

Social Work Theories: decolonizing social work (3 ECTS)

Teaching periods

From Wednesday December 6 (14h) to Friday December 8 (14h), 2023
Thursday February 15 & Friday February 16, 2024 (9h15-17h15)

Venue

December 6-8 2023: Münchenwiler
February 15-16 2024: University of Neuchâtel, Rue A.L. Breguet 2, room 2.310

Teaching team

Kris Clarke, Social Work Professor, University of Helsinki
Barbara Waldis, Professor ITTS, UniNE

Content of the seminar

The seminar starts from the international definition of social work with the premises of social change for more social justice and the consideration of different types of knowledge. The seminar deals with different dimensions of "decolonising social work". After an introductory afternoon on December 6, with Kris Clarke and a discussion on her text on epistemic decolonisation of social work (2022), December 7 includes presentations on decolonial social work in PhD thesis of PhD Students from Finland and Switzerland. In the morning of December 8, PhD Students from ITTS will present the group work started on the first afternoon.

The two-day seminar on February 15 & 16 (Thursday & Friday) at UniNE will consist of text presentation & discussion with a focus on different dimensions relevant in social work: the community work dimension, the intervention & professional dimension and the epistemological & training related dimension.

The term "decolonising" is used broadly, yet it bears a fundamental, also historically rooted critique of power relations in all social work dimensions and also in terms of advocacy (Spivak 1985). Seen in this light, the term is suitable for discussing the contradictions that any critical social work has to deal with: geopolitical (post-)colonial entanglements and blocking out, the national legal frameworks for social work and social policy, the power structures in organisations and the power relations in social relationships with the addressees.

The seminar aims to raise awareness of international power relations, because they influence the framework conditions of social work, mostly national in character. In addition, the seminar is dedicated to a critical perspective on a current theoretical debate in social work. Finally, the seminar offers space for discussion about the limits within which decolonising social work can be implemented in the practice of intervention, research and theory-based teaching.

- What does in fact mean the notion of decolonising and how does it relate to the notion of post-coloniality or a perspective from the margins?
- How much do we need to reconsider globalisation when adopting a decolonising social work perspective?
- What does "decolonising social work" imply regarding decentring social work theory from concepts coined by European and Anglo-Saxon academia?



- What are the consequences for research methods, organisations, interventions and training if decolonising social work is taken seriously?
- What new historical perspective on social work in Switzerland would a decolonising perspective entail?

Form of evaluation

Internal evaluation. Read, summarize, present & discuss theoretical texts, find & use relevant sources of critique, imagine possible applications

Learning goals

- To know the concept of decolonising social work imbedded in a theoretical background and with relevant dimensions for social work
- To be able to argue the salience of a decolonising social work perspective for a specific topic
- To reflect the societal context in Switzerland regarding decolonising social work

Transferable skills

- To be able to discuss a theoretically founded perspective of a key concept
- To be able to argue the relevance of a key concept for a given dimension of a discipline
- To be able to reflect the societal context for a given key concept

Pre-condition and registration

Registration as a PhD student at a Swiss university or pedagogical contract as a future PhD student of the ITTS.

Registration at messagerie.itts@unine.ch until September 15 if accommodation needed. In case of a day attendance only, registration until November 22.

Documentation & literature

All the documentation will be available on Moodle.