

THE PLACE OF POLITICAL DIVERSITY WITHIN THE SOCIAL WORK CLASSROOM

Mitchell Rosenwald

Barry University

Diane R. Wiener

Syracuse University

Alexa Smith-Osborne

The University of Texas at Arlington

Christine M. Smith

This article examines political ideology and its implications as a newer diversity variable within social work education. Responding to internal assessments and external critiques of social work education, the dynamics of how diverse political ideologies might manifest in 5 core course concentrations—human behavior in the social environment, research, practice, field education, and policy—are highlighted. The authors offer a series of critical questions, a typology for addressing political ideology, and a set of educational guidelines to assist educators, administrators, and students as they grapple with attending to political diversity in a variety of social work classrooms.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the enterprise of social work education was publicly critiqued by George Will (2007) and the National Association of Scholars ([NAS], 2007), who cited political ideological bias in educating social work students. The critics argued that the formal instruction of students in social justice and oppression, and the attendant strategies intended to promote the former by fighting the latter, serve as masquerades that conceal the Council on Social Work's (CSWE) interest in indoctrinating students into a liberal political ideology, and such indoctrination has absolutely no place in the academy. A number of

social work educators and leaders, including CSWE Executive Director Dr. Julia Watkins and National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Executive Director Dr. Betsy Clark issued strong responses. Dr. Watkins (2007) asserted that social work graduates "embrace the profession's historical commitment to social justice [and] CSWE will continue its dedication to quality assurance and program expectations that ensure open respectful participation by faculty and students" (para. 4). Additionally, Dr. Clark (2007) stated that "Our members hold a diverse array of opinions on social issues" and further articulated, "Social

workers do not apologize for caring about people marginalized by society, nor do we apologize for holding members of our profession to high standards" (p. A13). Beyond this spirited exchange lies a legitimate ground for scholarly inquiry—namely, the need to explore the nature of political ideology in social work education and how educators address political diversity in the classroom.

To begin this examination, *political ideology* needs to be defined. Political ideology

can be broadly organized on a continuum with respect to three criteria—the degree to which government should be involved in effecting social change, the substantive areas that government should address, and the speed in which government-induced social change should occur (Diamond, 1989; Knight, 1999). (Rosenwald, 2004, p. 11)

For our purposes, political ideology refers to an individual's beliefs with respect to a variety of policy statements that include social issues (e.g., abortion, gay marriage, immigration) and economic issues (e.g., welfare, health reform). Each of these social and economic issues can be interpreted by individuals on a continuum that includes a broad spectrum of political ideologies that range from conservative to liberal beliefs (Rosenwald, 2006). Definitions of conservative political ideology and liberal political ideology follow:

Conservative [political] ideology emphasizes the for-profit and voluntary

sectors' abilities to address social problems, maintenance of the status quo, and suspicion of government control (Dolgoff & Feldstein, 2003; O'Connors and Sabato, 2000). This ideology generally favors socially traditional values (e.g., pro-life stance, anti-gay rights), supports low taxes, and protects individual rights against government incursion (Lowi & Ginsberg, 1994; Sargent, 1995). . . . Finally, conservatives believe change should occur at a slow pace (Sargent, 1995).

Liberal [political ideology] emphasizes governmental protection of individual rights (Dolgoff & Feldstein, 2003; Lowi & Ginsberg, 1994). The government has a particular mission to advocate for those citizens who are disenfranchised and removed from the power structures (O'Connors & Sabato, 2000). Indeed, government is necessary because privatized self-help is not always available and even when it is, its success is limited (Sargent, 1995). Liberal views include the separation of church and state . . . (Brint, 1994; McKenna, 1998) . . . [and] that rationally motivated change should occur within given power structures (Sargent, 1995). (Rosenwald, 2004)

By centrally focusing on political ideology in social work education, we can move beyond the sound bites that the aforementioned pointed discourse provoked and begin a serious examination of how political ideology may manifest in both the BSW and MSW classroom.

This debate provides faculty, administrators, and students with a unique opportunity to assess classroom culture and to engage in an important conversation with each other about the role that political ideology may play in pedagogy with respect to both content and delivery. Colleen Galambos, former Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Social Work Education*, suggests that addressing political tolerance in the social work classroom is an important area of inquiry for social work educators (Galambos, 2009).

Such a conversation is also important due to its relative absence in the social work literature. The incorporation of and pedagogy pertaining to issues of social justice, diversity, nondiscrimination, and antioppression in social work education receive ample attention in the literature (e.g., Schiele, 2007; Snyder, Peeler, & May, 2008; Weiss, Gal, & Cnaan, 2008; Werkmeister Rozas, 2007; Wiener & Rosenwald, 2008; Woodcock & Dixon, 2005). However, literature that relates to the fundamental question of how a continuum of political ideology might influence and shape faculty and student participation and the range of educators' opinions on these topics—as referenced, respectively, by Watkins (2007) and Clark (2007)—has not received similar attention (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009 and Weinberg, 2010 are notable exceptions). Curiously, political ideology was not included as an explicit diversity variable in CSWE's accreditation standards until 2008 (CSWE, 2001, 2008).

Below, we offer a number of interrelated questions to be considered by social work educators, administrators, and students. Some of these questions will be addressed

directly in our subsequent remarks; others are shared to encourage discussion, but will not be answered within this particular article. We hope to return to these questions in forthcoming scholarly projects.

In making room for diverse political ideologies in the classroom, then, how might an appreciation of and a respect for such diversity be expressed simultaneously with the social work cornerstones of social justice and antioppressive advocacy? Other related questions are:

1. How does a school or department of social work select what curriculum, with its attendant political ideologies, is used, given that a politically neutral social work classroom probably cannot exist?
2. Upon which criteria (e.g., NASW Code of Ethics, NASW policy statements) are examples of political ideology included?
3. On what basis are texts and journal readings chosen?
4. How does political ideology manifest in syllabi and course assignments?
5. How do instructors use their roles as gatekeepers in supporting each student's development of a professional use of self that is consistent with ethical standards (e.g., NASW Code of Ethics), and, in particular, as each student works toward the advancement of social justice?
6. How do instructors develop and select classroom activities (including videos that are shown and vignettes that are used)?

The features and examples of political ideology that are selected for inclusion in a given course, as well as how the discussion of

political ideology is facilitated, reflect the range of explicit and implicit decisions that individual instructors and social work programs make.

Students need to be included and welcomed as central participants in discussions pertaining to the content and delivery of social work education. To address students' vital roles in the discourse of political ideology, social work educators and administrators can ask the following questions:

1. How are students engaged in discussions about political ideology?
2. To what extent are students aware that instructors are guiding them through discussions of politically situated topics?
3. How do students feel about expressing opinions that are presumably different from their instructors and each other?
4. How might the answers to these three questions be best assessed and measured?
3. How might students be encouraged to find ways to approach administrators and instructors regarding politically diverse needs and expectations?
4. How can administrators and instructors support students, and each other, when students' and teachers' opinions on the political continuum conflict?
5. How might students realize that a genuine appreciation exists on the part of their instructors (and vice versa) for a host of political opinions as expressed inside and outside of the social work classroom, despite the divisions that sometimes or perhaps inevitably occur between students, between instructors, and between students and instructors?
6. To what extent do social work departments and schools cultivate environments and cultures within which disagreement may occur?

Finally, seeking to strengthen the ties that exist between administrators, faculty, and students, and given the power dynamics that occur necessarily among these groups in most academic institutions, the following questions may prove helpful:

1. How might administrators and instructors elicit feedback from students about how course content incorporates what may be seen as politically sensitive subjects?
2. How can administrators and instructors respond effectively to students' various needs and expectations with respect to political diversity?

These questions provide important lenses into the political climate of the classroom and the manifest and latent intentions of faculty members and administrators in the delivery of social work education.

The Discourse of Progress in Social Work Education

Clearly, students are expected to progress in certain ways between their admission into and graduation from social work programs. The field of social work has a variegated set of political ideologies, which, understood and appreciated differently by each instructor, inform a complex yet sometimes seemingly intractable sequence of criteria that students must meet.

This specific set of expectations can be referred to as the *discourse of progress* in social work education. Instructors in social work programs often identify the need for increased reflexivity and critical thinking in a particular ideological, assumingly liberal direction. But, who defines these terms within the field of social work? Could not an evolution in critical reflection within an educational context lead a social work student to become, for instance, more politically conservative with regard to a particular issue on the aforementioned continuum?

Youll and Walker (2002) assert that the “capacity for independent thought and action [are] hallmarks of the advanced practitioner” (p. 212). Arguably, students develop this capacity through serious and committed reflection. However, if, for example, a student exhibits “independent thought and action” that prove to be incommensurate with that of her more politically liberal social work instructor, will she have achieved the hallmarks of the advanced practitioner any less admirably than her peer who has arrived at, for example, more liberal independent thought? One of the authors observed that it is sometimes the case that when social work educators speak of commonly invoked terms, such as *increased reflexivity* (D’Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007) or *critical reflection* (Fook & Askeland, 2007), what they seem to be referencing are their expectations that increasingly reflexive students will become politically less conservative or more liberal over time.

Although some members of the class implicitly understand this discourse of progress, it is rarely discussed overtly. This discrepancy between what is recognized and

what is actually discussed can potentially lead to a great deal of unnecessary friction between the instructor and students, and between individual students themselves. Such expectations of progression toward an assumed liberal political ideology are often interpreted by instructors as steeped within several foundational aspects of the field of social work, such as the NASW Code of Ethics and notions of social justice.

In some ways, discourse of progress may be a misnomer if considered particular to the field of social work. After all, discursively speaking, expectations of students’ progress or advancement throughout the program are presumably intrinsic to educational settings of all levels and in all disciplines. What distinguishes social work faculty in their expectations is their commitment to political ideologies that are specific to the profession. Therefore, critical reflection and independent thinking alone may be insufficient practices for students of social work; learners are also expected to engage with, and at least to a certain extent, abide by these ideologies that are assumed to be inherent to the field of social work itself.

Certain goals (such as a commitment to serve society’s marginalized groups and to combat all forms of social injustice) are intrinsic to the discipline of social work and reflective of a liberal political ideology. It may be useful for educators to spend time with their students explicitly addressing this ideology and the discourse of progress that may otherwise remain unspoken in the social work classroom. A commitment on the part of both instructor and student to open dialogue with regard to these issues should prove useful for

encouraging comfort for educators and students alike. Indeed, a mutual reflection on the discourse of progress may ultimately reveal that it is the means of achieving social work's goals, rather than the goals themselves, that represent a political ideological bias. For example, both liberal and conservative social workers might want to assist individuals who are poor, but they may have different views of how quickly change should be implemented to achieve this goal. We know that the social work profession, and consequently, social work education, will continue to transform and grow. Therefore, a relevant question might be: How will social work education keep with the changing political times and landscapes while remaining dedicated to its social justice roots?

The Curriculum

With the recent passage of CSWE's competency-based accreditation standards (and with the inclusion of political ideology within the standards' third competency on diversity), social work programs are free to design their curricula as long as the competencies can be achieved empirically. Given these new standards, programs may elect to develop emergent, unique approaches to social work education that differ from the traditional curricular sequences. We will now detail specific strategies for addressing a range of scenarios in which political ideology manifests in the traditional curricular sequences of human behavior in the social environment, research, practice, field education, and policy. These scenarios can be applied to both undergraduate and graduate social work education.

Human Behavior in the Social Environment

One of the authors, who taught in the graduate Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) sequence, has been intrigued by the relationship in HBSE classes among students' various political ideologies; students' myriad religious, antireligious, and nonreligious beliefs; and classroom discussions regarding clients', constituents', students', teachers', and practitioners' civil liberties. Galambos (2009) refers to the value of a "true deliberative classroom environment" (p. 346). Classroom environments can serve to foster and embrace political tolerance and political diversity; such environments can come to fruition in ongoing collaboration with our students.

The often abstract theoretical content in HBSE, like most MSW coursework, is difficult for some students to internalize in the time frames provided. In addition to the sheer volume and array of content to cover in HBSE, critical thinking, which can be defined variously, as previously noted, is often expected to be the avenue in which this content is understood and interpreted by students. Teaching critical thinking does not have to be accomplished by using specific political ideologies—liberal, conservative, centrist, and libertarian students, among others, are all capable of using self-reflection, taking personal inventory, and striving to establish a professional use of self. Moreover, each student (as well as individual faculty and administrators) may approach different issues from a set of varied political perspectives. For example, someone who has a liberal political ideology

on one issue (such as immigration reform) may hold a more conservative political ideology on another issue (such as welfare reform). A radical reminder to explore in HBSE and other social work courses is that the term *radical* means to change society from the root, and it is neither liberal nor conservative in its specificity, as is often mistaken to be the case.

Some of the truly radical work that we do around political ideology in the classroom, then, might include examining how it is permissible to be conservative and a great practitioner, thus defying a stereotype, and, more importantly, undergirding a support structure for the students in the classroom who identify as conservative and/or who work with conservative clients and constituents. Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) discuss a qualitative study conducted with a small sample ($n=11$) of social work students whose religious and political views “[differ] from what they perceived to be dominant at their school” (p. 32). Fleck-Henderson and Melendez wish to “learn about conditions that fostered or inhibited authentic speech for those students” as well as “how students dealt with their political views differing from political positions taken by the profession” (p. 32). An important pedagogical facet of Fleck-Henderson and Melendez’s work is to identify how faculty may negatively or positively influence “expression of minority views” (p. 32).

Fostering such conversations may be accomplished using intergroup dialogue. As Dessel, Rogge, and Garlington (2006) note, intergroup dialogue “is gaining currency in social work” (p. 303). The authors define *intergroup dialogue work* as:

a process designed to involve individuals and groups in an exploration of societal issues about which views differ, often to the extent that polarization and conflict occur . . . intergroup dialogue in the public arena is a facilitated community experience designed to provide a safe yet communal space to express anger and indignation about injustice. Participants are engaged in, witness, and are affected by a facilitated community experience. (p. 304)

Dessel et al.’s (2006) article emphasizes the potential impact of applying community intergroup dialogue to social work practice, research, and policy, but likewise encourages and provides examples of intergroup dialogue in social work classrooms. Specifically, Dessel et al. explore how “diversity-focused dialogues” support students in considering “cultural diversity and oppression” (p. 309).

Using intergroup approaches, Werkmeister Rozas (2007) describes a unique “theoretical process model” for encouraging dialogue in social work classrooms about social and economic justice, prejudice reduction, and diversity. According to Werkmeister Rozas,

this model builds from previous research that links bias and prejudice reduction to positive and sustained intergroup contact. Results suggest that students involved in this dialogic learning process are also involved in a process of recategorization and efforts to promote social change. (p. 5)

Snyder et al. (2008) identify a *conceptual framework* to be used within HBSE courses “to teach students how to work for social justice goals using a continuum of phased actions” (p. 145). These authors’ framework focuses on themes of diversity and oppression, but like Dessel et al.’s (2006) and Werkmeister Rozas’ (2007) projects, the framework does not address political ideology as explicitly as some might prefer. The innovative pedagogical strategies and methods encouraged by Dessel et al. (2006), Snyder et al. (2008), and Werkmeister Rozas (2007) might be used to promote a tolerance of (and hopefully a respect toward) differing political ideologies within HBSE and other social work classes, with an emphasis upon “reflective practice” as underscored by Schon (1987) and fine-tuned for social work purposes by Mishna and Bogo (2007). An orientation that is geared toward learning and doing more than teaching can also be linked to the philosophy of critical pedagogy as described by Freire (2005), hooks (1994), and others, and to the learner-centered education movement, broadly construed (Huba & Freed, 1999; Weimer, 2002).

Well before students embarked upon a journey to explore the intersections among various forms of oppression, this author explained that disrespecting any person’s political ideology or viewpoint would not be tolerated in the classroom. We then discussed how disparagement of any kind would have been a violation of the NASW Code of Ethics, how being conservative or liberal each represent a wide array of political ideologies, and how being liberal does not guarantee being an effective social work practitioner any more

than being conservative precludes this from happening. In other words, stereotypes and assumptions that tend to revolve around political ideologies in social work were discussed and disrupted throughout each of the HBSE sequence courses taught by the author.

The author was motivated to share the anti-disparagement statements based upon direct feedback received from students. In conversations with the author and during HBSE classes, students reported anecdotally that within HBSE and other classes, they wanted to feel increasingly comfortable and safe in being able to express their own beliefs, including political ideologies and to have the opportunity to experience and learn about the array of political ideologies that exists. Discussions about diverse political ideologies occurred while addressing simultaneously the NASW Code of Ethics and social work’s historical mission.

Consequently, from the outset of these courses, students were encouraged to consider how social workers are welcomed to have a range of political ideologies and that what matters most is that clients and constituents are served and that attempts are made to meet individualized needs with an ongoing respect for self-determination, dignity, and the worth of each person. This message was addressed by way of parallel process in the classroom: students heard and experienced that all viewpoints were welcomed, and all class members, including the instructor, tried to practice what we preach. Using this approach, students who may be either more or less liberal (or conservative) than some of their peers or faculty may not feel the need to remain secretive with their political views, or to hide what they are

thinking, for fear of reprisal from their colleagues or instructors.

These discussions were framed largely by students' and the instructor's varying political ideologies in terms of how we define entitlement, nondiscrimination, social justice, suffering, privilege, and so on. For example, using empowerment theories and other theoretical frameworks, students often chose to debate in HBSE about whether or not it is a social worker's ethical obligation to serve a wealthy, depressed teenager, since by virtue of class privilege this individual is likely to have access to greater resources than would an impoverished youth. Yet, since one of the profession's functions is to serve the disenfranchised, a depressed teen, regardless of the presence of class privilege, may easily be seen, at least arguably, as experiencing disenfranchisement through her/his experiences of emotional pain and marginalization due to age. Under these contested circumstances, students were encouraged by the instructor to discuss what is meant by disenfranchised, and to elaborate upon different and shared interpretations and understandings of the word oppression.

As another example, the instructor asked the students to consider what is referred to as "American exceptionalism." This may be defined as the degree to which individuals believe or perceive that the United States' mainstream political ideologies dominate or are taken to be the norm—if not a superior mode of being—within a variety of cultural contexts. Specifically, the students were asked how, as social workers-in-training, they felt the United States (or a mainstream understanding of the nation's presumed standards)

is often used as a measuring stick against other standards but not necessarily with the explicit consent or welcome of the people and places being evaluated and measured. In addition to its frequent international applications, some people and subcultures within the United States are evaluated using this measuring device. Typically, a lively exchange occurred in the classroom when these topics were raised. Students did not have to agree with this claim of exceptionalism, and were encouraged consistently to express dissent as well as consonance whenever they wished to do so about this subject and all others. Students explored definitions of political ideology as well as epistemology and hegemony at the beginning of and throughout the courses. Agreements, disagreements, and instances of ambivalence were contextualized within the HBSE classroom by summoning these various definitions.

While an instructor may decide not to hide their political ideology, it may be helpful to emphasize simultaneously that critical thinking does not mean shredding someone's opinions, but, instead, it means using active listening skills and empathy to try to imagine their perspective. In previous years, using empowerment theories, conflict theories, and a host of other theoretical schools in social work, the HBSE classes have had enriching debates over controversial political topics, such as ethnocentrism; transgender rights; the place of liberation alongside legitimation and assimilation; welfare rights; the simultaneous acceptance and refusal of labels; and the ways in which theory influences practice, research, and policy in the lives of social work clients, constituents, practitioners, students, and educators. These

facets of social work life overlapped and intersected in these HBSE classrooms because of a shared willingness to address respectfully our wide variety of political ideologies.

Research

We can examine how political ideology may manifest itself in a research class by considering the instructor's and/or students' selection and approval of and support for what are seen as legitimate policy study topics. The ways in which research topics are selected, research questions are formed, and research designs are crafted can at times reflect a political ideological bent.

Typically, any policy topic that is supported by the NASW policy statements (as encapsulated in *Social Work Speaks* [2009]) is among the topics that are considered plausible to study for a research class. Consequently, in a typical research course, a framework is provided to explore the degree in which these policies and programs are successful. Although NASW policy statements tend to explicitly serve as the social work profession's core political ideology benchmarks, faculty should be aware of any biases they have in supporting or rejecting inquiries into the efficacy of or alternatives to any of these policies—inquiries whose very questioning establishes that any policy statement might not be sacrosanct. For example, take the topic of immigration reform and research the inequities that exist. Similarly, take the difficulties that mothers have juggling motherhood and employment under current TANF guidelines and research these difficulties and the reasons that they exist. Instructors also need to consider their flexibility when stu-

dents may request to research a topic that may not be popular. Such inquiries could emerge from students who hold political ideologies representing a moderate view with respect to the NASW policy statements, or who have views that are more liberal or more conservative than these statements.

Students who want to conduct literature reviews or original studies on research questions grounded in what is perceived as conservative political ideology (e.g., "Do abstinence programs work?" and "What are the drawbacks of same-sex marriage?") deserve the same instructional endorsement as those questions anchored in what is perceived as liberal political ideology. Conversely, a student research project that examines attitudes focusing on the limitations of military intervention, at times an extreme liberal line of inquiry, also demands equal respect as a research topic. In fact, it should be the faculty's role to help students broaden their research questions so that their findings include any positive and negative data that exists and to critique the sources that are producing the data. This is the goal of scientific research.

Practice and Field Education

It is important to acknowledge that the post-secondary education knowledge base has substantiated that higher education, regardless of discipline, tends to be associated with increasing liberal political ideology in students through hypothetical mechanisms of either self-selection or socialization (Hastie, 2007). The socialization mechanism has been found to operate via social learning and informational influences (2007). Our earlier discussion of

the discourse of progress in social work education seeks to examine these tendencies critically; we will return to our discussion of the discourse of progress in the article's conclusion.

Although it is in the HBSE and policy content areas that diversity of political ideology and social justice theory are most evident in dedicated courses, the practice content and field education courses are intended to transmit practice skills/techniques and to be infused with similar diversity and social justice content as applied to practice settings within diverse systems and populations. Hence, macro structural factors that perpetuate social injustice will be found in the lives of client communities and individuals in field practice settings, and students are expected to demonstrate and develop practice skills to moderate them. Students are therefore expected to engage in ongoing deliberation on personal and professional political ideology associated with social change (Weinberg, 2010).

Practice classes seek to illuminate how choices of theories, their related interventions, as well as the profession's ethical obligation to practice with vulnerable populations, have implications for effective engagement with social and economic policy issues (e.g., abortion, gay marriage, immigration, welfare, health reform) that are framed within a very conservative to a very liberal continuum. Students learn to identify their own political countertransference, dissect their political ideologies, and understand how they may need to reconcile their own views when those views conflict with the profession's via NASW (e.g., working within LGBT communities or with undocumented clients). In turn, faculty can reflect on their own expectations

of what students' political ideologies should be, and whether it is sufficient if students' political ideologies as associated with their professional roles can differ from their personal political ideologies.

Students exposed to contextualized critical analysis in practice classes prior to or concurrent with entering field may be more effective at working within a range of client systems in accordance with social work ethics as defined by the NASW Code of Ethics. Examples from one of the authors' work experiences include:

- A liberal student who is antiwar who needs to negotiate this political view with the development of competence with military culture to work with combat veterans effectively;
- A moderate student's application of social stratification theory in the assessment of persons who are homeless; and
- A conservative student's connection with nontraditional adoptive families (e.g., gay and lesbian; single parent) or pregnant women seeking abortions.

Case studies involving work with abortion decision processes among women of different faith communities, for example, can be used in field seminars (as well as in practice classes) to promote reflection about political ideology and its relationship to the professional role (Smith-Osborne & Rosenwald, 2009). Subsequent retrieval and reading of longitudinal studies on abortion decision outcomes could promote synthesis and application of knowledge in practice based on the evidence in light of increased insight into the

students' political ideologies as well as their religiosity (Ehrlich, 2003; Robson et al., 2009).

Consideration of ethical dilemmas, role-plays, and demonstrations in social work skills labs, small group experiential learning, and engagement in political participation to advance social justice as well as to advocate for individual clients are all teaching methods that are used in practice classes to socialize students to the NASW Code of Ethics (Hamilton & Fauri, 2001). Although the "teach-in" may be a method of the past (Lasch, 1965), social action strategies are still taught in field placements and in required social work practice classes, as well as adopted in collective events such as state legislative lobby days or advocacy days in many social work programs. Because practice is taught from a contextual standpoint (i.e., person-in-environment) in our discipline, the practice content area is embedded in the discipline's social change and cultural competence orientation, and thereby tends to broaden students' tolerance for diversity in political ideology and fund of general knowledge about behavior in context—mechanisms for reflection on the discourse of progress. Such effects are distinct from the alleged exclusionary indoctrination processes as referenced by the NAS (2007).

Controversies in the practice curriculum and in field instruction have centered not only on discussion of micro areas of practice when examining students' political ideologies but on mezzo-level professional issues as well as where the political ideology of the profession can be shaped by both historical trends and current students' specific career paths. These discourses have been couched in binary terms, such as educating for *agency practice*

versus *private practice* and *psychotherapy training*, which focuses on assisting the client to change the self, personality, or psyche, versus *community practice*, *social casework*, and *group work training*, which focuses on assisting the client to deal with contextual issues and use their social resources effectively. Helping new students to understand that social work education is not simply a quick route to private psychotherapy practice is part of the socialization function of the practice curriculum (Karger, 1989; Specht, 1991). Consideration of this may address and challenge students' preexisting attitudes reflecting a political ideology just as in the HBSE and policy content areas. Practice content on the mental health consumer movement and models of recovery highlight ideological issues influencing clients' choices around institutionally embedded services, as well as social attitudes toward disability as a social construct and a diversity issue. Just as practice classes allow students to focus on acquiring narrowly defined, technical skill-sets, social work educators engage in the formation of agents of social control whose upward mobility into the professional class positions them to serve institutionalized power via privileged or credentialed expertise; hence, professionalization can be associated with a more conservative ideology (Rosenwald, 2004).

Privileging such content to the exclusion of theory and evidence about the impact of social problems/context and their relationship to oppression, social class, and processes of social stratification represents a *de facto* choice of ideologies relevant to praxis of the social work mission (Souflee, 1993; Van Soest, 1996; Perry, 2003; Danis & Lockhart, 2003; Col-

arossi, 2005; Olson, 2007). Perry (2003), however, found that students' political ideological association with practice settings/groups did not appear to be influenced by graduate social work education. These findings, in contrast to Hastie (2007), would suggest that self-selection rather than socialization is the pertinent mechanism in the association between more liberal political ideology and commitment to practice consonant with social work's social justice mission. This association, however, is exactly a component of the discourse of progress that the authors wish to raise.

Policy

Perhaps in no part of the social work curriculum does political ideology express itself more explicitly than in policy. Typically, aside from the history of the profession and perspectives on analyzing policy, a survey of different policies—from immigration policy and health policy to civil rights policy and welfare policy—is reviewed. While policy classes are traditionally known for their lively debates, let us take a closer look into the nature of these debates: To what extent is the full range of views freely expressed by students? To what extent might a student feel comfortable expressing a particular, albeit (presumably) unpopular, view? Does the instructor permit such a view or is such a view consciously or subconsciously sanctioned? Do students welcome or sanction each other's views? Does the instructor come to a student's defense if others perceive the student as betraying social work political ideology?

Let us ground these questions with an example: the recent health care legislation. President Obama's and Congress's health care

bill is widely perceived as an ideologically centrist bill. Some social work students may subscribe to the moderate sentiments of incrementalism and pragmatism that the law reflects. Other students, from a more conservative approach, might believe that the new health care reform will bankrupt this nation and is inherently unconstitutional, for example, when it comes to levying penalties on what should be a guaranteed individual freedom to choose whether to purchase health insurance. Still other students, representing a very liberal perspective, may insist that a state-run, single-payer health insurance system is the only real solution—a government solution to this social problem that proudly represents facets of a socialist approach.

Policy instructors are faced frequently with such a scenario and the extent to which they embrace political diversity in the classroom may determine whether such diversity is perceived as an uncomfortable dilemma or a teachable moment. Of course, complicating this a bit is whether NASW's *Social Work Speaks* (2009), the standard compilation of policy statements voted on every 3 years by NASW's Delegate Assembly, is used or referenced in the course.

Perhaps the instructor, who references NASW's position on health care reform, as referenced in *Social Work Speaks* (NASW, 2009), allows for a spirited interaction while being protective and respectful of all students' voices. Perhaps the students hold a forum on health care in the classroom, and the instructor supports the students regarding their need to identify their own views, educate themselves through reading, writing and class discussion, and reconcile their personal views

with their education when it comes to a particular policy (political ideology can vary from policy to policy). These may be among the best situations for the policy instructor and the students in the classroom. Yet, it is important to ask what an instructor may elect or even have to do when faced with situations that differ significantly from those just mentioned.

For example, what if most of the students are against abortion? Should an instructor invoke the NASW Code of Ethics with respect to its traditionally pro-choice stance? What about in some departments and schools of social work wherein students are not required to subscribe to the NASW Code of Ethics as a condition of admission? Perhaps the instructor encourages the students to discuss a range of views on politically controversial topics, including abortion. The instructor may choose to present (but not necessarily agree with) certain views, as well, with or without invoking the NASW Code of Ethics.

If the instructor indicates that a spectrum of views exists, provides the students with the opportunity to discuss these views openly, and allows the students to make their own decisions, has the instructor failed in social work education's discourse of progress or is it the goal of the discourse to protect and respect students' right to enact their self-determination? It may not be possible to teach about NASW policy statements in a neutral fashion. Even if students are pro-life, they may have to work with pro-choice clients and constituents and therefore need to be prepared for addressing potential ideologically based ethical dilemmas in various fields of practice (Rosenwald & Hyde, 2006). Whereas examples of ethical di-

lemmas appear frequently in the case studies, assigned readings, and in-class activities, students may not be given the impression that there are many answers possible in each case, including politicized answers to ethical dilemmas that in some cases may seem irreconcilable and therefore not realistic answers or resolutions to dilemmas. Although due to their apparent tendency toward irresolution these kinds of pedagogical situations may seem to be somewhat existential, faculty can still strive to support classroom discussions regarding applicable perspectives that foster the increased possibility of certain tangible resolutions, even to seemingly irreconcilable dilemmas.

Moving Forward

Galambos (2009) highlights that relatively little has been published in the social work literature concerning political ideology. It is our hope that Galambos's call for further discussion of political ideology in our classrooms and in our professional writings will be paralleled by an equally fervent amplification in the social work literature of what is understood, as noted above, to be "a true deliberative classroom environment" (p. 346). Discussing, debating, and, indeed, deliberating as members of a profession about what "deliberative" means today and could mean tomorrow hold the promise to elaborate rich, critical analyses and to promote positive, nuanced changes in the lives of social work students, administrators, educators, and practitioners, and the clients and constituents whom we serve.

With these myriad discussions, debates, and deliberations pertaining to political ideology in mind, we conclude this article by offering a three-pronged strategic approach that is

related directly to social work pedagogy: a typology (see Figure 1), a composite of guidelines (see Figure 2), and a final commentary. Our typology for addressing political ideology in the classroom includes key variables for educators to consider and review from their perspective; it could also be used as a springboard to a collaborative activity among faculty and students alike.

The composite of suggested curricular guidelines includes sample course objectives, instructional strategies, student learning objectives, and practice behaviors that can

help faculty and administrators to facilitate educational processes with students that honor a respect for political ideologies, as underscored by CSWE’s *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standard 2.1.4*. (2008).

It may be helpful to reframe the discourse of progress in social work education to protect and respect students’ rights to enact their self-determination as fully as possible. Some social work students may perceive inside and outside of the classroom that their political ideologies differ from their instructors’ or student peers’ beliefs or from those of the profession’s.

FIGURE 1. Typology of Addressing Political Ideology in the Classroom

Low ←————→ High
Degree of Instructor Self-Awareness of Own Political Ideology
Degree of Instructor Self-Disclosure of Own Political Ideology
Degree of Instructor Acceptance of Student Political Diversity
Degree of Incorporating Political Diversity in Class Content
Degree of Allowing Political Debate to Occur
Degree of Instructor Belief that the Profession has a Certain Political Ideology
Degree of Student Self-Disclosure

FIGURE 2. Guidelines for Competency-Based Education for Addressing Political Ideology

Sample Course Objectives for Respective Courses	Recommended Instructional Strategies	Sample Learning Objectives and Practice Behaviors
<p>Identify the range of political ideologies in U.S. society and their influences on social policies, social work theories, and professional socialization (<i>HBSE, Policy</i>)</p> <p>Experience support from faculty in expressing a range of political ideologies respectfully in the classroom and in analyzing their implications for effective social work practice (<i>HBSE, Policy, Practice, Field Education, Research</i>)</p> <p>Examine NASW policy statements to identify political ideologies represented and the effects of the enacted policies from the standpoint of different ideologies (<i>Policy</i>)</p> <p>Evaluate the research base for direct practice methods in terms of clients' and practitioners' / researchers' political ideology (<i>Research</i>)</p>	<p>Intergroup dialogue; large-group discussion; guest speakers; historical analysis; political participation/action</p> <p>Parallel process; debate teams using a multifocal, rather than binary (pro vs. con), structure</p> <p>Systematic review of studies on impact/outcomes of policies; client speakers/interviews for those affected by the policy with analysis course assignment</p> <p>Critical analysis of the practice evidence (e.g., identify and examine: sample characteristics and what groups were excluded, ideological influences on selection of research questions and methods, ideological stance of theoretical underpinnings, ideological influences on what studies get published)</p> <p>Standardized client simulations; process recordings; client speakers/interviews with analysis assignment; critique of advocacy group websites representing contrasting ideologies; systematic review of studies investigating relationship between client ideologies, access to services, and problems in living/coping</p>	<p>Students will view themselves as learners and engage those with whom they work. Students will be able to articulate these views verbally and in writing.</p> <p>Students will gain sufficient self-awareness to recognize, verbalize, and write about their personal political ideologies and to manage the influence of these ideologies in working with diverse groups.</p> <p>Students will recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping clients' life experiences. Students will discuss how political ideologies and policies may affect clients' life experiences differently.</p> <p>Students will recognize and communicate their understanding of the extent to which research can be influenced by political ideology and subsequently grant privilege or serve to oppress the generation of knowledge structures. Students will recognize how political ideologies may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.</p> <p>Students will recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of working with clients whose different life experiences may be correlated with the clients' differing political ideologies.</p>
<p>Experience clients' differing ideologies and practice impact (<i>HBSE, Policy, Practice, Field Education, Research</i>)</p>	<p>Standardized client simulations; process recordings; client speakers/interviews with analysis assignment; critique of advocacy group websites representing contrasting ideologies; systematic review of studies investigating relationship between client ideologies, access to services, and problems in living/coping</p>	<p>Students will recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of working with clients whose different life experiences may be correlated with the clients' differing political ideologies.</p>

Social work educators might work collaboratively with students so that students do not feel that their political ideologies need to be hidden. Encountering and addressing students' diverse political ideologies, as they exist on a continuum, ought not to involve socializing these individuals to become more liberal or less conservative (or, perhaps in fewer cases, less liberal or more conservative). In contrast, social work students with various points-of-view could be encouraged by their instructors and mentors to believe that critical reflection and independent thinking are vital to an ability to serve clients and communities effectively, rather than these students understanding that they are expected to abide by certain political ideologies that are seemingly inherent to the field of social work. Faculty and program administrators can also participate in this exchange to question deeply held assumptions about the profession's political ideology and the extent to which it is addressed in the social work classroom.

Importantly, we are not suggesting that students' critical reflection and independent thinking are necessarily sufficient in isolation. Indeed, some students' critical reflection and independent thinking might lead them to make decisions and to display behaviors that

are in direct opposition to the profession's stated commitments as expressed in NASW's *Social Work Speaks* (2009). While everyone is entitled to their opinions, having political ideologies and acting (or not acting) upon them must be guided by professional ethics as defined by the NASW, for example. Some students may be able to meet ethical expectations even if their political ideologies are in stark contrast with the profession's generally accepted stances.

It is our view that a synthesized set of approaches is likely to work best to support a variety of students in meeting the ethical expectation to serve clients and communities from a host of political ideology perspectives. By using a creative combination of supervision, mentorship, and critical reflection, field instructors, faculty members, and other instructors can work in close collaboration with our students to encourage them increasingly to grapple with the potentially challenging situations and ethical dilemmas that can result from diverse and at times competing political ideologies. Social work educators, supervisors, and administrators who adopt such a synthesized set of approaches can therefore support BSW and MSW students, as well as graduates, throughout their careers.

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Mitchell Rosenwald is associate professor at Barry University, **Diane R. Wiener** is director of the Disability Cultural Center at Syracuse University, **Alexa Smith-Osborne** is assistant professor at the University of Texas at Arlington, and **Christine M. Smith** is a recent graduate from Binghamton University.

Address correspondence to Mitchell Rosenwald at Barry University, School of Social Work, 11300 NE 2nd Avenue, Miami Shores, FL 33161-6695; e-mail: mrosenwald@mail.barry.edu.