

## Towards a Red Pedagogy for Social Work Education

Categories: [Teaching Effectiveness Award Essays](#)

By [Valentín Sierra](#), [Social Welfare](#)

### Teaching Effectiveness Award Essay, 2023

In our current educational system, colonialism is often overlooked or dismissed, perpetuating the marginalization of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge, while simultaneously reinforcing colonialism's power over their lives. Colonialism is detrimental for all learners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as it perpetuates systems of power and oppression that limits the diversity of perspectives and knowledge that are available. It is important for educators to recognize and challenge colonialism to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all learners.

In social work education, colonialism is perpetuated through a Eurocentric curriculum that privileges Western knowledge and devalues Indigenous ways of knowing. To address this issue, I implemented a Red Pedagogy relevant for social work education to center Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the classroom. Red Pedagogy is a critical pedagogy framework developed by Quechua scholar Sandy Grande, that seeks to decolonize education by centering Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. It draws on Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies to challenge the dominant Western educational paradigm and promote social justice, anti-colonialism and anti-racism work.

To integrate Red Pedagogy into the SW114 – Practice in Social Work class, I centered students' class activities on Indigenous cultural values and teachings by incorporating a “learn by doing” approach as I integrated components of the Gathering of Native Americans (GONA) intervention. Red Pedagogy (re)framed my approach towards instruction as I centered my two discussion sections on class activities, rather than the formal class discussion format.

The GONA was developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 1992 specifically to address the historical trauma response of substance misuse in tribal communities. One example of a class activity involved having the students partake in a talking circle where students passed around an eagle feather and provided a check-in or quick share about whatever they liked. By experiencing the activity, students got to understand the different ways social work practice can manifest. This approach also served to empower learners to develop critical thinking skills and promote social justice by (re)centering traditional knowledge and teachings.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, I incorporated the Belmont Process, a psychosocial reflection exercise that revolves around three questions: 1) What did I see?; 2) What did I hear?; 3) What did I feel? As a class, students answered aloud what they saw, heard, and felt in class. This activity allowed for the evaluation of the GONA class activities and the Red Pedagogy approach. Students identified being able to: 1) Hear: “passion,” “laughter,” and “self-reflections;” 2) See: “community,” “theory being put into place,” and “Indigenous cultures;” and 3) Feel: “love,” “connection,” and “empowered.”

In conclusion, colonialism is an ongoing reality in our current educational system that perpetuates systems of power and oppression, reinforcing harmful attitudes and beliefs, and limiting the diversity of perspectives and knowledge available. By centering Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, educators can decolonize social work education, promote social justice, and create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all learners. The Red Pedagogy approach, as applied in the SW114 – Practice in Social Work class, serves as an effective framework for integrating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into the classroom, empowering learners to develop critical thinking skills and promote social justice.

### Most Popular Tags

discussion  
 discussion section  
 active learning  
 writing  
 collaborative learning  
 motivation  
 conceptual knowledge  
 problem solving  
 analysis  
 reading & composition courses  
 participation  
 group work  
 visual learning  
 reading strategies  
 critical thinking  
 applied knowledge  
[Full tag list](#)

### GSI Teaching & Resource Center

[gsi@berkeley.edu](mailto:gsi@berkeley.edu) | Office Hours 9–12, 1–4

[Privacy](#)  
[Nondiscrimination](#)  
[Accessibility](#)  
 Berkeley Graduate Division