p.27), "The Social work among other professions deals with social relations, whether they are interpersonal, institutional or community." This profession can work towards developing a joint educational policy along with other public policies by providing advice to school counselors and teachers regarding issues relating to all

expressions of social intervention, and by working on all segments of the school community (Alessandrini, 2001, p. 26). Given the various possibilities, we can work towards violence prevention in its various expressions.

As a support profession, social workers should promote peace by empowering communities and by helping them in the development of their abilities and to acquiring tools to overcome oppressive environments. Social workers should also help them to achieve their goals by building self-confidence and motivation, by raising awareness of their situation, and by building collective actions to promote access to rights and services. Social workers should create and recreate social relationships through critical thinking and access to social policies that promote people's autonomy. Thus, individuals can transform their realities by informed action and by creative ways to make distinctive alternative choices, which have increasingly demonstrated the capacity to increase the control over their lives through agency (Simionatto, 1998, p.10).

According to Couto (1999), there are important strategies that social workers can rely on in their daily interventions. First, to build coalitions with organizations, service users and other professionals who share the same goals. This interdisciplinary work is essential to build collective strategies to overcome the structural limits imposed by social and public policies. Second, social workers should undertake professional training courses to cope with daily difficulties that may arise in the workplace and qualify their practices. Third, social workers should develop community and group work through planning and systematic reviews in order to reach emancipation and autonomy for these groups. Finally, social workers should carry out informed actions based on research to provide subsidies for their professional practices. Within this perspective, social workers understand the importance of taking into account the social, economic, cultural and political context that shapes the way educational policies are implemented and affect the population. This should be done in order to improve the school atmosphere and to implement non-violent approaches to resolve conflict resolution in restorative circles.

Social worker's ethical-political project, whose central value is ethics and freedom, implies autonomy, empowerment and the full expression of the individual. This project enables the transformation of workplaces, fostering a democratic participation of service users in the process of decision making concerning the issues that affect their lives. Social workers are able to decipher the genesis of the inequalities of social processes and to develop strategies for addressing them. This requires a purposeful professional ethos linked to a project of society committed to the process of creating a new citizenship as a political management strategy. This practice is opposed to the cult of individualism and market parlance, illuminated by a critical social theory. This requires a constant update and involvement with research. Social work has presented a constant concern with society issues related to democracy, citizenship and social rights.

In terms of our profession, we must be attentive to the ethical-direction policy defined by category for the practice of social work. In the next section of this article, we will try to show the interface between Social Work principles and the culture of peace.

### **Social Work and Culture of Peace**

Social work is characterized as a highly educational profession by enrolling in activities that affect the formation of culture, as a constitutive element of hegemonic social relations (Abreu, 2002, p. 66). The professional practice of social workers whether in different areas should be concerned with the quality of services and respect for users, since our work is not just focused in the immediate future, but it aims at the transformation of reality (Simionatto, 1998, p. 41). In this sense, Social Work, which is characterized by being an educational and political profession, is moved by indignation towards social inequalities

and hope concerning a new society and is moved by the resistance processes to oppression. In this sense, we share the idea of Giroux (2003, p 53.) that {...} policy is made not only in the realm of imagination and desire, but also is based on power relations mediated by the outcome of struggles. This practice will create possibilities for people to become critically engaged as political actors.

Social Workers are instigated to formulate responses by deciphering the "genesis of social inequalities", which is inseparable from the concentration of income, which is a version of violence and social exclusion (Iamamoto 2001, p. 58-59). In times marked by various kinds of difficulties expressed in multiple expressions of the social question, we need to look at these changes carefully. We should combine professional action with the context in which we operate professionally. We should promote innovative actions, while recognizing the real demands of the population, which requires of us not only sensitive listening and analysis of the reality, but also theoretical and technical policy expertise. From interdisciplinary and inter-institutional actions, we believe that we can transform conflicting and sometimes violent realities into more harmonious and healthy ones. The institutional framework has meaning when we restore the dialogue, communication and transformative relations by means of a professional mediation (Ortega and Del Rey, 2002, p. 147).

Social Workers are able to identify social constraints (e.g., the lack of access to health, work, education, housing, and leisure) and use some strategies to intervene in the midst of this reality. A critical reading of reality must always be present in the social worker's practices, because it enables us to decode the existing demands with regard to the life and history of our service users. The documentation, an important part of the work process, should not be seen as just filling items, but thought of as part of the process which gives priority to the continuity and dialogue between the institution, the user and the professional. Whether or not the institutional context reflects power relations, it pervades the daily lives of individuals and groups, and it interferes particularly in the process of mediation of complex interactions involving both social and cultural identity and autonomy, citizenship, organization, and social participation (Faleiros, 1997, p. 41).

Regarding the requirements to have professional competence in the management of social policies, Matos (2004, p. 108) states that it begins with the knowledge of the local history, civil society, social policies, relevant legislation, and intervention instruments. In order for the action taken by social workers to become effective, especially with regard to access to social policies, their professional intervention must have a political and ethical purpose. The effectiveness of our work manifests itself in the improvement of people's lives who may benefit from our services, or our service users. The expressions of social issues are extremely broad and diverse. We believe that it is our way of looking at them that determines our reflexive and critical stance. It is necessary to analyze reality in its different aspects, including the political, economic, cultural, religious, psychological and social factors which are crucial for our social context. The social issue is present at a macro level, but is reflected in a micro level as well, in our daily work when we are faced with the realities of our service users, who come to us with very specific demands. Consequently, in serving these users, we realize that their demands are related to a wider context of society that benefits capital. It is important to recognize these demands and create concrete alternatives for their resolution, valuing the historical process, from "principles that seek to overcome social exclusion, discrimination and the unmet social rights" (Baptista, 2002, p. 32).

Social workers envision a new society based on mutual care, dignity and social justice. Therefore, it has a political and ideological objective employing all methodologies, technical resources and guidelines for accomplishing this goal (Oliveira, 2009). The articulation of ethical-political, theoretical, methodological and technical-operative axes make up the elements of the instrumentality of Social Work.

The Social Work performs an educational activity that strengthens struggles and social projects. While being an interventional profession, it participates in the struggle for human rights. The direction of social work is to address the inequalities within relationships and in the larger system by seeking societal transformations. We believe that this essential to build a culture of peace within society.

As defined by the United Nations, the culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent it by tackling the root causes to solve the problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace).

Education for peace involves issues related to democracy, which is a necessary requirement for the exercise of human rights, for the full development of social justice, and for the prevention of any kind of abuse. All these elements can be achieved through a dynamic process that requires participation, positive attitude towards all beings, awareness of reality, and denouncement of injustice. (Tuvilla of Rayo, 2004; Jares, 2002; Guimarães, 2003, 2005).

According to Unesco (2001), for peace and non-violence to prevail, we need: a) to foster a culture of peace through education by revising the educational curriculum for this purpose, b) to promote qualitative values, attitudes and behaviors of a culture of peace, c) to include peaceful conflict-resolution practices, dialogue, consensus-building and active non-violence. Such an educational approach should also be geared to promote sustainable economic and social development. This can be accomplished by reducing economic and social inequalities, by eradicating poverty, and by assuring sustainable food security. Social justice with durable solutions to debt problems, empowerment of women, special measures for groups with special needs, and environmental sustainability is also essential. Protection and respect for all human rights, since human rights and the culture of peace are interdependent. Whenever war and violence dominate, there is no possibility to ensure human rights; at the same time, without human rights in all their dimensions, there can be no culture of peace. In addition, in order to ensure equality between all men and women through full participation of women in economic, social and political decision-making, we must eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

Foster democratic participation is another important element which is needed to promote the culture of peace. Social workers have this principle in its Professional Code of Ethics (1993). Supporting participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge are also essential to promote peace. Social workers advocate that sharing information to the service users is part of their ethical professional code, so that users will be able to access their rights.

In order to make more visible the interface between the social work principles and the culture of peace, table 1 is shown as follows:

Table 1: The interfaces between the culture of peace and the professional political project of Social Work in Brazil

<b>Ethical and political project of social work</b>	<b>Culture of peace</b>
Recognition of freedom as a central ethical value, and the autonomy and full development of human beings	Ensures freedom, sociability and reflection about universal ethical values (Unesco, 2005)
Intransigent advocacy for human rights	Respect for all human rights since human rights and peace are complementary
Increase democracy, political participation and social wealth collectively produced	Foster democratic participation, support participatory communication; aims sustainable and economic social development; aims the eradication of poverty
Equity, social justice and democratic management	Promotion of gender equity; aims the reduction of social and economic inequalities; seeks social justice.

Pluralism	Pluralism. Takes into account the political, economic, social and cultural context.
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Source: Oliveira, 2009, p.150. Adapted, translated and modified version by Grossi, 2014 based on the Code of Ethics of Social Workers, 1993 and the UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

## Conclusion

Social workers are professionals in Brazil who develop their work guided by a political and ethical project, which is present in the Code of Ethics, in the Law, and in the the Curriculum Guidelines which regulate the profession and guide the education they receive to achieve their degree. It is important to remind that to achieve social transformation, it is required not only the good will of social workers, but a government committed to social policies that attend the population needs. In addition, to build a society based on the culture of peace, we need to take interdisciplinary and collective efforts to raise people's consciousness about the necessary changes we need to take to challenge the sexist, racist and oppressive structures that still prevails within society.

This article demonstrated that social workers can contribute to the construction of the culture of peace in their daily efforts to prevent violence and diminish social inequalities. This can be done by providing information to those who need access to their rights as citizens. In addition, social workers foster social inclusion through respect for cultural, political, economic and social differences inherent in a multiple and complex reality that goes beyond the educational setting.

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