

DISSERTATION

A SURVEY OF GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS: TEACHING PERSPECTIVES  
AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### A SURVEY OF GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS: TEACHING PERSPECTIVES AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

Social work educators have the challenging task of preparing students to be ethically, morally, and socially responsible professionals. As professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, social workers are faced with ever increasing complexity and change. Teaching philosophies are at the foundation of what educators do in the classroom. Research about teaching perspectives in social work education is limited. The purpose of this descriptive, survey study is to better understand the teaching perspectives of graduate social work educators when teaching human rights, social and economic justice (HRSEJ) content and the actions educators reported taking to create their classroom environment.

The current study is a quantitative, online survey design. Two separate instruments were combined into one online survey hosted on SurveyGizmo. The two instruments were the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) and a newly developed Classroom Environment Scale (CES). The 45-item TPI had 5-point Likert scales and the 12 item CES had 7-point Likert scales. Participants in the study were graduate social work educators in CSWE accredited programs who had experience teaching human rights, social and economic justice content (HRSEJ). Fifty graduate faculty responded to the online survey and 48 completed the whole survey.

Findings suggest that the majority of these graduate social work educators held teaching perspectives that aligned with the theoretical basis of this study. In this study, the majority of graduate educators held a Developmental perspective (42%) with an additional quarter that held an Apprenticeship (26%) perspective as dominant. Although infrequently dominant, this sample of faculty had a higher mean score for Social Reform than any of the other groups of professionals in the TPI database. When comparing the current social work educators who teach in private vs. public or denominational vs. all other types of institutional auspices, no significant differences

were found. Also, this study compared the social work course where the HRSEJ content was covered by the faculty member, and no significant differences were found for individual courses. There was a relationship between the actions related to the classroom environment and the Developmental, Nurturing, Social Reform, and to a lesser extent, Apprenticeship perspective. Faculty in this study also began to define what components they felt were necessary for an environment that would support critical thinking. Educators in this study identified dialogue around the exposure of students to different points of view as crucial in supporting critical thinking in social work education. Just over a half of all respondents also felt that respect, safe climate, and the modeling of openness was key to an environment for critical thinking.

In this study, when an educator was more likely to share feelings, they were also more likely to challenge all students to explore their assumptions, use their own feelings to model the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking, and recognize the risks for students to explore their assumptions. Recommendations for social work education are to take notice of our teaching philosophies and the impact they have on student's experience and learning. To answer critics requires that the profession thoughtfully examine *all* of the elements of the teaching/learning exchange and to understand how they impact the profession, the student, and educators alike.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Artist Leigh Standley said, “Since things don’t always go right, it’s nice to have someone like you on my left.” I have many people “on my left” that have made this journey possible. To thank everyone individually would take too long – with humility I create an abbreviated list which I hope can still do justice to the support and guidance I have received from so many. First, I want to thank my committee – their efforts and support throughout my doctoral journey made actually getting the degree possible! Next, I want to thank my wonderful family – my husband, Chad, my sister, my mom, and my dad. Your encouragement and never wavering belief in me is what made me think I could do this and probably kept me on the path towards completion. While you have been with me since the days of green barrettes, “let’s face it girls are smarter”, and Barbie dream houses – you *still* have to call me doctor! Finally, I’d be remiss if I didn’t include some of the many friends I have made along the way who have understood my ups and downs – Tobi, Helen, Barb, and Katie – thank you! This study is dedicated to my grandparents: Chas & Lu Johnson and Winston & Mary Lindsay. While you are no longer here with me, I know you are beaming with pride.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Social work educators have the challenging task of preparing students to be ethically, morally, and socially responsible professionals who are faced with ever increasing complexity and change. While the profession has continued to be about working for the well-being of individuals and their communities, the context where social work practice occurs has changed dramatically over the last couple of decades. Overall, education is a complex dance between student, content, context, and educator. What information is covered, from what perspective, evaluated on what standards, and for what end are key questions that drive all educational interactions.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has created educational competencies, known as Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which provides an educational blueprint for social work. EPAS is but one system that impacts what happens in a social work classroom, but educational standards are central to the education that social work students receive. Social work educational competency 2.1.3 is related to the application of critical thinking to inform professional judgments (CSWE, 2008). While experts in critical thinking assert that one unified definition is not necessary, CSWE has adopted a relatively limited one to guide professional education. Specifically, CSWE (2008) stated that, “Social workers are knowledgeable about the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and reasoned discernment. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity [and that] critical thinking also requires the synthesis and communication of relevant information” (p. 4). CSWE’s (2008) definition provides a working definition of critical thinking for this study. In contrast, Hale (2008) completed a critical analysis of Richard Paul’s conception of critical thinking. Through his review, the fundamental conceptualization of critical thinking that has propelled the work of the Foundation for Critical Thinking for over thirty years was found to contain the base-line concepts that most critical

thinking scholars believe are key regardless of disciplinary differences (Hale, 2008). That definition, which is used in this study as an educational ideal, is:

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and socio-centrism. (Hale, 2008, pp. 48-49)

Chapter two will further situate critical thinking and the benefits it provides to the profession in the current literature. For now, the claim will be made that critical thinking supports the implementation of the values and mission of the social work profession. While the profession's values and mission are lofty and idyllic, they are not above reproach. The National Association of Scholars (NAS, 2007) is one organization that has critiqued the profession's educational efforts by saying that social work educators have "lost sight of the difference between instruction and indoctrination ... they have...adopted an official ideological line, closing off debate on many questions that serious students of public policy would admit to be open to the play of contending viewpoints" (p. 5). What can be done in education to battle indoctrination? An educational competency for critical thinking combats those claims; however, teaching for critical thinking is not easy and even the explicit use of core principles and standards still does not guarantee positive student outcomes (E. Hale, personal communication, March 5, 2011). Stated another way, even the best efforts at explicitly teaching for critical thinking can miss the mark. It is the assertion of this study that, underlying the incorporation of critical thinking into a course are philosophies of education that support it and an appropriate educational environment for the necessary tasks. So, while critical thinking, depth in learning and knowledge, competence or adherence to professional values are end goals for education, there are pre-cursors found in the educator that may or may not support them.

The purpose of this descriptive, survey study is to better understand the teaching perspectives (Pratt & Associates, 2005) of social work faculty and the actions they take to create a

theoretically ideal classroom environment that ultimately supports critical thinking. A perspective has been defined as “an interrelated set of beliefs and intentions which give meaning and justification for our actions...[it] is really a particular bias, based on how you ‘see’ the issue and what vested interests are most important to you” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 33). While Pratt and Associates (2005) argued against the universal acceptance of one perspective as *best*, it is stated here that some perspectives align naturally with the canons of social work and adult education theory. The tenets of social work and adult education point to the need for critical reflection, support, and openness in the classroom; learning through negotiation and full discourse with people who have values, biases, beliefs, and ideas that are different from our own (Baradat, 1994).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) challenged the profession and the education of social work students. NAS has stated they are an independent association dedicated to supporting intellectual freedom, reasoned scholarship, and civil debate in higher education. None of which is incongruent with social work education. Where NAS has claimed foul is in the values and mission of social work and how that has reportedly been translated in the educational setting. In the 2007 study *The Scandal of Social Work*, NAS reported that social work has “lost sight of the difference between instruction and indoctrination...they have...adopted an official ideological line, closing off debate on many questions that serious students of public policy would admit to be open to the play of contending viewpoints” (p. 5). NAS (2007) also contended that social work has abandoned the traditional principles of academia and that attention must be paid to the intellectual foundations of higher education. Reflection upon the underlying foundation of these statements to evaluate their claims is integral to full participation in the discourse of this educational critique. NAS has challenged social work based upon the association’s belief about what education *should* be.

If students are to do the work required for competence in graduate social work education, or specifically with human rights, social and economic justice (HRSEJ) content, it is necessary that

conditions are created where students feel safe and supported to speak, write, and read in a manner consistent with the definitions of critical thinking in this study. What is consistent with critical thinking? Self-directed and skilled reasoning based upon intellectual standards promotes the ideal definition of critical thinking. This means that students need to feel that they can investigate the issue for purpose, root ideas and questions, the assumptions and points of view, conclusions or inferences and the implications of what is being taught. Foundational to Hale's (2008) work which was based upon the extensive work of Richard Paul is the notion that humans think and make meaning in a very personal manner. This is to say that we naturally think in ego- and socio-centric ways (Paul & Elder, 2009). In order to balance those socio-centric and ego-centric tendencies students need the support and space to explore the content. It is easy to become defensive when our beliefs and ideas are challenged (Paul & Elder, 2009). Educators are not immune to this. Unless educators have personally done the work necessary to cultivate their own thinking, they too can fall victim to defensiveness or complacency. If students feel that there is only one acceptable answer to questions that are actually questions of judgments with better and worse answers, they are not in an environment that is consistent with the tenets of either definition of critical thinking. Classrooms based in the dialectical, dialogical, and constructivist traditions offer the most effective premises on which to build an environment that empowers students to question, identify and understand assumptions, analyze, clarify, view an issue from different points, or figure out the implications of the issue at hand.

While an *ideal* conceptualization of critical thinking is difficult for educators to achieve (R. Paul, personal communication, March 4, 2011), taking explicit and incremental steps in that direction will provide students with the necessary skills to survive and thrive in modern social work practice. As stated previously, that is just the tip of the iceberg. Adult learners and adult education is different. Adults possess a rich reservoir of knowledge and prior experience that must be engaged and addressed in the classroom. What leading scholars in the fields of educational philosophy and adult education and learning have discovered is that the way an educator taught and

what they believed about the educational process affected student learning. A theoretically ideal and active climate of respect, mutuality, support, and challenge supports the adult learner and ultimately justice, depth in knowledge, and critical thinking.

What this study aims to discover is what lies beneath the surface of the classroom and the content with exploration into the philosophies of the educator; the philosophies that drive how an educator sees teaching, learning, and the conditions to support that vision (see Figure 1). Based upon the theoretical base of this study, it is posited that certain educational environments support the learning styles and needs of adult students. The relationship between teaching perspectives and classroom environments will impact a student's experience and overall quality of learning. While ultimately this graphic depicts a supposition that certain environments and certain perspectives will lead to critical thinking, depth in learning, competence, and adherence to professional values, this study did not address these outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

1. What teaching perspectives do graduate social work educators report having when teaching human rights, social and economic justice content?
2. How do social work educators in this sample compare to other social workers and related disciplines that have completed the teaching perspectives inventory?
3. Is there a difference in teaching perspectives between educators who teach at public institutions and those who teach at private institutions in teaching perspectives?
4. Is there a difference in teaching perspectives between educators who teach at denominational institutions and those who teach at all other institutions in teaching perspectives?
5. Is there a difference in teaching perspectives between educators who teach in different social work courses (e.g., practice or policy) in teaching perspectives?
6. Do graduate social work educators' report that their students perceive they act in ways that support the theoretically ideal environment in this study?

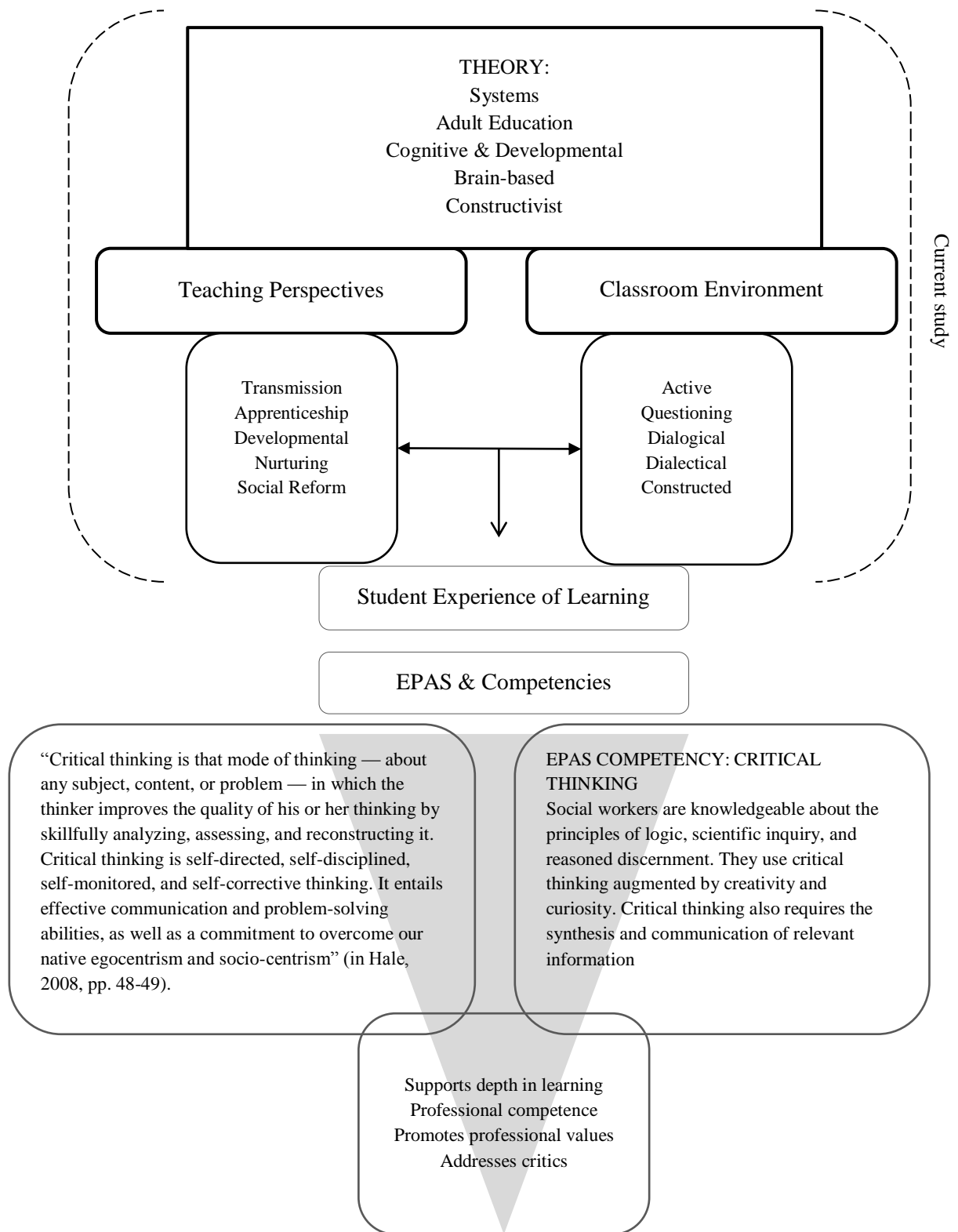


Figure 1. Conceptualization of the study.



7. Is there a relationship between educators' teaching perspectives and the reported actions for creation of a classroom environment?
8. What components did these educators report as important in the creation of a classroom environment for critical thinking?

### **Skillful Teaching**

Social work education, while unique in many ways, is still part and parcel a discipline within higher education. EPAS linked social work education with a foundation in liberal arts education and with the principles of critical thinking. To consider what social work educators believe about their classrooms, students, the content, and their ideals is to enter into a full examination of the scandal that NAS has *claimed*. To move the profession continually forward, to meet the ever changing landscape of globalization, and to provide best practice for our clients the profession's educators need consistent critical reflection and thinking about what and how the students are taught. Based in the 1995 work of Brookfield, critically reflective teaching occurs when assumptions that motivate how we work are identified and scrutinized; critical reflection requires that educators view their practice from different angles and perspectives. Brookfield (2006) cautioned that "when our teaching is determined by an unthinking subscription to professional norms...our chances of helping our own students learn are severely reduced" (p. 25). While not typically a focus of social work educators (Anastas & Congress, 1999; Valentine et al., 1998), the way in which an educator understands the self, the content, and the student affect what and how students learn (Brookfield, 1995; Pratt & Associates, 2005; Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999).

### **Theory**

The grand level theory for this study is systems theory. This theory provides a framework for the multifaceted nature of education. Systems theory holds that problems do not necessarily reside with the individual or the environment, but in the interaction between them (Payne, 1997). Becoming a professional social work practitioner and educator is comprised of an intricate

interaction of the person and their environment; the connectedness and impact of each system upon the individual. People are in constant interaction with their environment and they both change and are changed by that environment (Payne, 1997). Social work education is made up of many interrelated components. Other theories that inform this study include: cognitive developmental, adult learning, constructivist and brain-based teaching.

While only a brief review of these theories will be presented here, a full review of the theoretical base is provided in Chapter 2. As already noted, systems theory assumes that in order to understand social work education it is necessary to understand the individual and the context; that neither acts alone but in concert. Cognitive-developmental theory based upon the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky builds on the interactive ideas in systems theory. Piaget and Vygotsky saw development as constructed of distinct yet interrelated stages of development where the individual meets the environment (Salkind, 2000). The graduate educator's perspective is built upon their beliefs and assumptions about what educating the adult student is about. Finally, adult educational theory builds upon the work of both Piaget and Vygotsky with the view that adults are active, evolving, and culturally bound. Contemporary views of learning are based upon the belief that children and adults alike construct new knowledge and understanding built on what they already know and believe (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Further, adult theorists and educators in the field believe that education for the adult is a transformational (Mezirow, 1994) and critically reflective (Brookfield, 1987; 2006). In order to improve education, we must understand how people learn and then place *that* at the center of teaching (Caine, Caine, McClintic, & Klimek, 2009). Adult educational theories, brain-based and constructivist principles provide a solid foundation for the necessity of an environment in the classroom that is supportive, positive, challenging, and meaningful for adult learners. Pratt and Associates (2005) draw on many of those concepts in their conceptualization of teaching perspectives.

In addition to the adult education, cognitive-developmental, brain-based and constructivist theories, this study is further informed by the work of Pratt and Associates (2005) and their model for understanding teaching philosophies. Guided by the general model of teaching (see Figure 2),

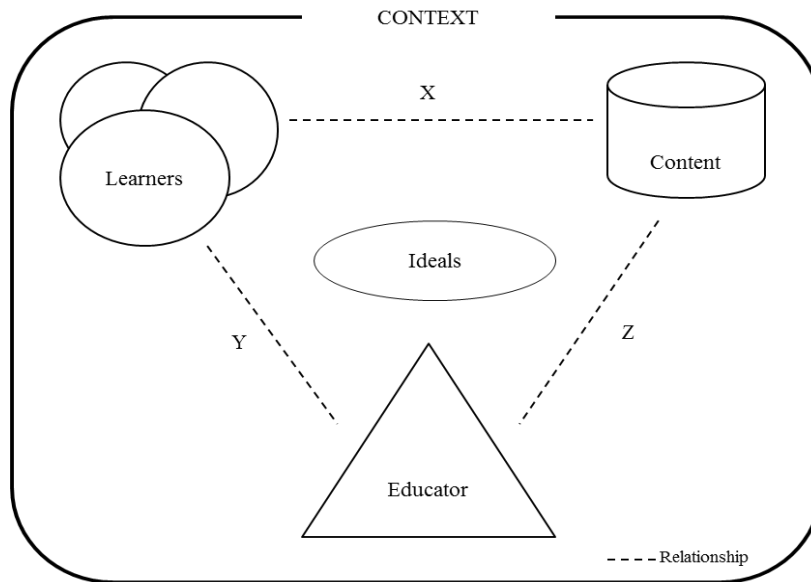


Figure 2. The General Model of Teaching Adapted from Pratt & Associates, 2005.

it was discovered that the way in which a person teaches (actions) and what they are trying to accomplish (intentions) are explicated by statements that mediate, justify, and support (beliefs) (Pratt & Associates, 2005). The general model contains five elements (e.g., learners, context) and three relationships (lines X, Y, Z). The relationships indicated the use of different means to engage learners with the content (line X), preferred relationship with learners (line Y), and the beliefs about an educator's credibility in relation to the content (line Z) (Pratt, 2005). The commitments held to each of these relationships vary and it is the unique blend of meaning attached to those relationships that leads to how an educator views their beliefs, intentions, and actions related to teaching. The reported commitments held to the individual aspects of the general model and the relationship between them eventually led to the development of five teaching perspectives. Those perspectives are transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and social reform and each is a complex constellation of actions, intentions, and beliefs that ultimately represent what

will be judged as right/wrong, true/false, or effective/ineffective (Pratt & Associates, 2005). The *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education* (2005) model will inform this study.

### **Significance**

NAS has challenged the profession. To fully enter into examination, and possibly rejection, of those claims social work education must understand what NAS believes about education. Those beliefs are educational philosophies. Beyond the challenges presented by NAS, reflection on educational philosophies will shore up educational agendas, consequences, and dimensions (Brookfield, 1995). In addition, there is currently little scholarship related to teaching philosophies or teaching perspectives in social work. While social work has continued its tradition of considering notions of power, participation, oppression, and justice that run counter to well-being, there has been less self-reflection, especially as it relates to our educational beliefs and assumptions.

In 1992 and 1998, Pearson considered the beliefs of social work educators to find that some social work educators felt that it was their duty to show students what is good for them and the teacher's role is that of expert. While in some situations those sentiments and beliefs may not be harmful, on face value they are contradictory to principles related to diversity and adult education. Diversities found in modern societies can clash. One example would be the exploitation and oppression of women that occurs with the blessing of some cultural traditions (Elder, 2004). As Elder (2004) further stated:

What, then, are we to do when it is part of a cultural tradition to oppress some given group? To "respect" the culture seems irreconcilable with critiquing its "oppression. How are we to reconcile these contradictory emphases in two different "diversity" movements? This can only be done through critical thinking. A critical thinking approach reconciles appropriate multicultural thinking on the one hand with fair-minded feminist thinking on the other (para. 23).

As has been previously stated, the conditions necessary for the process described above by Elder are based in certain beliefs about teaching and learning. The necessity of open, inclusive, safe and challenging environments has been found as important to students and to their learning.

Recent research and editorials (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009; Galambos, 2009; Holley & Steiner, 2005) in social work have supported the necessity of considering the classroom conditions created and what underlies them. Fleck-Henderson and Melendez interviewed students to construct an understanding of how faculty may discourage or support expression of views. Risks associated with polarized or oversimplified discourse (e.g. liberal vs. conservative) inhibited expression of divergent viewpoints and thought about the complexity that surrounds all areas of practice (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez). Connected with transformative learning and critical reflection, this pair of researchers posited that a central challenge for social work educators is to create the contexts that allow and support authentic dialogue in the social work classroom. What did the students expect to experience in the social work program or its classrooms? Over 70% of the respondents expected that there would be open discussion around difficult and divergent issues rather than the dismissal or intolerance that was felt (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez). It was recommended that educators reflect upon the actions they take to establish classroom ground rules, amplify minority opinions, and appreciate the potential cost to students who confront long held beliefs and assumptions.

Research has pointed to the necessity of purposefully teaching. In 2001, Smith offered that “the term teaching refers to the design and implementation of activities to promote student learning [but] it certainly goes beyond what the teachers do in the classroom” (p. 69). Smith further believed that teaching required analysis and reflective critique which is in agreement with Brookfield’s (1995) work on critically reflective practice in teaching. Brookfield stated that, “I had believed that the purity of my intentions as a teacher discounted and offset any unforeseen and unfortunate consequences that my actions might have. My teaching was not necessarily bad or harmful, but it was problematic. By that, I mean that it was shot through with unacknowledged agendas, unpredictable consequences, and unrealized dimensions” (p. xi).

What educators believe about teaching *is* important and can positively shape the future of the profession; a future that has veteran scholars in social work concerned (Stoesz & Karger, 2009).

Reflection upon the beliefs that underlie what, why, and how we teach is valuable. “Just as our life journey is one of a growing perspective in our relationships to the world, its peoples, cultures, and societies, our study of philosophy, ideology, and theory of education challenges us to develop our own answers to these questions and to create our own philosophies” (Gutek, 2004, p. 2).

### **Definitions**

Adult: applying a social definition, a person is an adult “to the extent that that individual is performing social roles typically assigned by our culture to those it considers an adult” – parent, worker, etc. (Knowles, 1980, p. 24). Applying a psychological definition, a person is an adult “to the extent that that individual perceives herself or himself to be essentially responsible for [their] own life” (Knowles, 1980, p. 24).

EPAS Critical Thinking: “Social workers are knowledgeable about the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and reasoned discernment. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity. Critical thinking also requires the synthesis and communication of relevant information” (CSWE, 2008, p. 4).

Critical thinking: “Critical thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and socio-centrism” (Hale, 2008, pp. 48-49)

Faculty/Educator/Teacher: anyone who teaches masters level social work courses in an accredited social work program

Human rights and social and economic justice content: “each person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights, such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and

are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights” (CSWE, 2008, p. 5).

Teaching Perspective: “an interrelated set of beliefs and intentions which give meaning and justification for our actions...they are the lens through which we view the world of teaching and learning” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 33)

Actions: “activities which engage learners with the content and which, it is assumed, facilitate p. learning” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, 17).

Beliefs: According to Pratt and Associates (2005) definition, beliefs are the “most abstract and the most important...they represent underlying values” (p. 21) and beliefs “regarding knowledge and learning are, usually, the most central of all beliefs related to teaching” (p. 21).

Intentions: are “statement[s] of purpose, responsibility, and commitment directed towards learners, content, context, ideals, and some combination of these” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 18).

Teaching Perspective Inventory (TPI): Instrument developed by Daniel Pratt and John Collins. It defines what teachers do and why. Results indicated the dominant teaching perspective as outlined by Pratt and Associates (2005): *Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform*.

### **Delimitations**

This study focused on graduate (MSW) social work educators who have included human rights, social and economic justice content in their course. Faculty must teach at Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited program; however, any institution type (private, public, denominational, non-denominational) and United States geographical region were included. This study focused on graduate social work faculty; however, these programs do not need to be in MSW only departments or colleges (combined BSW and MSW programs were included).

## Researcher's Perspective

My experiences, my beliefs, my meanings, and my assumptions drove this dissertation. I began my doctoral studies troubled by some aspects of my previous graduate education. It had led to some resentment, but once I began to learn more about the nuances of philosophy and educational beliefs I began to have a different, and more open, understanding of what I experienced during that time. I came to social work via psychology, sociology, and a conservative, middle class background. Admittedly, I needed to have some of my foundational beliefs and assumptions challenged, but I just wish that it had been done in a more open and dialectic way. I think that many of my MSW educators believed that transmitting the profession's content to me was their responsibility. Unfortunately, their limited focus mostly on the content only left me feeling like they did not trust me to "get it". I did not feel that they trusted me to become a *true* social worker... whatever that may be unless they told me what it was. I also honestly do not believe that my professors made a calculated effort to do these things, but I do think many of them were unaware of their own foundational beliefs and intentions that drove their actions in the classroom. Does social work have better things to think about or do? To thoughtfully and brilliantly educate the next generation of professionals seems pretty important to me.

We are all unique and I want to celebrate that. I believe that I am a work in progress. The best thing I learned during my educational journey was the ability to actively analyze, synthesize, explore, challenge, and evaluate information; to think critically for myself. I believe that we make meaning based upon our past experiences and there is more than one way to know. I believe that we need to support our students during their education; to make the classroom a place where they explore and challenge their assumptions *even* if they are in line with the profession. As a future educator I want to improve the well-being of the individual and the community by allowing students to explore their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs to hopefully arrive at a place that is congruent with the profession; this profession where we support the diversity of our clients and, hopefully, more diversity amongst ourselves. My assumptions about education lead me to the



perspective that this process is more about the student and their learning than it is about the content or the teaching, per se. I believe that “the development of learner’s thinking, reasoning, and judgment” (Arseneau & Rodenburg, 2005, p. 111) should be the focus. I primarily hold a developmental perspective on teaching.

In keeping with the reflective and critical theoretical base of this study, I share the assumptions I have going into this study. I suspect that many social work educators who teach human rights, social and economic justice content will fall primarily into two perspectives: transmission or social reform. My assumption is that the experience of most graduate educators is that the majority of their students come to them with little depth in knowledge for the content that encompasses this educational standard. The transmission perspective would fit this belief in that educators would feel a duty to accurately and effectively disseminate the knowledge they have about HRSEJ content. I assume there is a difference between teaching social justice content and teaching for social justice. I believe that those educators who teach *for* justice may be more aligned with the social reform perspective than with any other. I do not ask or differentiate that aspect in the current study so it will be impossible to know if that is where the difference lies, but teaching for justice requires challenging systems of oppression, adhering to an ideology, and holding that above all else.

I believe that social work will benefit if educators continually and critically examine biases, assumptions, and promote self-determination as we do with so many of our social, economic, and political institutions. Developing students’ critical thinking is paramount and to effectively pursuing justice. It is my belief that educational beliefs congruent with this study’s theoretically ideal environment for adult learners and critical thinking must come first with educators. I will not be with any future student I may teach every hour of every day of their life. The best thing I can do for them is give them the tools to thoughtfully and critically examine what they encounter throughout their lives. I believe that if I do that, no matter the ideology, this world will be a better and more just place. “Teaching is the visible expression of an underlying set of

beliefs a teacher brings to the learning environment” (Arseneau & Rodenburg, 2005, p. 108). I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to explore this in my doctorate work and I believe that it will ultimately make me a better teacher and a better social worker.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

While important to successful scholarship, leadership, and teaching, philosophical beliefs about education often go unexamined or worse unidentified at all (Brookfield, 1995; Witcher, Sewall, Arnold, & Travers, 2001). According to Brookfield (1995), a measured and cohesive teaching philosophy provides the necessary foundation for a successful and effective academic career. The purpose of this study is to describe the teaching perspectives of social work faculty. Further, this study describes how teaching perspectives are related to the reported actions taken by educators in relation to classroom environments. The classroom environments concentrate on content related to the advance human rights, social and economic justice which is framed in a manner theoretically consistent with professional literature, adult education and constructivist brain-based learning. After a review of this study's theoretical framework, the remainder of this chapter will review the literature regarding the components of the teaching perspectives model as well as the types of environments that have been shown to be supportive of adults, depth in learning, and critical thinking. Further, it will consider how intentions related to adult education and how people learn tie teaching perspectives to environments supportive of critical thinking.

The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (CSWE, 2008) is a competency based blueprint for the provision of social work education. Since the 1950s when the current Council on Social Work Education began, social work educators have committed to EPAS as the quality and excellence standards for the profession. Beyond what the governing bodies want for the profession, educators have their own personal hopes for their students. It will be argued in this study that these beliefs, intentions, and actions are just as important to eventual student outcomes as any other component in the teaching/learning exchange. These concepts are integral in the overriding model informing this study: the teaching perspectives model (Pratt & Associates, 2005) for the education of adult learners. Pratt and Associates (2005) reported that diversity in

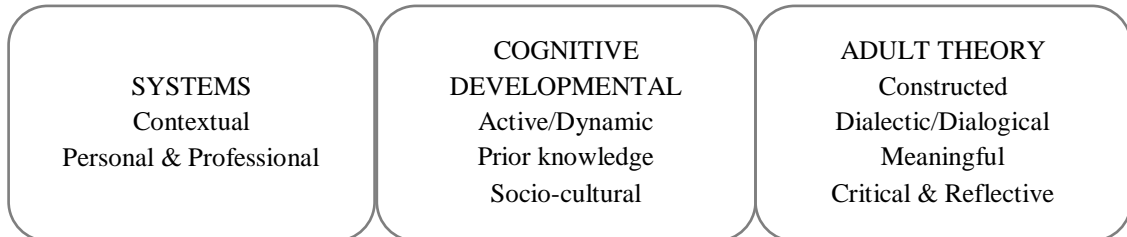
education requires plurality in perspectives and remained committed to the belief that no one teaching perspective is universally best. What informs teaching perspectives, which are fundamentally teaching philosophies, are beliefs, intentions, and actions related to knowledge, learning, the purposes of adult education, and the roles, responsibilities and relationships of adult learners and educators (Pratt & Associates, 2005)? While Pratt and Associates (2005) did not explicate one perspective as best, literature in development and learning (e.g. Bransford, et al., 2000; Caine, Caine, McClintic, & Klimek, 2009; Marton & Saljo, 1976) and adult education (e.g. Brookfield, 2006; Mezirow, 2000) detail how some perspectives support the needs of adult learners and ultimately critical thinking.

Early work found in the area of teaching conceptualizations, philosophies, or perspectives (e.g. Fox, 1983; Marton & Saljo, 1976; Pratt, 1992; Prosser, Trigwell, & Taylor, 1994) generally concluded that teachers do have different conceptualizations of teaching and those differences are then seen in student achievement as related to type and depth of knowledge. As Pratt continued work in the arena of teaching conceptualizations he began to break from the works of Prosser, Trigwell, and Taylor (1994) in a substantive way by not accepting a universal best perspective; however, other studies in this area have found that some approaches support deeper learning and conceptual change in students (Kember, 1997; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). Studies since the foundational work of Marton and Saljo (1976) have continued to consistently show that two primary themes emerged when considering teaching approaches or perspectives and the quality of learning for students: teacher or content centered approaches that produce reproduction or memorization and student or learning centered approaches that produce understanding and conceptual change (e.g. Kember, 1997; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). Fewer studies have been conducted in the arena of social work education. To set the stage, the study's theoretical foundation will be explored as education relates to human cognition and adult learning theories.

## Theory

The overall theory for this study is connected to systems theory. Figure 3 shows the theoretical conceptualization for this study. The ecological systems theory has become central in

Adult Learning is...



Teaching adults is supported by environments that are...

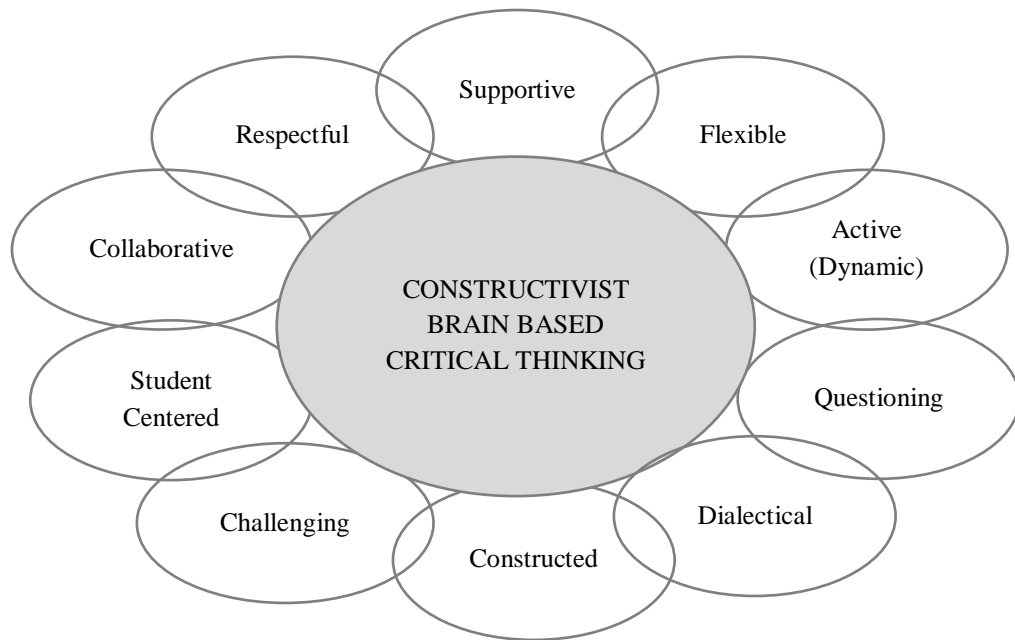


Figure 3. Theoretical graphic for the study.

social work education as it provides students with a framework to begin seeing clients as adapting to and constantly changing their environment. As conceptualized in this study, connected to the contextual focus of systems theory is the socio-cultural nature of development as outlined by Piaget and Vygotsky. Here quantity in knowledge is not the goal, but rather actual qualitative changes in that knowledge. Prior knowledge and experiences are how students make meaning with content.

Adult learners desire to connect new knowledge with the sizable knowledge and experience they already hold. Specifically, meaningful learning for adult learners is constructed through active dialogue with the new content in relation to what they already know. Finally, this study conceptualized that adult learning is supported best by environments that are based in constructivist, brain-based, and critical thinking components.

Systems theory deals with the whole of human behavior rather than with the individual parts (Payne, 1997) and the profession has evolved around the principle of viewing a person as a whole and as part of a larger system. Systems theory incorporates two concepts that are congruent with social work: equifinality (the same result can be achieved in different ways) and multi-finality (the same circumstances can have different results) (Payne, 1997). At first glance, the theoretical section of this review seems to focus upon the student while this study is about the educator, but the tenets of the study's theory relate to the human experience. Furthermore, teaching is about something. That something may differ, which is the premise on which teaching perspectives are built, but at the end of the day teaching is done in concert with the learner. The literature review and theoretical base attempt to provide evidence related to thinking and knowing in adult learners. Education responds to and creates what Pratt and Nesbit (2000) defined as a culture of teaching; a culture which provides part of a social work educator's context.

### **The Context of Social Work Education**

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) holds the unique position of shaping the profession by influencing the content, context and culture of teaching. Pratt and Nesbit (2000) understood adult education to be framed in a culture of teaching that serves the function of generating norms around what beliefs, habits or values surround teaching communities and what teachers do. Further, this "theory seeks to analyze how teaching processes are chosen, developed, enabled, and constrained by certain 'frames'" (Pratt & Nesbit, 2000, p. 123). CSWE was created in response to the changing landscape of charity and social welfare after the turn of the century. The social work profession has historically responded to and has been subsequently shaped by societal

developments and pressures. Social work began with works of charity and benevolence for localized relief, but quickly expanded to meet the increasing demand created by a growing industrialized society that became characterized by poverty, immigration, and instability.

Industrialization created social conditions whereby the family and community were no longer the primary line of defense for individuals in need. As urban society moved away from community to more individualized living, what had previously dictated charity's responses were no longer as applicable. As these advancements began, leaders in the charity movements began to conceptualize the causes and solutions to society's problems differently. Subsequently, the profession emerged out of two movements: The Charity Organization Society (COS) championed by Mary Richmond and the Settlement House Movement (SHM) led by Jane Addams.

The COS sought intervention at the individual level while the SHM was more committed to social change (Franklin, 1986). Mary Richmond's social casework was the precursor to clinical social work (McLaughlin, 2002) and the foundation of the COS. With a desire to make aid scientific, efficient, and preventative, Richmond sought a focus on rehabilitation of the individual (Franklin, 1986). Desiring to live amongst those who needed aid, Jane Addams developed Settlement Houses to engage with the community to achieve action and social change (McLaughlin, 2002). The individual roots of the COS were at odds with the social action roots of the SHM and the profession has never fully resolved this tension (Austin, 1997). In multiple publications related to the profession of social work, connections are drawn to the division that occurred early on between the two influential movements of COS and the SHM (Specht & Courtney, 1995; Taber & Vattano, 1970). In addition to the fact that these two movements embraced two ideologies, they developed two separate philosophical models for preparing new workers: academic education based upon science versus job-related training based upon direct experience (Austin, 1997). The tension between these two perspectives has not gone away and both can be found in contemporary social work education. While social work officially still holds a dual focus on the person and the environment, many in the profession have argued that we have

lost our way in one direction – towards the academic education for professionalization (Olson, 2007; Specht & Courtney, 1995).

When considering teaching perspectives it is important to focus responses around a specific content area (D. D. Pratt, personal communication, October 15, 2009) and there may be no more debated issue than that of social work's *true* mission. Thus, this study will focus on content related to this unique and sometimes controversial content area: human rights, social and economic justice (HRSEJ). The debate touches on several issues of contention that have been highlighted in the literature: the academic and the practitioner, scientific knowledge versus practice wisdom, and professionalization versus social justice. Much of the split in the profession can be found along the division between the COS and the SHM. Aspects of philosophical paradigms are also found in the nuances of this debate. Olson (2007) organized a comparison and critique of what he considers to be two completely separate social work projects: the professional and the social justice. He questioned the motives of the social work profession as it relates to organizing values. Olson (2007) claimed that despite overall agreement that social work's organizing value is social justice the profession actually has two separate goals. One goal, as has been stated previously, is of a just society and the other is for the establishment and sustainment of a profession. When teaching human rights and justice content, where do social work educators put their focus? Is it more important that students understand a prescribed understanding of social work's *true* mission or is it more important that students are supported to reflect upon professional and personal assumptions to transform their understandings of social work's mission in a way that is uniquely theirs?

The works of Freire (2007) and hooks (1994) consider education for those that are oppressed as a practice of freedom. In both of these works, their ultimate aims are congruent with that of critical thinking. That to fully participate in and reap the benefits of society each participant must have the tools to engage in critical dialogue around the central and governing issues. It is not enough to become the numerical or ideological majority, in a sense, but to become a citizen through the ability to fully and equally participate in society. Freire (2007), concerned about the



necessity of social change through education, challenged that the liberation of the oppressed must not come from oppression by those once oppressed, but through the liberation and restoration of both groups. “True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking...without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire, 2007, pp. 92-93). hooks (1994) spoke from her experience as an African American woman in education. She too had discovered that education and knowledge were sources of transformation and freedom. Critical thought and authentic interaction with others has the power to bridge the divide between races, genders, religions, and ethnicities. Referencing Henry Giroux, hooks (1994) wrote that “professors must learn to respect the way students feel about their experiences as well as their need to speak about them in classroom settings. You can’t deny that students have experiences...students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages, and cultures that give them a distinctive voice” (p. 88). Cognitive development theory provides the framework to further explicate how and why prior experiences and knowledge are essential to learning.

### **Cognitive Development**

Cognitive psychology is dedicated to how the human mind is organized and produces intelligent thought (Salkind, 2000). Research into how the brain functions has made many gains in the last decade (Bransford et al., 2000). Our perceptions of environmental stimuli provide the foundation for our experiences, but it is our cognitive processes of those stimuli that shape our experiences. Humans are living systems. Integral to our humanity is the desire and ability to find social connectedness and meaning (Caine et al., 2009). It is out of our cognitive perception that human beings build a brain-based network of neurons to hang each and every new experience on. Cognitively we attach meaning to new information and experiences based upon how and what we know. When education was based upon behavioral assumptions learning was seen as the conditioned response to the educational environment (Gitterman, 2004). Skinner further popularized behaviorism in education with the introduction of teaching as a process of introducing

and then withholding rewards (stimuli) to achieve and prevent certain responses (Gitterman, 2004). The teacher controlled this content centered environment and it is still seen in traditional conceptions of education. But as cognitive theories developed, so too did their influence on the educational environment. Most notably in the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky who began to influence primary and now adult education.

Piaget believed that individuals developed by being active with their environment (Salkind, 2000). As previously mentioned individuals are in constant contact with their environment and are striving to make meaning of what they experience. Piaget believed that as people physically developed so too did the complexity with which one thinks and each subsequent phase is built upon the previous. So, as humans move from childhood to adolescence to adulthood their ability to think and reason is assumed to become more developed, abstract, and elaborate. Schemas are organized perceptions and independent senses that attempt to make a coherent whole out of individual events. As humans develop, schemas change and adapt through a series of processes that occur continually and throughout the developmental process. Ultimately, humans want to understand their new experiences in relation to what they already know. This continued re-organization happens so we can adapt to new experiences and new environments. As Mezirow (1991) stated, “our very perception endow events or objects with meaning to give them coherence. To become what is, an entity must be interpreted as an instance of a type...it must meet certain conditions imposed through meaning schemes and perspectives that constitute a cultural code of interpretation” (p. 20). In this way knowledge is not simply added, but the meaning schemes an individual holds are fundamentally changed. In transformational learning theory, Mezirow (1991) seeks to reveal how an adult’s experiences and meaning perspectives are changed through the educational process; a process that is culturally situated.

Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget shared many conceptual ideas. Where Piaget focused on what occurred within the individual, Vygotsky broadened his focus to include what occurred around the individual. In a continual move towards a constructivist tradition, Piaget and Vygotsky

both theorized that what we do is a function of our thinking and our thinking is a function of what we have done (Barone, Maddux, & Snyder, 1997). The belief that humans are fundamentally social beings holds certain assumptions. If we are social participants from the very beginning, thought is assumed to be a function of human interactions (Barone et al., 1997). Children are first socialized into their primary unit of contact – the family. This is where schemas are first formed and where children start to make meaning out of their experiences. These familial interactions are foundational and provide the rules by which a child comes to understand their world. The relationships that we build and keep are integral throughout the lifespan. For Vygotsky, higher levels of learning optimally occur in the context of our relationships.

This constructivist learning theory, as it was eventually defined, is a fit with social work education. Professionally social work's perspective is one of situating the person in their environment. Vygotsky situated education in the same way. He emphasized zones of proximal development and scaffolding which became two primary contributions to social constructivist education (Green & Piel, 2002). The ability to develop is dependent upon the efficacy of the support and scaffolding provided by the educator or mentor. Scaffolding is done when the educator builds a bridge between what we know and what we are being asked to know (Salkind, 2000). Additionally, Vygotsky connected individual learning with everyday tasks and the interactions shared with others. In the adult social cognitive educational setting, dialogue is a necessary interaction between the learner and educator as the latter attempts to provide a framework for the former to learn. The beliefs and assumptions held in the theoretical marriage of Piaget and Vygotsky also have curricular impacts. Those impacts have been seen most readily in the rise and development of the constructivist tradition in education. Constructivist education holds much in common not only with the cognitive developmental tenets of Piaget and Vygotsky, but also with a new generation of brain-based science.

**Brain based science.** Research into the brain has been occurring for several decades and despite the increase in brain-based knowledge the results have not consistently made their way into

the educational setting. The traditional, behaviorally based lecture model has continued to dominate primary and secondary education (Caine et al., 2009). While brain-based education is a fairly new paradigm in educational literature, it has continued to advance into the educational landscape. What do brain-based principles offer theoretically to this discussion of teaching perspectives and classroom environment? Most notably is the contribution and understanding into educational environments that foster reflection, cognitive complexity, resilience and creativity. The current section will focus on the basics of brain-based science, while later in this review the relation to classroom environment will be explored.

Jenson (2008) defined brain-based teaching as “active engagement of practical strategies based upon principles derived from brain-related sciences” (p. 414). Caine et al. (2009) focused on the development of our executive functions by using the whole brain and learning as “developing the ability to make good decisions in the real world, based on the knowledge that people have and the sense they have made of experience” (p. 9). More specifically, Taylor (2006) considered meaningful learning with adults which “encourages increased cognitive complexity – in other words, learning that changes not just *what* people know but *how* they know” (p. 72 italics in the original). So, the beginning cumulative definition is based upon the science of the human brain, and then how to educate people to use the brain’s natural ability to take in, organize, make meaning, and ultimately act upon what’s been experienced. Authors in the brain-based education field continually agree on the notion that the changing landscape of society necessitates education that transcends mastery of content to mastery of our executive functions which is ultimately cultivated in the social experience (Caine & Caine, 2006; Caine et al., 2009; Taylor, 2006). The goals of Caine et al.’s (2009) principles are for the development of our executive functions. Executive functions are found to be integral in our ability to plan, organize, multitask, moderate emotions, think critically, reflect, and sustain over time (Caine et al.). It is at the intersection of the learning environment, the experience with a learning opportunity, and the active processing of the opportunity’s meaning that creates optimal learning (Caine et al., 2009). The amount of

information that is readily available in modern society is vast. The ability or inability to know how to find, manipulate, interrogate, and act upon that information will make the difference between success and failure. While the brain-based principles' are timely to the ever changing landscape in which professional social workers are found, the concepts are not entirely new.

While recent publications have brought renewed attention and updated the science surrounding the dance that occurs between biology and the environment (e.g. Caine et al., 2009); in 1910 Dewey was already concerned about the connection between how humans know and their environment. He believed that thought must be trained. Dewey (1910) wrote that through education thought could be trained and without conscientious effort the potential for error in thinking is great. Dewey's thoughts became foundational in the pragmatist paradigm in education. In pragmatism, knowing is connected to doing and emphasizes the practical application of ideas by testing them against actual human experience. Ideas as hypotheses, conjectures and plans have social origins and are formulated in the context of shared experience (Gutek, 2004). In this paradigm, it is assumed that we act on the best available knowledge we have *now* knowing that as we act we will gain new information which will revise our current beliefs which will ultimately inform our next act (Gutek). The impact of beliefs was believed to be so important that the grounds upon which they rest must be explored, tested, and questioned through reflective thought (Dewey, 1910). Knowledge and knowing are different for the adult learner and three adult theorists (Malcolm Knowles, Jack Mezirow, and Stephen Brookfield) have been repeatedly referenced for their understanding into learning in adulthood. The review of these theories provides further support for the necessity of considering and reflecting upon what educators bring with them to the classroom setting and how that will influence a classroom that supports critical thinking. But first the essential components of knowledge and knowing, as have been alluded to throughout this review, will be further explicated.

## **Epistemological Development**

While seemingly unrelated to the daily task of teaching, philosophy has provided the foundation for much of what educators take to the classroom. Ontology is concerned with what is real and is related to what we know in the form of curriculum and epistemology is concerned with how we come to know and bears upon how methods are used to teach students (Gutek, 2004). Epistemologically, a belief that the universe exists independent of human interaction and that we strive to come to know this single reality is connected to a more traditional philosophical stance (Fisher, 1991). Constructivism understands knowledge (epistemology) to be a social construction. It sees development in knowledge as context bound, social, fluid, and consisting of multiple realities (Magolda, 2004). In a constructivist framework, reality is ultimately social, as Piaget, Vygostky, and Dewey believed, and focus belongs on the presentation and appreciation of multiple, competing, and often conflictual realities (Guba, 1990). For Guba (1990), the goal of constructivism is to find truth through a dialectical process whereby consensus is built. While socially constructed, truth and knowing is built upon the shared meaning of those most intimately involved. To authors in the field of epistemological belief and development, the importance of reflection and understanding of knowledge and knowing is paramount. “To thoughtfully and intentionally promote either cognitive or moral development among college students, educators need to understand development and major concepts and assumptions underlying [them]” (King, 2009).

In 1968, Perry pioneered a study of college students in an attempt to understand how and why students developed differently while receiving the same liberal education. What Perry found was that students occupied different developmental positions relative to how they know and make meaning and commitments (Knefelkamp, 1999). The ability to understand that multiple realities exist is a higher developmental task than the belief that truth is out there in a dichotomous right and wrong format. Perry’s developmental stages are: dualistic – right and wrong, teacher centered; multiplicity – ambiguity in knowing but all is knowable, subject centered; relativism – ambiguity

as a part of life, experiential; and commitment – active and inquiry centered (Garrison, 1991; Perry, 1999). It was also discovered that students did not fluidly move or grow through each developmental phase, but instead could be consumed with doubts and retreat (Perry, 1999). He further believed that educators, if they understood their students' development, could move students toward growth instead of alienation or retreat. Perry found that most college students enter at a stage where education is seen as an accumulation of facts and information. Here the student prefers that the onus for learning lie mostly with the educator as they decide upon course content and structure. This is not where all college students begin or end. Perry found that students clearly have within their developmental domain the ability to challenge assumptions, find alternatives, acknowledge ambiguity, or in general think critically (Garrison, 1991). Having the opportunity to challenge, explore, to dialogue, and think critically are important in the education of adults. Brain-based research has found that *adulthood* is not simply a chronological age with associated abilities but can be found in the *young*. We can grow in ability to think and reason from simpler to more sophisticated forms (Caine et al., 2009). While much of the focus in epistemological development has centered on students' development, educators are not exempt from the risks, retreat, and potential development that students' go through.

Perry (1968, 1999), Kitchener and King (1990), and Magolda (1992, 2004) shared the assumption that humans develop chronologically and cognitively. King (2009) noted that at the heart of the constructive-developmental tradition for cognitive and moral development is an evolution of skills; the skill to organize what and how one knows in increasingly complex ways. As we mature, it is a move away from being told what is right or wrong to developing a personal understanding of what right or wrong means. This maturation process is also at the heart of transformational learning (TL). The process of TL will be discussed in greater depth the next section, but transformational learning assumes that knowledge is not fixed but that as social beings we are in continuous cycles of negotiation of meaning. Mezirow (2004) responded to challenges that TL is out of the reach of most adults by stating that it is the precise role of adult educators to

“help these adults acquire the insight, ability and disposition to realize [transformative learning] potential in their lives” (p. 69). Understanding how people learn is crucial in the praxis of adult education. Taking into account habits of mind and facilitating reflection upon them in a meaningful way *is* transformational. It is the movement through the phases of meaning while learning that is adult development (Mezirow, 2004). When students acquire those insights and disposition they are developing their executive functions which have been found to be an almost self-sustaining system of growth (Caine et al., 2009) allowing transformational learning to occur.

In 1997, Taylor completed a critical review of the empirical studies, to date, that had utilized TL theory. Thirty-nine studies were included in the study and were methodologically across the board (e.g. qualitative, phenomenological, collaborative inquiry, ethnographic, and mixed methods). Taylor (1997) reviewed the data which indicated that a variety of adults, in different developmental stages of their lives, experienced transformations in their perspectives. Further, the studies confirmed that the majority of transformations were initiated by a disorienting dilemma followed by learning strategies aimed at reflection, exploration of roles, negotiation and renegotiation of relationships (Taylor, 1997). While the potential for all of this exists, the ability to think and reflect critically upon what we believe about teaching and learning is not a given. Experts in the field of adult education, such as Brookfield (1995, 2006), admitted that it often does not occur. Is it that adult learners have not grown to those developmental positions? Not necessarily, but critical thinking and reflection is a risky and difficult endeavor. Social work has spent much of its existence challenging the assumptions and structures of modern society; however, as Aymer & Okitikpi (2000) commented the profession has consistently produced practitioners and scholars who do not truly understand the fundamental importance of our personal and professional beliefs. They cautioned that until social work prioritizes this endeavor professional arguments will continue to circle the same issues with the same ideas. Once we have command of our professional and educational arguments, “then the possibility exists that there may be counter arguments, alternative views and other perspectives” (Aymer & Okitikpi, 2000, p. 70).



After Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) examined the experiences of religious and political minorities within their social work classrooms, they warned that if educators assume a community of social work students is homogeneous the effects are detrimental and marginalizing on students and their learning. It is those assumptions that would be examined in considering teaching perspectives; however, research into the foundational beliefs of social work educators has been largely unexplored (Aymer & Okitikpi, 2000; Pearson, 1998). Witcher, Sewall, Arnold, and Travers (2001) argued that all teaching and learning is about philosophy; our personal and professional beliefs about education, teaching, and learning. This review does not intend to leave any part of the teaching-learning exchange out, but does intend to focus on the powerful position an educator holds in the classroom. Pratt & Associates (2005) agreed and stated that teaching is about the constant decisions being made about whether or not people have learned which is fundamentally based upon personal epistemology. The theoretical models of Knowles, Mezirow, and Brookfield are based upon what has been previously explored: systems, cognition, development, and epistemology. These adult theories provide one essential link between the literature related to what works with how we learn and teaching perspectives.

### **Adult Education Theory**

The education of adult learners is unique. Adults have lived experiences and enter any educational setting with a rich reservoir of knowledge and prior experience. While research has continued to show that active, meaningful, and constructed learning is beneficial at any age (Bransford et al., 2000), the education of adults necessitates that attention be paid to those concepts. The brief review of three influential adult education theorists will provide a summary of their theoretical concepts as a bridge between educational theory and specific teaching perspectives.

#### **Malcolm Knowles**

“The...climate should be one which causes adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality...in which there is freedom of expression

without fear of punishment or ridicule...[where teachers really listen] to what the students say” (Knowles, 1980, p. 47)

Malcolm Knowles (1973, 1980) developed his notion of adult learners, or andragogy, around a central assumption that adults move from a self-concept that is dependent to one that is self-directed. Knowles (1980) believed that adult education is different and should be self-directed, active, a self-paced discovery, dialogic with mutual inquiry between learner and educator, and respectful of the adult’s identification as a productive member of society. Knowles (1980) acknowledged that “adults *are* what they have *done*...so when...their experience is not being used, or its worth is minimized, it is not just their experience that is being rejected – they feel rejected as persons” (emphasis in the original, p. 50).

### **Jack Mezirow**

“As educators, we have an ethical commitment to help learners learn how to think for themselves rather than to consciously strive to convert them to our views. This commitment forbids us to indulge in indoctrination. What we can do is foster learner awareness” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 231). Figure 4, depicts that at the heart of transformational theory are beliefs about cognition, the construction of meaning, and the emancipation or transformation that is likely for those who participate in this learning process. Transformational learning (TL) holds that through a critical assessment of shared assumptions, those which we have been socialized to agree upon, learners will develop viewpoints that are more functional, inclusive, and discriminating (Mezirow, 1994). Mezirow (1994) identified a ten-step cyclical process for transformational learning. As part of a cycle, transformation is nonlinear. Learners may progress step-by-step through the process, they may retreat and repeat steps multiple times, or they may remain fixed at one stage. Studies have confirmed that the majority of transformations were initiated by a disorienting dilemma followed by learning strategies aimed at reflection, exploration of roles, negotiation and renegotiation of relationships (Taylor, 1997). Individuals may change before an educator’s eyes or

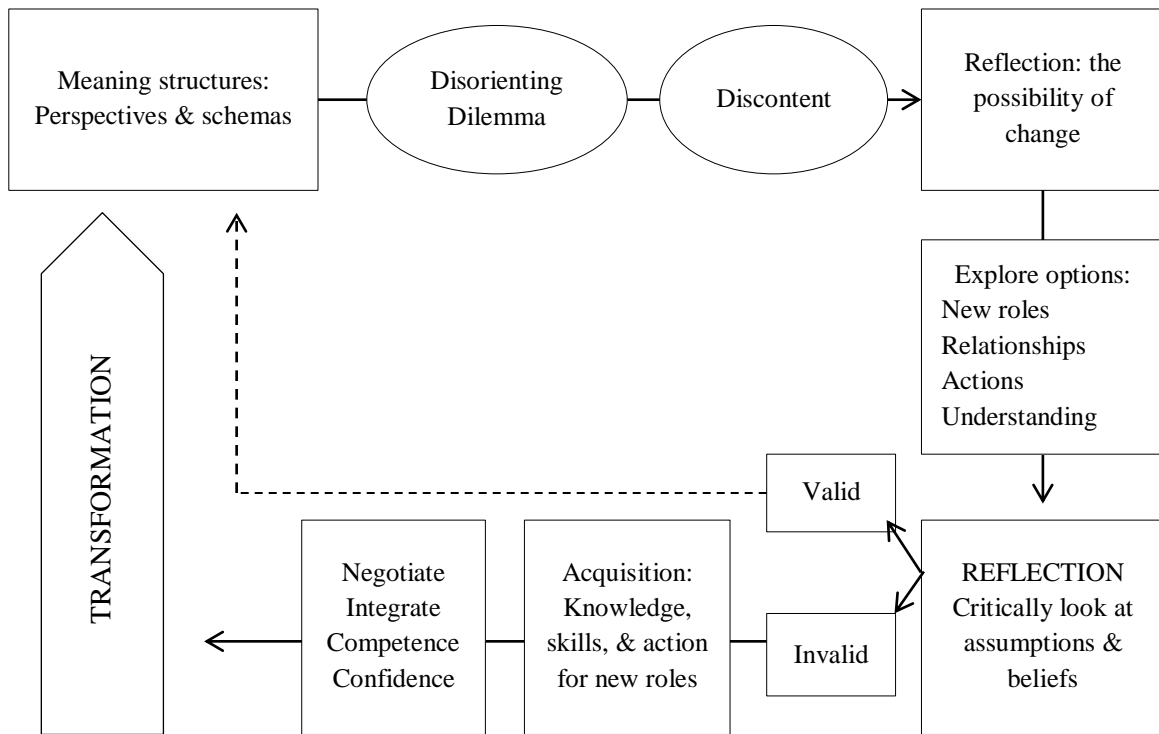


Figure 4. Overview: 10-step process for transformational learning. Sources: Brock (2010); Mezirow (1994).

the transformation may occur well after classroom interactions. Mezirow (1994) cautioned that TL may not be epic, but episodic.

Meaning perspectives are the broad and general ways that humans see the world (Cranton, n.d.); whereas, meaning schemes are a more specific constellation of concept, belief, judgment and feeling that shape a particular understanding (Mezirow, 1994). Both of these make up meaning structures or habits of mind. When needing to engage in reflection, it is important to have complete information, opportunities to engage with various viewpoints, freedom from coercion and self-deception, opportunities to participate in the various roles of discourse and be willing to suspend the desire to arrive at a definitive truth (Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1994). There are necessary conditions for TL. The adult learner needs to have the time and space to engage in what may be personally risky or life changing. Habits of mind are not easily surrendered. They are the

messages learners have been told from the youngest of ages and define who they are and in what kind of world.

Again, TL assumes that knowledge is negotiated and that too many contested meanings will be resolved through consensus. Adults learn contextually through critical reflection on assumptions and meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1990; 2000). The value of TL is in the focus on independent thinking (Merriam, 2004) which ultimately empowers and emancipates the learner to more fully and thoughtfully participate in society (Mezirow, 2003). It is not isolated thinking, but in concert with the learning and social community of which we are a part. Transformational learning involves a change in worldviews through independent thinking (Brock, 2010; Merriam, 2004). Meaning perspectives are the broad and general ways that we see the world (Cranton, n.d.); whereas, meaning schemes are a more specific constellation of concept, belief, judgment and feeling that shape a particular understanding (Mezirow, 1994). Both of these make up meaning structures or habits of mind. According to Mezirow (2003) these beliefs, which have been argued are foundational to what educators bring with them into the classroom, “shape, delimit, and often distort the way we make meaning of our experiences” (p. 2).

### **Stephen Brookfield**

CSWE (2008) has provided a comprehensive roadmap about what the *profession* wants from its students, but that is not at the heart of what *educators* want from their students. It is through internal and external reflective lenses that educators enjoy the empowering and cohesive benefits of considering how they impact the major contexts in higher education.

Understanding ideology means knowing how it's embedded in the inclinations, biases, hunches, and apparently intuitive ways of experiencing reality that we think are unique to us. To challenge ideology we need to be aware of how it lives within us and works against us by furthering the interests of others. Without this element of ideology critique the process of clarifying and questioning assumptions is reflective, but it not necessarily critical. (Brookfield, 2009, p. 293)

Brookfield (1995, 2006) argued that an uncritical stance towards practice leaves an educator susceptible to the ever changing tides of the institution and its leadership. A developed, critically reflected rationale guides teaching which has personal, political, and professional implications (Brookfield, 1990). Without a solid foundation and understanding for what and why something is done with students in or outside the classroom, the educator risks being inconsistent, indecisive, reactionary, and isolated. While critical reflection can be empowering and self-determining, it cannot be forgotten that it is also a risky and potentially distressing endeavor – even for educators. Brookfield’s educational reflections are to remind educators that critical reflection is a continual process whereby educational tools are revisited and juxtaposed against the current educational climate.

The benefits of critical reflection upon teaching practice are very congruent with the values and mission of social work education. Being able to engage in thinking about thinking leaves anyone involved in that endeavor less susceptible to being dominated and more empowered to make a sound decision based upon a broad understanding of the issue. Gambrill (2006) noted a difference between education and schooling (or indoctrination) to conclude that education is where all claims are subject to testing and discussion, where a broad understanding of an issue is supported, where critical thinking occurs regularly, and different points of view are provided. Schooling is based in authority. Reflection is about looking for and considering assumptions which can be risky, but enlightening provided that the rationale that can be explicated and supported. The ability to communicate a rationale to administrators and students makes education a more transparent process which creates an authentic classroom whereby what is experienced in the classroom is modeled by the educator’s own exploration and questioning. Furthermore, it increases democratic trust in the classroom so that students do not fall back into their socialization around teacher pleasing (Brookfield, 1995). Trust in the student is necessary and ties everything together. To have trust in the process of education as a meaningful, critical and transformational activity that

will produce people, not just professionals who will in turn engage with the world in meaningful, critical, and transformational ways *is* a belief about education.

### **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed three influential adult education theorists to illustrate that when educating an adult learner it is important to remember what they bring to the educational setting. Adults have lived experience that they need to incorporate into and build content around. They need to be active in their learning and not passive recipients of what educators want to place into their minds. Adult learners come to the classroom with a purpose and want the content they engage with to be meaningful; meaningful in a professional and personal way. Adults have had experiences that do not fit or challenge what they had been socialized to believe in childhood and need the supportive guidance to begin to critically and thoughtfully engage with those challenges. With this experience comes more insight into the complex and contested nature of truth. Following, is a review of one additional theory related to the education of adults in higher education: the Teaching Perspectives Model (Pratt & Associates, 2005).

### **Teaching Perspectives in Adult Higher Education**

In 1976, Marton and Saljo began a line of inquiry into understanding how students approach their learning. In their study, how faculty approached the content, the classroom, and the student were found to have differing influences on whether students adopted a surface or a deep approach to their learning. Marton and Saljo (1976) found these two different levels of processing and described a surface approach as reproductive and connected to rote-learning whereas a deep approach is directed towards comprehending and understanding what was intended. While focused upon the students' approach, Marton and Saljo found that how a teacher approached teaching and learning impacted the other elements in the learning process (content, student, and context) (Fox, 1983). Several lines of inquiry have begun out of the work of Marton and Saljo (1976).

## **Conceptions of Teaching**

Personal theories of teaching were a topic of interest when Fox (1983) developed a model of four basic understandings of teaching. Fox (1983) reported that while teaching and learning are difficult and complex topics to study, it is necessary to grapple with them as they reflect educator's fundamental beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning. Those beliefs and assumptions will be reflected in how and what the educator does or allows in their interactions. While foundational, research into the concept of teaching beliefs, philosophies, conceptions, or perspectives did not get a further boost until the 1990s (Kember, 1997; Pearson, 1998; Pratt, 1992; Prosser et al., 1994; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992).

In 1997, Kember reviewed thirteen articles related to conceptions of teaching and all were found to share two broad categorical similarities: orientations characterized as being teacher/content-centered or student-learning-centered. In the teacher/content-centered conceptions of teaching, the focus was on knowledge transmission (Gow & Kember, 1990), transfer (Fox, 1983), delivering content (Pratt, 1992), transmitting the teacher's knowledge or the discipline (Prosser et al., 1994), and the imparting and transmission of information (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). The position held by the educator in this conceptualization is that of expert which stressed the importance of getting information to the student. Learning involved the accumulation of facts, definitions, skills, or formulas to be memorized (Prosser et al., 1994). Knowledge is seen as stable, external to the learner, and possessed by the expert teacher (Pratt, 1992). Knowledge is about a quantitative change in the amount of information.

In the student/learning-centered conceptualizations of teaching, the focus was on learning facilitation (Gow & Kember, 1990), building, travelling, growing (Fox, 1983), cultivation of the intellect or modeling ways of being (Pratt, 1992), helping students develop or change their own conceptions (Prosser et al., 1994), and facilitating understanding or supporting the student's learning (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). The teacher is seen as a guide or a support in the efforts of the student. "They espoused a view of knowledge and human potential that placed high regard on

individual differences. Learners were perceived as dynamic elements with variations in prior knowledge and intellectual potential” (Pratt, 1992, p. 213). Knowledge is negotiated and constructed between student and teacher (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). Knowledge is about a qualitative change in comprehension.

In the work that led to the development of the teaching perspectives model, Pratt (1992) defined conceptions as the “specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world” (p. 204). Pratt (1992), Samuelowicz & Bain (1992), and Prosser et al., (1994) based their work on the foundation provided by Marton and Saljo (1976) that the way a student learns is impacted by the way a teacher teaches which is situated in the cultural, social, historical, and personal realms (Pratt, 1992); however, Samuelowicz and Bain (1992) and Prosser et al. (1994) directed their schemes toward a continuum of conceptualizations that were later divided into those that are content/teacher centered and those that are student/learning-centered. Pratt and Associates (2005) have maintained that there is no universal best teaching perspective and have not dichotomized their work in this way; although as previously noted, Kember (1997) was able to thematically relate teaching perspectives to these two anchors.

### **Pratt and Associates**

Based upon the 1992 work of Daniel Pratt, the teaching perspectives model has developed into a reliable and valid way to understand the beliefs and values held by educators. It has been developed with thousands of participants, in several countries, and a variety of disciplines. Pratt and Associates (2005) introduced their book, *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education*, as an “in-depth examination of the intentions and beliefs that give direction and justification to what teachers do and how they think about their teaching” (p. xiii). As mentioned in chapter one of this study, the five perspectives are based upon a general model of teaching (Figure 2). The general model consists of ideals, context, content, student, and teacher and three



relationships. In this general model, there is no importance placed upon the various elements; however, the fundamental difference in each of the perspectives rests upon the belief that some elements and relationships are more important to each teacher than others (Pratt & Associates, 2005). These commitments in teaching are the foundation for a teaching perspective. The five qualitatively different perspectives (Pratt & Associates, 2005) are:

- Transmission – effective delivery of content
- Apprenticeship – modeling ways of being
- Developmental – cultivating ways of thinking
- Nurturing – facilitating self-efficacy
- Social reform – seeking a better society

Pratt (1992) conducted discussions with two hundred fifty three educators in five international locations to understand how they conceptualized what it means to teach. Up to this time, the idea was that adult educators held the same assumptions and beliefs about what it meant to educate adults, but Pratt (1992) believed that those conceptions would be anchored in the cultural, social, historical, political, and personal beliefs, intentions, and actions of each educator. Educators may share some of the same ideas about what it means to educate, but may place differing importance on each element of the general model. Whether an educator states they want to efficiently and effectively transfer information and whether they place that as the highest importance in their teaching are two different things. Again, Pratt (1992) and Pratt and Associates (2005) do not hierarchically place one perspective as better or more progressed, but each as a legitimate view on teaching; however, this review has utilized literature related to how people learn to illustrate how some perspectives are more aligned to assist and promote learning and critical thinking in the adult learner. Pratt and Associates (2005) discussed indicators of commitment (actions, intentions, and beliefs) as parts of the whole that can be used to illuminate and measure perspectives on teaching. Each will be considered in turn followed by a review of each teaching perspective.

**Actions.** Actions are the most concrete and straightforward of the commitments. They are the routines, techniques, and activities that teachers do to help students learn (Pratt & Associates, 2005). When asked, people had little trouble with answering questions related to the action they take to help students learn (Pratt, 1992). In each perspective, the importance placed upon what action is taken is integral in defining that perspective. For example, in the transmission perspective the focus is on the teacher's credibility with the content (how much they know) and in the efficient and accurate presentation of that information (Pratt & Associates, 2005). There is an emphasis in this perspective on the actions taken by the educator as the focus in this perspective is teacher/content related. Other perspectives also report actions, but the aim and importance of them are different. In the developmental perspective, the focus is on the student and learning and actions taken are to assist the student in engaging with the content for increasingly complex forms of thought (Pratt & Associates, 2005).

**Intentions.** "Intentions are general statements that point toward an overall agenda or sense of purpose" (Pratt & Associates 2005, p. 18). As educators expressed what they were trying to accomplish and what role they played in that pursuit, they were talking about their intentions. These statements are generally made quite quickly and firmly when educators are asked (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Objectives, often externally defined, are not the same as intentions (Pratt & Associates, 2005). In social work, CSWE (2008) has defined what social work educators are to accomplish through EPAS. The objectives laid out by EPAS (CSWE, 2008) are the goals for curriculum. EPAS (CSWE, 2008) defined what will count as success or competence. It defined what will qualify as a quality social work education by establishing a baseline of necessary content. It defined educational values, contexts, and goals. Pratt and Associates (2005) argued that those objectives are different than an educator's intentions which tend to be personally and passionately held ideas about where they want to take their students. For example, when a social work educator intends to engage in anti-oppressive education, which is also a tenet of EPAS, they are holding onto the essential components of what it means to be anti-oppressive not the behaviorally defined

objective that has them teach “the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination” (CSWE, 2008, p. 5). In professional education, teachers have the dual challenge to teach students for the profession as well as for the overall spirit of higher education with each having internal and external motivations attached. Intentions, as part of this model, are connected more to the internal motivations that educators have for their teaching.

**Beliefs.** Beliefs are the least flexible, but probably the most important commitment. They represent the underlying values and ideas about knowledge that arbitrate all other commitments (Pratt, 1992; Pratt & Associates, 2005). This encompasses beliefs about knowledge and learning. For Pratt and Associates (2005) the two views of knowledge are on a continuum of objective to subjective whereby objective knowledge exists and subjective knowledge is created.

Those who hold a belief that knowledge is objective believe that the facts of the world essentially exist and are waiting to be discovered through rationality. Here the learner and the content are separate and the teacher is an expert in the content being presented (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Truth is a matter of fit between what is observed and how that is described through detached neutrality. Personal values or bias have no bearing on knowledge because it exists in its own right. There are universal facts and realities. As Pratt and Associates (2005) moved on the continuum towards a subjective stance on knowledge, the encountered softer objective views about the interconnectedness of values and facts. The goal of this softer objectivism was still to maintain impartiality by holding values in suspension when searching for solutions, even for value informed problems. Further along the continuum, subjective beliefs view knowledge as something that is determined by the learner; knowledge is believed to be created and negotiated between teacher and learner and thus distorted, shaped, and dependent upon the individuals in the moment of perception (Pratt & Associates, 2005).

**Key belief structures.** Some of the key defining differences that are fundamental to teaching perspectives come from key belief structures (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Overlaps are found among the perspectives; in the foundations of each perspective and in the goodness-of-fit

with individual educators. In short, epistemic, normative and strategic beliefs underlie the three components of the teaching perspectives inventory (beliefs, intentions, and actions) which delineate and measure teaching perspectives. What follows is a review of the components that Pratt and Associates (2005) used to further delineate and define teaching perspectives. While presented as separate entities, epistemological beliefs derive meaning and support from normative and strategic beliefs and they provide clarity and definition to epistemic beliefs (Pratt & Associates, 2005).

While a silent partner in most research endeavors, a focused effort on epistemological beliefs has changed the educational landscape. Since the early 1970s, educational researchers have increasingly observed the importance of epistemological beliefs in educational outcomes (e.g. Schommer-Aikins, 2004). In 1998, Hofer and Pintrich reviewed the progression of epistemological theories to find that it wasn't the need of a unified conceptualization of epistemological beliefs that was important, but the "examination... [that] will help us to understand students' and teachers' beliefs about knowledge and their thinking about knowledge. [And] this information will then help us better understand the teaching and learning processes in classrooms" (p. 133). A more simplified organization of epistemology is a view of knowledge that is based upon a continuum of objective to subjective. An objective view of knowledge is that reality exists regardless of the political, psychological, or social preferences humans may have and the process of knowing emphasizes discovery, understanding, and use what is naturally occurring (Guba, 1990). A subjective new of knowledge is a view that "reality is a social, and, therefore, multiple, construction; that there is no single tangible...reality on to which science can converge; that reality exists rather as a set of holistic and meaning-bound constructions that are both intra- and inter-personally conflictual and dialectic in nature" (Guba, 1990, p. 77).

Normative beliefs are the "social norms of a teacher's perspective" (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 208). In other words, is the expectation that the social work educator is a content expert, a facilitator, or a coach? In a recent study, Funge (2011) explored what educators felt were their responsibilities in fulfillment of the CSWE standard related to students promotion of social justice.

Based upon semi structured interviews, nine educators felt their role was one of exposure to the social justice perspectives not promotion of one particular perspective whereas four felt it was their role to “actively cultivate [a social justice] conviction in students” (Funge, 2011, p. 81). Different beliefs about roles or responsibilities are related to different epistemic beliefs. A constructivist epistemology can be captured in Magolda’s (2004) words, “people actively construct or *make meaning* of their experience—they interpret what happens to them, evaluate it using their current perspective, and draw conclusions about what experiences mean to them (p. 31). This belief leads an educator to roles and responsibilities whereby they share in the acquisition of knowledge in the classroom. “The roles we assume as instructor are a product of the beliefs we hold about knowledge, learning, and evaluation. What we believe about knowledge affects our role; and what we believe to be our responsibilities affect how we evaluate people’s learning” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 210)

Procedural beliefs are divided into tactical (skill) knowledge and strategic (justification) knowledge (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Skills are aligned with routines, procedures, and techniques. These tend to be some of the issues that are at the forefront of educators’ minds when thinking about why or how they teach and as has been reviewed here is only a part of the bigger picture. Skill knowledge is more flexible, creative, adaptive, and deep for veteran teachers because of the experience of knowing what technique has proven more effective and in what scenarios; a component in what is called strategic beliefs (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Strategic beliefs are about the *how*, *when*, and *whys* of procedural beliefs. Causal strategic beliefs deal with when to change tactics and how to accomplish that change; so, a belief that if a certain new technique is employed then a new particular outcome will be achieved.

**Assumptions of the model.** Pratt and Associates (2005) said that “perspectives... govern what we do as teachers and why we think such actions are worthy or justified” (p. 10). The whole exercise is reflection upon the assumptions and beliefs educators have about the teaching-learning exchange and what follows is a brief review of the assumptions (what Pratt calls propositions) that

underlie the teaching perspectives model as outlined by Pratt and Associates (2005). As had been previously mentioned, the first assumption is that no universal best perspective exists. Pratt (1992; Pratt & Associates, 2005) has remained true to the idea that certain conceptions are better than others. While certain techniques may be shown to be less impactful with the adult learner (e.g. lecturing), there are times and places for such a technique and it can be done with great skill and efficacy. The assumption is that each perspective is built upon credible philosophical and epistemological roots that can be used efficaciously in the classroom. The second assumption is that teaching is more than a set of techniques, but is guided by what he has included in his model: beliefs, intentions, and actions about what are knowledge, learning, purposes, and roles in adult education. Thirdly, Pratt and Associates (2005) assumed that some beliefs are more central than others and are less open to change. Fourth, conceptions are dynamic and improvements to teaching can focus at any aspect of the teaching perspective. While beliefs may be more difficult or resistant to change, they can change and develop as an educator moves from novice to expert. Drawing on the suppositions of Brookfield (2006) and Mezirow (1994), Pratt (1992; Pratt & Associates, 2005) believed that through reflection of their beliefs, intentions, and actions change, potentially transformational change, can occur. Teaching can be improved. In the fifth assumption, it is noted that teachers, like their students, develop. This development can lead simply to using and improving the current way in which they teach or it can include a challenge and transformation in what it means to teach and learn (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Finally, this model assumes that perspectives can be measured. This model has produced the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt, Collins, & Selinger, 2001) and the instrument used in this study.

**Teaching perspectives.** As has been noted in the overall review of teaching perspectives, each perspective is a constellation of commitments related to beliefs, intentions, and actions. In addition to these commitments are three relationships related to the components in the general model which comprise an overall teaching perspective. Those relationships are represented in the general model (Figure 2) by the dashed lines that connect context, ideals, student, content, and

teacher. “It was clear that people used different means to engage learners in the content (line X), preferred different kinds of relationships with learners (line Y), and held contrasting beliefs about an instructor’s content credibility (line Z)” (Pratt, 2005, p. 6). It is through the expression of beliefs, intentions and actions related to those relationships that further defined how teacher’s envisioned teaching and learning. These interrelated commitments and relationships developed into five distinct, but at times overlapping, teaching perspectives (Pratt et al., 2001).

**Transmission.** The transmission perspective has been characterized as “effective teaching depends, first and foremost, on the content expertise of the teacher” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 48). Once orthodoxy this perspective has since lost favor with the rise of constructivism and other post-modern philosophies. When introduced to this perspective, the many negative reactions stem from the fact that the primary focus is on the central relationship of the teacher to the content and that knowledge is essentially stable and well-defined (Boldt, 2005). Notable authors such as Freire (2007) or Caine et al. (2009) believe that the human brain is not a blank slate accepting deposits of information. Transmission teachers do hold the content in high regard spending a great deal of time attending to the accurate and efficient presentation of it. Transmission teachers believe it is their responsibility to clearly present organized content, to provide answers, to be objective in their assessment of students, and to follow a predetermined timeline of material (Pratt et al., 2001). In the general model, the emphasis is placed on the relationship of the teacher and the content. It is the instructor’s authority over the material gives the content credibility (Pratt & Associates, 2005). While much negative press has been given to transmission teachers there are several positives often noted. Most notably these teachers are often seen as “virtuoso performers of their knowledge and expertise” (Pratt et al., 2001, p.72). They are seen as passionate and enthusiastic about the material and can be infectious for that reason. While a deep respect and attachment to the material has its positives, it can quickly devolve into rigidity if not reflected upon.

**Apprenticeship.** Apprenticeship is a “process of enculturating students into a set of social norms and a professional identity” (Pratt et al., 2001, p. 73). Pratt et al. (2001) discussed this as a

task of knowledge transfer. In social work education, a similar goal is held to produce competent professionals. This is ultimately the ability of students to take the knowledge, values and skills of the curriculum and put it into action. The apprenticeship teacher believes that their competence and expertise as a practitioner or clinician will provide a model for students as they learn the knowledge of the profession and translate that into skill in practice. Apprenticeship teachers take their knowledge and couple that with modeling effective practice. In the general model, the content and teacher are essentially the same and both are used as a vessel for students' knowledge attainment and transfer. Apprenticeship teachers embody the profession and learning is located in authentic situations that are related to the application of knowledge (Pratt & Associates, 2005).

***Developmental.*** A developmental perspective on teaching is a belief that learning is a search for meaning (Pratt et al., 2001). Here, the focus is on the learner's ability to engage with the content to make meaning. The developmental teacher believes it is their responsibility to assist students' active engagement with the content, to provide bridges between a learner's existing knowledge and the new, ask good questions to provoke critical thinking, and to assess for reasoning and not just answers. One key concept in a developmental perspective is the very idea of knowing and how we come to know. It is a belief that learning has only occurred when learners can actually demonstrate their understanding (Arseneau & Rodenburg, 2005). However, authentically assessing students' reasoning or the change in the complexity of their reasoning and understanding is not easy or straightforward. Developmental teachers view prior knowledge and ways of thinking as the foundation for what people will ultimately know (Pratt & Associates, 2005). They view knowledge as a mutual and social construction which is explored through trust and respect cultivated in a supportive and open climate. The developmental perspective has much in common with what embodies the learner centered, cognitive, and critical thinking movements.

***Nurturing.*** In the nurturing perspective, achievement comes from "the heart, not the head" (Pratt et al., 2001, p. 76). It is a belief that supporting and challenging students creates self-efficacy with the complex knowledge, values, and skills of the social work curriculum. When



stress and anxiety are high, students struggle to attend to and learn the material. At the core of this teaching perspective is a belief that effective learning comes from teaching that is empathetically and respectfully supportive while challenging through achievable and meaningful expectations. Importance is placed upon fostering a respectful and trusting climate whereby the content is used as a means to increase confidence and self-efficacy (Pratt & Associates, 2005). T'Kenye (2005) believed that to nurture is to "sustain and to aid growth; the educator of adults must have faith that learners can grow, can learn" (p. 159). The nurturing perspective is offered as especially valuable when teaching for students who have been wounded in their previous educational settings or those who are unfamiliar with higher education. Women and first generation higher education students could be well served by the sensitivity, empathy, forgiveness, and support offered by a nurturing teacher. In fact, Collins, Selinger, and Pratt (2001) found that teaching perspectives were connected to discipline and gender. Collins et al. (2001) found that nurturing was the single-most dominant perspective and women held this perspective more than men. Nurturing or developmental perspectives were found more in disciplines assumed to have knowledge that was more fluid and contextual whereby understanding and critical thinking were valued.

***Social reform.*** The fifth perspective is social reform. In this perspective teaching starts with "an explicitly stated ideal or set of principles which are linked to a vision of a better society" (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 50). The teacher's ideals take precedence and all teaching activities and content are a means to that end. Students are encouraged to take a critical stance on the underlying issues and power within the content to arrive at what the teacher has presented as an ideal and better society. Here, no single ideology reigns, but it is the teacher's ideology that guides their efforts in the classroom. Educators must remain authentic and consistent in what they say and what they do. Social reform teachers believe that education is not value-free or neutral, but is a biased, value-laden and political enterprise (Pratt & Associates, 2005). While this perspective may appear immediately attractive to social work education, with the emphasis on power, betterment of society, rejection of the status quo, it is vital that, as Pratt and Associates encouraged, it is not

uncritically praised. As will be discussed in the next couple of sections, teaching for how people learn holds a great deal of value. If students feel threatened by the fundamentally radical or rigid ideology of the teacher, meaningful learning will not take place. While the end goal of a social reform perspective is laudable, the means to achieve it may not support the adult learner.

### **Summary**

Pratt and Associates (2005) have continued to develop the seminal works of Marton and Saljo (1976) and Pratt (1992). Conceptualizations of teaching have been developed by several scholars and overall fall along a continuum of teacher/content-centered to student/learning-centered (Kember, 1997). The theoretical base of this study is centered on the education of the adult learner with the utilization of brain-based learning. Supporting the adult learner is most exemplified in the Developmental, and to a lesser extent Nurturing, perspectives (Jarvis-Selinger, Collins, & Pratt, 2007). Scholarly works on the topic of teaching and thinking in higher education will now be reviewed.

### **Teaching and Thinking in Higher Education**

Intentions are normative beliefs related to the perspective held on the role, responsibility, and relationships educators and students hold in education (Pratt & Associates, 2005). These beliefs can range from facilitator (Brookfield, 1990), to content specialist (Knowles, 1980), or fostering critical reflection (Mezirow, 1994). Normative beliefs live in a symbiotic relationship with epistemic and procedural (action) beliefs and all affect how we teach and how students learn. Again, even with no universal best constellation of beliefs, intentions, and actions promoted in the Pratt and Associates model (2005), research in this area has shown that some constellations provide for depth in learning, room for justice, and an environment conducive to adult learners.

### **Depth in Learning**

In 1991, Caine and Caine addressed educational concerns around being able to educate the next generation of workers and leaders by putting forward their model of brain-based education. They posited that the gap begins with a lack of appreciation into the complexity and elegance with

which the brain learns (Caine & Caine, 1991). To teach to how the brain learns would address educational gaps and change educational goals to meet the increased demands of the complex and global 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Students need more than memorization of established knowledge and truths to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In 2000, Bransford et al. released a cumulative report that detailed the work of two committees under the National Research Council (NRC). It connected a two year study on the science of learning with practices in the classroom. The expanded edition contained a multifaceted view of how humans learn in a cognitive, psychological, developmental, social, and neurological model whereby each component is essential to the complex process of learning. Caine and Caine (1991) and Bransford et al. (2000) have separately provided congruent evidence on how to educate the next generation. At the end of the day, both want to achieve depth and qualitative changes in knowledge and knowing.

At the heart of brain based education is a firm belief that humans innately strive to make meaning. When students are able to feel confident in the educational setting, connect with content in an experiential and relevant way they can actively process those experiences and consolidate it into something meaningful. The constructivist tradition complements this brain research with a focus upon the social nature of learning. In constructivism, it is believed that what is real and known are socially constructed out of experience and dialogue. Intertwined with that is a belief that the constructed reality is supported, validated, and authenticated within the community which holds this *truth* and if *knowing* means that we all construct our experiences into knowledge, then what counts as knowledge is significantly broader than if it is seen as an external common reality. What is seen as deviant because it falls outside of what is socially approved in the later is validated in an attempt to understand people's actions and choices in the former (Fisher, 1991). Knowledge is seen as active; people have some self-determination in what is meaningful and true for them. For social work this is important to education around everyday practice. This is also true in the classroom. Education is now better conceived as learning with understanding (Bransford et al., 2000). It is more important to be able to understand a problem and know how to solve it than to

memorize interventions. While Bransford et al. (2000) acknowledged that a foundation of knowledge must exist – much of which is done through memorization – the key to survival in our complex global society is in the active, connected, and useable nature of that knowledge. To view the student as active meaning makers is a shift from viewing students as a passive recipient of truths. One measure that has been used to exemplify this is reasoning ability.

Empirical studies of constructivism in social work are not plentiful, but the work done has consistently shown that students are aware of the differences in student-centered constructivist and teacher-centered environments (Able & Campbell, 2009; Moulding, 2010), and that deeper, more meaningful knowledge and skills were developed in student-centered learning environments (Able & Campbell, 2009; Fok & Watkins, 2007). While empirical accounts in social work are minimal, constructivist principles have been investigated significantly outside the field to show that deeper and more meaningful learning occurs (Bransford et al., 2000; Kember, 1997; Trigwell et al., 1999) and that students found utility in them as well (Loyens, Rikers, & Schmidt, 2009). Despite few empirical investigations into constructivism in social work, several authors have commented on the utility of (Dean & Fenby, 1989; Martinez-Brawley, 1999; Witkin, 1990) and the obstacles to (Campbell & Ungar, 2003; Fleck-Henderson, 2002; Humphries, 2003) constructivism in social work. In a related study, Kaplan (2006) compared the reasoning ability of MSW students [n = 265] with different educational backgrounds to find that those with a liberal arts background, where focus was more broadly on analytical discourse and thinking, had higher levels of reasoning than those with social work undergraduate degrees. Social work undergraduates showed less preference for using the highest and most complex level of reasoning (post-conventional moral reasoning) than those liberal arts undergraduates (means ranging from 12.89-71.11 for social work and 31.94-70.95 for liberal arts) (Kaplan, 2006). In the schema-based moral development model that guided the study the highest level included reasoning based upon justice, context, and critical thinking (Kaplan, 2006). Social work practice is messy and complex and problems are not one-dimensional

with neatly gifted wrapped solutions. If students are to be successful and competent, they need to be imparted with more than technical skills and good intentions (Kaplan, 2006).

Reconsidering the role of teaching perspectives in the depth of student learning, research has consistently shown that student-centered perspectives provide the depth and commitment to qualitative changes in knowledge that are needed to succeed in modern society. Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse (1999) studied 48 classes (46 science teachers and 3956 students) and found that the qualitative differences in the depth of student learning were linked with the conceptualization the educator. Over time good teaching, defined as having students who adopted a deep approach to learning, was found mostly in teachers who conceived of learning and teaching as student centered with a focus on qualitatively changing their understanding or conceptions rather than memorization and recall (Kember & Kwan, 2000; Marton & Saljo, 1976; Trigwell et al., 1999). Of all five teaching perspectives, two are more student-centered: Developmental and Nurturing. Key words found in the work of Pratt and Associates (2005) provide a thematic picture (Table 1) of these two

Table 1

*Themes from Pratt and Associates' (2005) Teaching Perspectives*

Transmission	Apprenticeship	Developmental	Nurturing	Social Reform
Stable body of knowledge	Expert knowledge, application and practice	Provide bridges & co-construct: present and desired thinking	Relationship between self-concept and learning	Well-articulated ideal
Shaped and guided by content	Transfer of learning	Content used to develop thinking	Foster climate: respect & trust	Ideals and ideology are central
Commitment to a deep respect for content	Commitment to role and identity as practitioner	Power with the student: prior knowledge and evaluation of that	Mutual collaboration	Move individuals towards ideal
Power in authority of teacher as expert	Power with teacher in craft knowledge		Power between teacher & student: boundaries and competence	Power is in the ideology

perspectives. The themes found in the Developmental and Nurturing perspective are consistent with what Kember (1997) showed to be consistently student-centered. The other three perspectives

have components that are aligned with the tenets of adult education and are student-centered, but are less prevalent (e.g. transfer of learning).

Education must include a learner's preexisting knowledge, it must be relevant and active, and it needs to integrate metacognitive skills throughout. As noted by Fisher (1991), when we can recognize that alternative meanings exist we then have the opportunity to make choices. When we are able to make choices, we have some degree of power. Choice and power are intimately intertwined [and] power is a key issue in social work" (p. 5). When the focus is on techniques, we are asking the wrong questions (Bransford et al., 2000). That is like asking what tool in the toolbox is best – best for what? If competency is defined by educational standards to include ethical decision making or critical thinking then helping students problem solve and increase their metacognitive abilities is the goal with discourse, reflection, analysis, synthesis, and the like as useful techniques. If the goal is different, then the techniques are different.

### **Room for Justice**

As was stated previously, one of the most contested issues in social work is that of social work's *true* mission. The issues have been framed in many ways that are represented here by a few: professionalization versus social justice (Olson, 2007) or a trend by the unfaithful angels who have "abandoned [the] mission to help the poor and oppressed" (Specht and Courtney, 1995, p. 4) to provide psychotherapy to middle-class America. While an outside group such as NAS has attacked the profession for its handling of the competency related to human rights, social and economic justice (HRSEJ), even members of the social work profession are concerned (Hodge, 2006; Ressler & Hodge, 2005; Seelman & Walls, 2010). An overall review of the literature found that some concern is warranted and little research has been done to consider where beliefs about education for HRSEJ factor in. While concern is building in social work education about discrimination against certain groups of students (e.g. politically conservative, religious) (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009; Ressler & Hodge, 2005; Thyer & Meyers, 2009), some in the

profession continue to write about social work as a profession with one dimension (HRSEJ) (Specht & Courtney, 1995; Weiss, Gal, & Cnaan, 2005)

Weiss, Gal, and Cnaan (2005) utilized a pre-post questionnaire with two hundred twenty three graduate students in the U.S. and in Israel. The study found that while the students came in with differing views and levels of support for the welfare model by the end of the study they were more consistently in support of this model. While that seems positive for social work education, a critique of their conclusions is as follows. While students changed in the *right* direction, it is suspect as to whether any other direction was presented as a viable option. The authors noted that when student policy views were different than the welfare model, as defined and proscribed by the educators representing the profession, they were presented with the welfare model as *the* way to alleviate injustice. Not too surprisingly, the student's views changed. While it was not stated one way or the other if critical thinking was an integral part of the teaching process, the adherence to one view without holding it in suspension until dialogue, analysis and reflection can be done is in opposition to critical thinking. It is also in opposition to previously mentioned views of education for freedom and justice (Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994).

Others who write about teaching HRESJ content promote critical and reflective thinking (Adams, 2004; Epple, 2007) and others are concerned that social work education is not inclusive of all perspectives (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009; Hodge, 2006; Ressler & Hodge, 2005). While social work has championed the cause of many groups that have been at the margins in society, the behavior towards groups not at the margins may provide the most evidence about social work's success at justice and critical thinking. For several years, some social work researchers have considered the view of Christians within the social work profession (Hodge, 2006; Ressler & Hodge, 2000; Ressler & Hodge, 2005; Sherwood, 2000). By most accounts Christians are a majority group within the United States; however, within the profession they hold a different position (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009). Sherwood (2000) argued that it is easy to be the champion of diversity or tolerance if you agree with the diversity that is in question; however, real

tolerance is about how we treat the ideas, behavior, and the people that we genuinely disagree with. Environments for deep learning and critical thinking support Sherwood's conceptualization of tolerance. However, if Saleebey and Scanlon (2005) and Seelig (1991) are right social work education may not be teaching in this way. Historically, the focus of social work education has not been on the canons of critical thinking but instead on the canons of a profession (Olson, 2007). Current faculty have likely been educated and trained as a professional social worker as defined by competencies built upon rote criteria that suggest what and who is a professional social worker (Saleebey & Scanlon, 2005).

Adams (2004) and Epple (2007) commented on the necessity of developing what are in essence executive functions and critical thinking skills as in harmony with HRSEJ content. Adams (2004) discussed barriers to teaching and learning social welfare policy and identified: relevance, content, and prior knowledge or misconceptions. He utilized the principles of critical thinking and constructivism to posit the notion that educators must understand where students are at and that this content area is risky and daunting for students. The fields that make up HRSEJ content are vast and full of debate. Adams (2004) concluded that to utilize critical thinking improves learning and empowers students to be reflective, respectful, and dialogic which is democratic and consistent with the aims of social justice. Epple (2007) echoed the need to move beyond trying to find uniformity in the profession and work for professional harmony where differences are embraced and celebrated to make something greater, felt, and more creative.

### **Classroom Environments**

Procedural beliefs (actions) are focused upon justification for the set of techniques and routines that are employed by the educator (Pratt & Associates, 2005). While much of the literature into *teaching* has concentrated upon these techniques, with social work being no different, very little has been explored related to the underlying belief structures that give these techniques and routines their meaning and justification (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Strategic beliefs provide the justification for why a specific technique or routine is utilized. The actions that



educators take are in relation to what they are trying to accomplish and are supported by beliefs that support and justify it. The theoretically ideal classroom environment for adult learners is respectful, challenging, active or dynamic, dialectical, supportive, constructed, and student-centered to allow for reflection, multiple points of view, dialogue, depth (complexity) in knowledge and learning, justice, and critical thought.

What does it take to create the theoretically ideal classroom environment? How is that ideal environment connected with reasoning, complexity in knowledge, and critical thinking? An explicit focus of creating an environment that supports an adult learner's need for respect, meaning, dialogue, collaboration, and challenge promotes justice through the inevitable outcome of critical thinking through those processes. However, as previously stated humans naturally think and make meaning in ego-centric ways. Educators must consciously strive to cultivate environments where students can speak and listen to diverse points of view. Many of the issues social workers deal with are messy and complex. They require that social workers be able to test the frames of reference that are creating the barriers to well-being. To test these frames of reference they must be dialectically set against one another so the strength of one can be examined against the other (Paul, 1995). To enter into this examination requires empathy and reciprocity as the two opposing views are explored through dialogue. Paul (1995) was convinced of the necessity for educators to model dialogical thinking and to develop them in students. He stated that to do so required modeling and development of empathetic responding to others' points of view and to provide reflective discussions, challenging dilemmas, complex issues, and assignments that challenge a student's frame of reference.

The strategic utilization of dialogue in the classroom necessitates the thoughtful inclusion of most of this study's theoretical base. Dessel, Rogge, and Garlington (2006) found that for intergroup dialogues to occur educators need to foster an environment where participants are enabled to speak and listen in the present with an understanding of the past. So, participants are asked to suspend judgments, confirm their unfamiliarity with each other, and to prepare for

unanticipated consequences. Nagda et al. (1999) defined dialogue as the “horizontal communication process aimed at fostering deeper understanding, mutual respect, empathetic connection, and discovery of shared meaning” (p. 439). Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) framed it as a safe and challenging environment with shared responsibility, the amplification of minority opinions, conflict management, and appreciation for the potential costs to students who are in process of letting go of deeply held beliefs and assumptions. Holley and Steiner (2005) also found that students learned about the perspectives and ideas of others when they felt they were in a safer classroom; a classroom where open expression, even if different from the norm, is supported. Holley and Steiner also found that students felt judged by peers and professors which created an unsafe place for them to explore; however, was not able to further explicate the term *judgment*.

A learning environment that can support the student who is questioning fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and actions is largely informed by the principles of adult education, critical thinking, brain-based and constructivist principles as previously reviewed (Neuman & Blundo, 2000). The conditions that are created out of those principles are empathetic, supportive, and respectful while challenging. This is not an easy task. Most students have not been socialized into this kind of educational environment. An open and inclusive society requires that minds be open and what most primary educational settings create is a transmission approach to knowledge whereby authorities outside the individual are expected to work and solve the problem and then deposit that knowledge in others. The traditional transmission approach assumes that knowledge can be obtained without struggle, without having to hear multiple points of view, without having to evaluate claims, without having to question assumptions, or without having to trace the implications of what is being said (Paul, 1995). Those assumptions are inconsistent with environments that are supportive of adults, constructivist brain based learning, or critical thinking (Browne & Freeman, 2000; Caine & Caine, 1991). Educators who want to teach adults must believe in that process and provide a supportive environment around students who are taking the risk to openly engage with different points of view.

As students transition into college and adult life, questions begin to arise about the meaning and the understanding they hold related to their values and beliefs. As inherently meaning making beings, humans strive for that end as an understanding into who, why, and what we are. College is potentially the first time this has occurred for many students (Perry, 1968). Social work may provide the first place where a student has found acceptance and validation. Diversity is an integral concept in social work and frames many of the profession's values. Exposure to issues of diversity, justice, and oppression is necessary and risky. When interactions around issues of diversity are left to chance the likely negative interactions actually reinforce differences between groups rather than the exploration of commonalities (Hurtado, 2005). If the quality of the interaction is controlled for (e.g. it is managed thoughtfully by an educator), Hurtado found that dialogue was associated with improved analytical skills, cultural awareness, the ability to hear and incorporate the perspective of others.

Teachers can awaken and nurture the innate drives we have to make meaning and understand the world that surrounds us. Teachers can harness the natural inclination we have to understand, problem solve, and control our lives. The creation of an environment that is conducive to critical thinking is a deliberate attempt to provide low threat and high challenge at the same time. Why low threat? Some in social work education feel that it is precisely the goal of social work education to move people out of their comfort zones and see the world as the diverse place that it is (Litvack, Mishna & Bogo, 2010; Olson, 2007; Spano & Koenig, 2007). But it is equally important to understand what *all* students bring with them to the classroom and how those challenges may be experienced. The complex and emotionally reactive nature of social work education finds a natural ally in the consideration of the conditions necessary for brain-based relaxed alertness (Litvack et al., 2010). Caine et al. (2009) pointed to three qualities as the key to any effective learning: self-efficacy, resilience, and self-regulation. These attributes are so important because they allow the learner to feel that they can achieve, that they will be able to bounce back despite failures, and they

can sustain all of that to achieve their goals. If learners do not have those attributes, the foundation for risk taking, questioning, experimenting in the classroom are gone (Caine et al., 2009).

For many students who enter social work, their socialization has not included analysis of their culture or society with regards to oppression, social and economic justice, or the like. Early socialization in schools often positions the teacher as the expert and there to impart truths upon the student. To enter into a social work classroom that is fundamentally challenging who you are and what you believe is very stressful and frightening (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009; Hyde & Ruth, 2002). Fear and threat engage our automatic responses of survival, withdrawal, and self-preservation; learning does not occur if the primary task a student is involved in is fight or flight (Caine, et al., 2009). All energy is put into survival. Caine et al. (2009) believed that to create a sense of belonging and recognition, of being listened to and noticed are classrooms that contribute to relaxed alertness and by proxy meaningful, deep, and transformational learning. These environments are ones that are supportive, authentic, but not without challenge or dialogue. Without the sense of belonging that is produced out of an authentic community, learners will not risk take, explore, or challenge each other without fear or stress (Caine et al., 2009).

Students have a desire to belong to the profession when they enter graduate school, so what are educators creating? Does a student in social work feel that they can belong if they are respectfully open about their biases or judgments? If a student wants to think critically or in the ideological minority are they supported to do so? Or through educational beliefs do social work educators convey that the profession has principles to transmit to them without their active engagement?

## **Summary**

Connected to the foundational roots of the profession, academics and practitioners have long struggled to define and agree upon what constitutes professional skill and competence. “Competency-based education concerns itself with what common body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes is considered so essential that every student should master them before leaving the

educational environment” (Galambos & Greene, 2006). CSWE (2008) outlined competencies that include evidence based practice, critical thinking, ethical decision making, and advocacy. Students are often challenged by the juxtaposed position of honoring diversity in the classroom and being socialized into the profession. Honoring diversity is creating harmony and not unity around the very things that make us different (Epple, 2007); however, socialization may beg for more conformity around values and attitudes. Gross (2000) commented on gatekeeping in the profession and compassionately asked, “had the [social work] program encouraged students to be more prejudiced” (p. 54) by not more openly asking and having students vocalize their attitudes and prejudices? We all have prejudices, assumptions, biases, and culture. To presume or deny any part of that for any student does not promote justice, competence, or critical thought.

The previous three sections outlined how adult education theory, skillful teaching, and brain-based constructivist theory outline environments that are supportive of social work education through depth in knowledge, promotion of justice, and critical thinking. In this study, this is considered the theoretically ideal environment for graduate students and requires explicit actions on the part of educators to build and create this type of environment. Browne and Freeman (2000) outlined critical thinking environments to include questioning, active or dynamic learning, developmental tension, and modeling the necessity of and comfort with uncertainty. Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) echoed what Holley and Steiner (2005) had found that students acknowledge the benefits of *safe and supportive* environments but did not expect that the environments would be without challenge, tension around growth and transformation, or open dialogue around divisive topics. So, the theoretically ideal environment is respectful, challenging, active or dynamic, dialectical, supportive, constructed, and student-centered to allow for reflection, multiple points of view, dialogue, depth in learning, justice, and critical thought.

### **Teaching Perspectives and Critical Thought in Social Work**

Pearson’s (1998) study of the educational orientations of social workers was one of the last articles published in the profession on this topic. Issues of teaching and paradigms that are

congruent with the profession have remained visible in the academic landscape; however, this topic has not continually been explored. As mentioned previously, Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) were interested in the experiences of social work students who self-identify as having political/religious world views that are seen as differing from what is perceived as their program's dominant view. While the sample was small and relatively homogenous, the interviews yielded very relevant themes for social work education (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009). Students in this study reported that they felt their opposing views were dismissed or unwelcomed at times by students and sometimes by faculty. Social work classrooms are often quite homogenous (people with certain personalities and values may seek out social work more consistently), so it may be easier to become dismissive of opposing viewpoints with like-minded people. Seelman and Walls (2010) shared a similar concern that faculty may be in the habit of interrupting and challenging comments or actions that target a marginalized group, but far less likely to do so to comments that target privileged groups. While acknowledging that marginalized and oppressed groups do not share the same power and advantage as privileged groups, by implicitly or explicitly not interrupting students when privilege is joked about or attacked a message can be sent that there is an ideological line to be followed in the profession (Seelman & Walls, 2010). This is the opposite of the conditions necessary for the type of learning that has been outlined here and truly by the profession. While these privileged identities are often seen as contributing to the status quo which may not support all of the values and missions of social work, they are very important to the student or client that holds them (Seelman & Walls, 2010). It is far more inclusive and healing to model an attempt to understand a point of view and then engage in a critical dialogue than to dismiss it outright. The profession can be served by the principles of relaxed alertness as it tackles the core competencies for critical thinking and social justice. Holley and Steiner (2005) found that safe and unsafe spaces exist in social work education; students know the difference and learn more in safer environments. As has been explicated throughout this review, the underlying beliefs about

teaching, education, and knowledge are present in this, and other, discussions on the topic of social work education, but they are rarely explored.

Social work literature has also explored critical thinking; however, studies in the profession have focused mostly on student outcomes with critical thinking skills (e.g. Clark, 2002; Kaplan, 2006) or methods for teaching (e.g. Gibbons & Gray, 2004), but few consider the environments that have been shown necessary for the process to occur (Brookfield, 1987; Paul, 1995). One particularly sound study was conducted by Garcia and Van Soest (2000) to explore educator responses to critical classroom incidents related to race (which is part of the greater HRSEJ content in social work). Garcia and Van Soest (2000) found that what educators bring with them to the classroom and the awareness of their cultural identity led to awareness of personal biases and triggers which was hypothesized to have positively impacted student learning and handling of diversity content. That awareness brought a more balanced reaction to incidents within the classroom, a willingness to cultivate open and honest dialogue, modeling of appropriate responses, a maintained awareness into the risk involved in challenging personal assumptions and beliefs, and continual self-evaluation. “Teaching diversity content requires substantial personal and professional insight, risk taking, communication, and process skills on the part of faculty” (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000, p. 37); however, the literature does not reflect if this is occurring on a large scale (Anastas & Congress, 1999). Do educators take the time to reflect on what they bring to course content that is rife with emotion and conflict? Do social work educators know their teaching perspectives and do those perspectives include support for environments that ultimately support critical thinking?

### **Summary**

Epistemic (knowledge), normative (intentions), and procedural (action) beliefs are foundational to the teaching perspectives model (Pratt & Associates, 2005). “Epistemic beliefs indicate what you think is important...and how you would know when someone else has learned it sufficiently” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 206). Knowing if a student has learned what you

intended to teach involves the evaluation of performance and that evaluation is based upon judging truth. What is seen as truth is a matter of perspective based upon a continuum of objective to subjective or knowledge as independent of a learner's interest in it to knowledge as intimate and determined by the learner (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Beliefs are the arbitrator of intentions and actions. Knowing what beliefs an educator holds is never more important than when confronted by ones that are different (Pratt & Associates, 2005). Reflecting upon beliefs is an exercise in critical thinking.

The adult educational theories of Knowles, Mezirow, and Brookfield collectively state that the education of adults be conducted in a climate “which causes adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality” (Knowles, 1980, p. 47), where educators are ethically committed to helping “learners think for themselves rather than to consciously strive to convert them to our views...[educators] can foster awareness” (Mezirow, 1994, p.231), and with educators who are aware of how ideology works within and against us to make the process of clarifying and questioning assumptions critically reflective (Brookfield, 2009). The theory of teaching perspectives states that conceptions “are specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations” (Pratt, 1992, p. 204) and that educators view their teaching through these conceptual lenses. Teaching perspectives are “a complex web of actions, intentions, and beliefs; each in turn, creates its own criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, true and false, effective and ineffective” (Pratt & Associates, 2005, p. 35). The purposes of this survey research are to describe the teaching perspectives of graduate social work educators, to describe graduate social work educators' actions related to classroom environment, and to see if a relationship exists between teaching perspectives and classroom environments.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

Research about the teaching philosophies or teaching perspectives of social work educators is limited. One key study was conducted by Pearson (1998) who randomly surveyed graduate social work departments to explore what she called educational orientations; however, few projects have since been completed. The assumptions of the teaching perspective inventory (TPI) and of this study are that teaching perspectives and actions for classroom environments can be quantified, measured, and the data analyzed to describe the beliefs and attitudes of responding social work educators (Nardi, 2006; Pratt & Associates, 2005). This chapter describes the methodology, research questions, and analysis procedures used for this study.

### **Design**

This study is a quantitative, online survey design utilizing descriptive and comparative analysis. Survey methods allow for less costly data collection and are ideal for asking questions related to attitudes (Nardi, 2006). Additionally, online survey research has increased in the last decade and has become attractive to a variety of researchers for the cost and time benefits (Millar, O'Neill, & Dillman, 2009). In accordance with Umbach's (2004) best practices, multiple reminders were used, a deadline for responses was used in the final reminder, an incentive was included, and the overall survey was estimated to take less than twenty minutes. Additionally, Millar, O'Neill, and Dillman found that people in the predominant age range of this study (18-50 year olds 40%) and those with higher educational levels (26%) expressed a preference for web based surveys.

### **Research Instruments**

Two separate instruments were used in this study: the teaching perspectives inventory (TPI) and a newly developed classroom environment scale (CES). Permission to use the TPI was obtained from the authors (Appendix A). A small pilot test was used to help establish content

validity and to improve the questions of the final CES instrument. The instruments are described in further detail below and are included in Appendices.

### Teaching Perspectives Inventory

In 1992, Pratt utilized phenomenography as research methodology for his inquiry into the study and practice of teaching and how they are grounded in our conceptions. Based originally upon 250 teachers of adults and a general model of teaching, the five perspectives that were developed out of their descriptions have become outcomes in a valid and reliable instrument (Collins & Pratt, 2011). The Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) has been online in its current version since 2001 and has exceeded 100,000 respondents globally (Collins & Pratt, 2011).

The current 45-item TPI is broken down into three sections: beliefs, intentions, and actions. The TPI yields five perspective scores, one for each of the perspectives (transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and social reform) and three sub-scores for the three commitments (beliefs, intentions, actions). Each of the three sections of the TPI contain 15 questions and respondents are asked to rate various statements on a 5-point likert scale. Examples of the TPI questions and related scales are located in Table 2 (full scale refer in Appendix B).

Table 2

#### *Example of TPI Questions and Scale*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Learning is enhanced by having predetermined objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
Most of all, learning depends on what one already knows.	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
My intent is to demonstrate how to perform or work in real settings.	1	2	3	4	5
I emphasize values more than knowledge in my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5

Collins and Pratt (2011) have gone through several stages of refinement and just released a ten year follow-up report that demonstrated the overall validity and reliability of the instrument. Over the

last decade some Cronbach's alphas have ranged from .70 (Developmental) to .83 (Social Reform) for 100,000 (Collins & Pratt, 2011). Average reliability across all five scales is .79 (Collins & Pratt, 2011).

Respondents are able to take the TPI multiple times, so test-retest reliabilities have been taken for subsets of the population that can be identified as having taken the TPI multiple times. These test-retest reliabilities average .67 and range from .62 (developmental) to .71 (social reform). The instrument has shown solid reliability over time. One interesting impact on the test-retest reliability may come from the instructions given to focus responses to one particular class or subject (D. Pratt, personal communication, March 2011). In the case of the current study, graduate educators are asked to focus on a time when they taught human rights, social and economic justice. These same educators may have a different dominant teaching perspective if answering based upon a different content area.

The seminal work of Pratt (1992) has continued to be supported with additional studies in higher education (Collins, Selinger, & Pratt, 2001) peer assessment in teaching (Courneya, Pratt, & Collins, 2008), and advisory practices in professional education (Clarke & Selinger, 2005), and through the continued development of the TPI that has been utilized by a variety of disciplines from several countries (Collins & Pratt, 2008). True to the belief Pratt and Associates (2005) held that no one perspective is best works completed utilizing the TPI have continued to show that no one teaching perspective dominates the landscape of higher education, but disciplinary (Collins et al., 2001) differences were found.

The TPI is located online and permission was obtained to use the instrument (Appendix B). All research instruments for this study were located in one place to reduce potential technical problems with two web sites and to increase responses because participants only needed to access one web site. At the suggestion of the TPI authors, the questions for this study were placed in the exact same order and basic format as the original TPI found online.

## **Classroom Environment Scale**

To address some of the recent and specific critiques leveled at social work education (NAS, 2007); a new scale related to classroom environment was developed. The Classroom Environment Scale (Appendix B) was developed to more specifically respond to critiques and discipline specific literature on related topics through the lens of this study's theoretical base. The current study is framed in the theoretical tenants of cognitive development, adult education, brain based and constructivist learning which outlined an *ideal environment*: for adults, depth in learning, dialogue, and ultimately critical thinking. Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) Holley and Steiner (2005), Browne and Freeman (2000), and Caine, Caine, McClintic and Klimek (2009) informed questions on the current CES. The questions for the CES were developed by the researcher in consultation with committee members and departmental faculty.

As outlined by Babbie (2001), the twelve item CES was created so the total sum score would be an indicator of how often social work faculty report they act in ways that are supportive of this study's ideal environment. The focus of the CES was on having respondents consider additional actions they take in the educational process. Each of the twelve questions has a 7-point Likert scale (never, very rarely, rarely, occasionally, frequently, very frequently, always). The decision was made to utilize a 7-point scale after review of research showed that the finer the scale the greater the differentiation (Lietz, 2010). A pilot scale was reviewed by several faculty members for clarity and usefulness with revisions made to the scale based upon their response. One revision was to include an instructional statement that respondents were to include at the beginning of each statement: *As a social work educator, I believe my students perceive that I consciously seek to...* This was done, in part, to reduce the bias and social desirability of responses that are associated with self-report (Lietz, 2010). After an additional review by faculty members, final changes were made and are reflected in the CES. The 7-point scale will provide a summed score whereby a higher score indicates a higher frequency of actions taken to support the theoretically ideal environment in this study (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Sample of CES Questions and Scale*

	Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	Always
Refrain from judgment of students' views even if they are contradictory to my own.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

To assess whether the twelve items used to create the CES form a reliable scale, Cronbach's alpha was computed. The alpha for the twelve item CES was .891, which indicates that the items that form the CES have a good internal consistency. Further review of each question revealed that only one question (question 4) was not moderately correlated with the other items, but the decision was made to keep all twelve items as the overall alpha did not change significantly with the one item out. Scores can range from 12 to 84. A score of 60 or more is indicative of an educator who more often than not (frequently) takes action supportive of this study's theoretically ideal environment.

**Participants**

In this study, sampling originally took place on two levels: the program and the individual educator level. Participants in this study were graduate social work educators who had teaching experience with graduate content related to human rights, social and economic justice content. Institutional IRB approval was obtained for the study. All participants in the study, received the same consent, instructions, and completed the same web-based survey.

### **Sampling from Social Work Programs**

In January 2011, CSWE's online database of accredited programs reported 203 accredited MSW programs in a variety of institution auspices. All accredited schools in the continuous United States were included and separate alphabetical lists were created for public, private, and religiously affiliated programs. Of the included programs, twenty-four (12%) were considered to be in religiously or historically religiously affiliated institutions and twenty (10%) were considered to be housed in private, non-religiously affiliated institutions. Since only 22% of all programs that fall in these two categories, all religiously affiliated and private, non-religiously affiliated programs were included to increase representativeness of those programs (Babbie, 2001). The remaining 157 programs found in public institutions were placed in an alphabetical list and a systematic sample with a random start was employed where every 3<sup>rd</sup> program was included. The total sample of 96 programs consisted of 52 publicly housed programs, 24 religiously affiliated programs, and 20 non-religiously affiliated, privately house programs.

A letter was sent to the sampled department heads (Appendix C). Twenty-eight program heads expressed interest (30% response rate). Twenty-two department heads sent names of faculty directly to the researcher and six forwarded the study information for their educators to reply directly. A total of 48 respondents received the e-mailed invitation. The emailed invitation contained the purpose of the study, a SurveyGizmo generated link to the survey, contact information for the CSU IRB and the researcher, and statements about the voluntary nature of their participation, the ability to withdraw without penalty, and the assurances of confidentiality (Appendix D). A total of 22 of the 48 identified educators responded to the survey (response rate of 46%). Sixteen responded to the initial email invitation while an additional 6 responded to a final emailed reminder.

### **Sampling Individual Participants**

To address the overall low number of respondents and the response rate, an additional convenience sampling was conducted utilizing a professional graduate listserv. The MSW listserv

is a managed but not moderated mailing list for those interested in graduate social work education. The researcher, a member of the list, posted a brief invitation (Appendix E) with a default link for members of the list to respond if they chose. If members chose to click on the link, they were redirected to the SurveyGizmo hosted survey site. A total of twenty-nine educators responded to the listserv invitation.

### **Representativeness of Sample**

Because nonprobability sampling was used, it was important to check the representativeness of the sample (Morgan, Gliner, & Harmon, 2006). In other words, were the schools and respondents that participated in this study similar to all social work programs and educators? This sample’s relative percentages appear to be representative of the information provided by CSWE’s website in 2011 (Table 4). Of the fifty respondents, 78% were in public

Table 4

#### *Institutional Characteristics*

Group	Institutional Auspice			Total
	Public	Private – Denominational	Private – Other	
CSWE Accredited Graduate Programs	157	24	20	201
% of all Programs	78%	12%	10%	100%
Participating Programs	39	6	5	50
% of Participating Programs ( <i>n</i> = 50)	78%	12%	10%	100%

Note: Denominational = religiously affiliated

institutions which are similar to where the overall percentages of graduate programs are housed. Similarly, as noted previously 12% of programs were found in private religiously affiliated and 10% were in private non-religiously affiliated program. This study has the same percentages in its respondents for those two institutional auspices.

## Procedures

Since the TPI is located online and the decision was made to continue with the same survey format, but instead of directing respondents to two separate websites both instruments were put into one form on SurveyGizmo. A free enterprise level student account was created with the online survey company SurveyGizmo. In accordance with Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine (2004) who found that web surveys had comparable completion rates to hard copy, mailed questionnaires when preceded by mail notification, an introductory letter was mailed to the sampled department head describing the study and how to contact the researcher with nominations (Appendix C). This formal letter was followed with an email letter at the beginning of the fall term and one reminder to increase the likelihood of obtaining participant nominations (Umbach, 2004). Graduate program department heads were asked to nominate two educators in their program who had the necessary content experience and once they had identified two educators they were to email the researcher the participants name and email address so a formal e-mail invitation could be sent with the online survey link. The email invitation included a formal letter describing the study, the link to the online survey, associated risks, IRB contacts, and investigator contacts (Appendix D). In a rolling fashion, participants received an initial invitation followed by two reminders to increase response rates (Umbach, 2004). The first reminder was sent approximately four weeks after the initial invite with the final reminder coming within approximately ten days.

To address the overall low number of responses and response rate, an email invitation was sent out over the MSW listserv (Appendix E). An MSW listserv exists for people who request to be included in the postings. Volunteer "membership" in the listserv is started by interested parties emailing the listserv manager who will then include the person's email in the listserv. With permission from the listserv, a brief description of the study with a link to the online survey was posted to the MSW listserv. All members of the listserv received an invitation to participate via the included link, and had the choice as to whether to respond. If they chose to participate, they were redirected to the online survey.



Tuten, Galesic, and Bosnjak (2004) found that the use of prize draws can improve the response rates of web-based surveys, so this survey utilized a drawing for one of two \$100 Amazon.com gift cards as an incentive to increase response rates. The follow up email was structured similarly to the initial invite. The final reminder email included the previously mentioned information and also gave participants the date the survey closed. Once the survey closed, de-identified raw teaching perspective data was sent to the TPI authors for proprietary scoring. The data was returned and included in the SPSS database.

## Variables

**Participant variables.** The participants in this study have taught graduate level human rights, social and economic justice content. The participants in this study vary in age, gender, course chosen for their focus, academic degree earned, teaching rank, years teaching, and years of practice within the profession. The participant level variables used in this study are in Table 5.

Table 5

### *Participant Variables*

Measure	Operationalization/Definition
Course	A nominal variable for the course chosen as the focus for answering TPI and CES questions.
Age	An ordinal measure based upon predefined age range categories: 18-24, 25-34, 35-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75+.
Gender	A nominal variable: male, female, transgendered, other.
Degree Earned	A categorical variable for the highest degree that the educator has earned: Masters-social work, Masters-other, Doctorate-social work or social welfare, Doctorate-other, Law, ABD or in doctoral program, other.
Teaching Rank	A categorical variable for the teaching rank held by the educator: Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor, Lecturer, Clinical Appointment, Adjunct, other.
Years Teaching	An interval variable whereby the educator indicates the actual number of years they have been teaching.
Years in Practice	An interval variable whereby the educator indicates the actual number of years they have practiced in the profession of social work.

Within the online survey, participants in this study did not provide information that would identify them individually.

**Institutional variables.** The institutions where these educators teach vary by auspice and type of degree program they have. The institutional variables used in this study are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

*Institutional Variables*

Measure	Operationalization/Definition
Auspice	A nominal variable indicating the best description of the institution where they teach: Public-state, Public-other, Private-denominational, Private-other.
Degree Program	A nominal variable that describes the type of social work degree program that their institution has: Combined BSW/MSW, MSW only, MSW & PhD, Combined BSW/MSW & PhD

**Outcome variables.** The outcome variables for this study pertain to the 45-item TPI, the 12-item CES, and an open ended question that asks about the specific components of a classroom environment needed to support critical thinking. These variables are interval measures that are evaluated by the participant using a 5 point Likert scale for the TPI and a 1-7 point Likert scale for the CES. As indicated previously, the 5 point Likert scale in the TPI for beliefs is different than the scale used for intentions and actions. The belief Likert scale was coded “1” indicates strongly disagree and “5” is strongly agree. For the intention and action scales a coded “1” indicates never and “5” indicates always. The educational belief, intention, and action questions, three for each perspective, were to address the level of agreement or disagreement with statements that answer the question: what do you believe about instructing or teaching?

Each of the three subsections contained three questions for each perspective for a total of nine questions total for each of the five perspectives. After the raw data were obtained from the

instrument authors for scoring, the data used in this study included: a total perspective score for all five perspectives, a total score for their beliefs, intentions, and actions, and an indicator of each participant's dominant perspective(s) if they held one at all. Also included in the scored data were scores from a variety of similar disciplines that were used for comparison. This study aims to answer the following research questions about the participants.

### **Research Questions**

1. What teaching perspectives do graduate social work educators report having when teaching human rights, social and economic justice content?
2. How do social work educators in this sample compare to other social workers and related disciplines that have completed the teaching perspectives inventory?
3. Is there a difference in teaching perspectives between educators who teach at public institutions and those who teach at private institutions in teaching perspectives?
4. Is there a difference in teaching perspectives between educators who teach at denominational institutions and those who teach at all other institutions in teaching perspectives?
5. Is there a difference in teaching perspectives between educators who teach in different social work courses (e.g., practice or policy) in teaching perspectives?
6. Do graduate social work educators' report that their students perceive they act in ways that support the theoretically ideal environment in this study?
7. Is there a relationship between educators' teaching perspectives and the reported actions for creation of a classroom environment?
8. What components did these educators report as important in the creation of a classroom environment for critical thinking?

### **Statistical Analysis**

The TPI was scored in a manner consistent with the work of original authors. Raw data was sent to the authors of the TPI for proprietary scoring. Perspective totals, belief, intention, and

action totals were returned to the researcher. TPI authors also determined which and how many dominant perspectives each participant had. Also included in the returned data were normed scores for other educators, helping and health professionals. A sum of the ten item CES yielded a CES score that can range from 10 to 70. Considerations of *effect* or *causation* will not be utilized or reported in this study because of no active or manipulated independent variable, no random assignment, and the use of non-probability sampling (Morgan et al., 2006).

As previously stated, this is a non-experimental survey study with descriptive, comparative and associational analyses. With limited previous work done in the professional literature related to teaching philosophies, perspectives, and classroom environments, it is necessary to begin with some foundational knowledge in this area (Nardi, 2006). This study answered the research questions and described this sample's teaching perspectives, compared them with other similar professionals, and discovered the relationship between perspectives and the actions taken in the classroom to create this study's ideal educational environment.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The previous chapter outlined the study's research design and methodology. Chapter four presents the results from this study. Results are presented in two sections. The first section contains descriptive information about the study demographics. The second section presents results by research question.

### Study Demographics

In order to determine the demographic characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics were run on each of the educator and institutional variables: course, age, gender, degree earned, teaching rank, years teaching, years in practice, auspice, and degree program. A total of 50 educators participated in the study; 48 completed the whole survey. As indicated in Table 7, over half of the educators were female and two-thirds were 35-54 years old. Most of the remaining respondents were over 55 years old.

Table 7

*Participant Demographics: Age and Gender (N=50)*

Measure	Frequency	Percent
Age		
25-35	1	2
35-54	29	58
55-64	14	28
65-74	6	12
Gender		
Female	32	64
Male	16	32
N/A	2	4

Educators in this study primarily held doctorates in social work or social welfare (76%), were relatively evenly split among assistant, associate, and full professor rank, and utilized either policy (26%) or practice (24%) as the course they chose to focus on for the survey. As Table 8 indicates, all but one predefined course was selected and one participant did not identify a course at all. The majority of the study's educators would be considered seasoned educators indicating that

Table 8

*Participant Demographics: Education, Teaching Rank, and Course (N=50)*

Measure	Frequency	Percent
Degree		
Masters – SW	5	10
Doctorate – SW	38	76
Doctorate – other	6	12
ABD/Doctoral program	1	2
Teaching Rank		
Professor	14	28
Associate Professor	10	20
Assistant Professor	18	36
Instructor	3	6
Lecturer	3	6
Clinical Appointment	1	2
Course		
Policy	13	26
Practice	12	24
Diversity	9	18
Community/Organization	5	10
HBSE	4	8
Research/Evaluation	2	4
Other	4	8
Spirituality/Religion	-	-
None	1	2

that they have taught for 11 years or more. Twelve percent of the sample would be considered novices with less than six years of teaching while an additional 26% have 6 - 10 years of experience (Table 9). Table 9 also indicates that approximately 80% of the respondents would be considered seasoned practitioners indicating they have practiced for 11 or more years. Interestingly, one respondent indicated that they had no years practicing within the profession. Overall, this is an experienced sample of practitioners who are educators with the majority (68%) reporting between 7 and 30 years of experience with one respondent who reported forty-five years of practice experience.

As shown in Table 10, the institutions that are represented in this sample are found primarily in public-state institutions (78%). One hundred and fifty-seven of the total 203 CSWE accredited programs (77%) are in public institutions. Over half of the respondents were in

combined BSW/MSW programs and more than one third in programs with a doctorate level program (PhD) while very few were in graduate Master's level only programs.

Table 9

*Participant Demographics: Experience Teaching and Practicing (N=50)*

Measure	Frequency	%
Years Teaching		
1-5	6	12
6-10	13	26
11-20	25	50
21-30	5	10
40+	1	< 1
Years Practicing		
0-5	6	12
6-10	3	6
11-20	24	48
21-30	9	18
31-40	6	12
41+	2	< 1

Table 10

*Institution Demographics: Auspice and Program Type (N=50)*

Measure	Frequency	%
Auspice		
Public-State	39	78
Public-Other	-	-
Private-Denominational	6	12
Private-Other	5	10
Program Type		
BSW/MSW (combined)	28	56
MSW only	4	8
MSW/PhD	9	18
Combined BSW/MSW & PhD	9	18

Research questions in this study did not pertain to the relationship between instructor demographic characteristics and teaching perspectives. Analysis was completed for the demographic data. There was no significant relationships between age and teaching perspective: Transmission  $r(46) = -.17, p = .24$ ; Apprenticeship  $r(46) = -.13, p = .37$ ; Developmental  $r(46) = -.06, p = .71$ ; Nurturing  $r(46) = -.03, p = .82$ ; and Social Reform  $r(46) = -.01, p = .96$ . Likewise,

there were no significant differences found between novice and seasoned educators, novice or seasoned practitioners, genders, or teaching rank.

### Results by Research Question

**What teaching perspectives do graduate social work educators report having when teaching human rights, social and economic justice content?** Graduate social work educators were asked to consider a time when they have taught human rights, social or economic justice (HRSEJ) content when answering the Teaching Perspectives Inventory. Of the 48 respondents who completed the TPI, 29 (60%) held a singularly dominant perspective, 13 (27%) had a combination of dominant perspectives and 6 (13%) held none. For those who held a single dominant perspective the breakdown among the five perspectives is as follows:

- Apprenticeship – 10
- Developmental – 10
- Nurturing – 8
- Social Reform – 1
- Transmission – 0

As Table 11 indicates, the transmission perspective was held as a dominant perspective but never

Table 11

*Comparison of Dominant Teaching Perspectives for the Current Sample and the Overall TPI*

Teaching Perspective	Current Sample (frequency)	Current Sample %	Overall TPI %
Developmental	20	42	17.8
Apprenticeship	18	36	38.3
Nurturing	10	21	50.5
Social Reform	4	8	2.7
Transmission	3	6	13.6
TOTAL	55	113	122.9

Note: 13 respondents had two dominant perspectives, so percentages total to more than 100%; Overall TPI data for 116, 621 respondents of the TPI taken from Collins & Pratt, 2011

alone by this sample of educators. Dominant perspectives are “computed as plus or minus one standard deviation around the mean of each respondent’s five perspective scores, hence the spread



separating dominant from recessive is individualized for each person” (Collins & Pratt, 2011, p. 9). Respondents of the TPI can hold none, one, or two dominant perspectives as previously noted and most frequently held one in this sample. Similarly in Collins and Pratt’s (2011) work, they found that about a quarter of the nearly 116,000 respondents had two perspectives.

When considering HRSEJ content, the Developmental perspective dominated this sample and accounted for 21% of educators who have a single dominant perspective and increased to 42% when educators who have a combination of dominant perspectives, of which Developmental is one, were included. Aligned with the theoretical foundation of this study, 63% of the respondents held either a Developmental and/or Nurturing perspective. Interestingly, the dominant teaching perspective of these social work educators is different than that of the overall TPI. Already noted is the prevalence of the Developmental teaching perspective with 42%, which is compared to only 17.8% in the overall TPI. Nurturing is the prevalent teaching perspective in the overall TPI at 50.5%, where it holds only 21% in this sample (Collins & Pratt, 2011).

**How do social work educators in this sample compare to other social workers and related disciplines that have completed the teaching perspectives inventory?** As shown in Table 12 and 13, this sample of social work educators, when considering HRSEJ content, are significantly higher than any other comparison group on the Social Reform Perspective. These social work educators were higher on the Social Reform perspective than the overall faculty ( $p < .001$ ), which constitutes seasoned educators in higher education, overall TPI participants ( $p < .001$ ), other social workers ( $p = .006$ ), those in public health ( $p < .001$ ) and physical or occupational therapists ( $p < .001$ ). The overall mean Developmental score for this sample is significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) than the normed sample of higher education faculty who teach at least 50% of the time. Social work educators in this sample also had mean Developmental scores that were significantly higher than the overall TPI mean scores ( $p = .004$ ). Educators in this study had significantly lower in mean Nurturing score than the overall TPI ( $p = .032$ ). This sample was also

Table 12

*Means and p Values for each Teaching Perspective – Sample vs. Overall Faculty and Overall TPI Scores*

Perspective	Sample <i>M (SD)</i>	Overall Faculty <i>M</i>	Sample vs. Overall Faculty <i>p</i>	Overall TPI <i>M</i>	Sample vs. Overall TPI <i>p</i>
Transmission	32.0 (3.82)	31.8	.718	33.1	.052
Apprenticeship	36.31 (3.37)	37.0	.164	36.2	.818
Developmental	36.08 (3.67)	33.8	< .001*	34.5	.004*
Nurturing	35.0 (5.02)	35.5	.493	36.6	.032*
Social Reform	33.33 (4.16)	26.4	< .001*	28.8	< .001*

Note: Sample ( $n = 48$ ); Overall Faculty = mean perspective scores for 11,045 seasoned higher education faculty whose responsibilities include at least 50% teaching; overall TPI = mean perspective scores for 116, 621 respondents of the TPI (Collins & Pratt, 2011)

\* significant at the .05 level based on one-sample t-test

significantly lower on mean Apprenticeship score ( $p=.013$ ) and Nurturing score ( $p=.002$ ) than the other 148 social workers in the overall faculty sample.

When considering how this sample compared to other helping or applied professions, there were significant differences in addition to those mentioned. Table 13 shows the overall means and p values based upon one-sample t-tests comparing the sample and a variety of other disciplines. This sample of social work educators had the highest Social Reform mean and was most closely related to the other social work comparison group. When comparing this group of social work educators to all of the included comparison groups, the study's educators had significantly higher mean scores on the Developmental and Social Reform perspectives. Also, this sample had significantly lower mean scores on the Apprenticeship and Nurturing perspectives. When considering educators' belief, intention, and action scores, similar comparisons were made. Again, teaching perspectives are comprised of answers to questions related to the individual's beliefs, intentions, and actions about what they believe it means to teach and learn; they are indicators of commitment that are visible and help define our perspectives or philosophies

Table 13

*Means and p Values for each Teaching Perspective – Sample and Normed Scores for Similar Professions*

Perspective	Sample <i>M</i>	SW <i>M</i>	Sample vs. SW <i>p</i>	PH <i>M</i>	Sample vs. PH <i>p</i>	PT/OT <i>M</i>	Sample vs. PT/OT <i>p</i>
Transmission	32.0	31.85	.787	32.16	.773	32.0	1.0
Apprenticeship	36.31	37.57	.013*	35.58	.139	37.5	.019*
Developmental	36.08	35.74	.520	34.83	.022*	34.5	.004*
Nurturing	35.0	37.32	.002*	35.27	.711	35.7	.339
Social Reform	33.33	31.60	.006*	28.71	<.001*	27.3	<.001*

Note: SW = social work educators ( $n=148$ ), PH = public health ( $n=135$ ), PT/OT = physical therapists/occupational therapists ( $n=373$ ); sample ( $n = 48$ )

\* Significant at the .05 level based on one-sample t-tests

on teaching (Pratt, 2005). Actions are what are what educators do to engage people, intentions are statements of overall purpose or responsibility, and beliefs are the fundamental understandings about knowledge and what it means to learn. These components of educators and teaching are often seen as minor if they are acknowledged at all (Pratt, 2005).

Shown in Table 14, these graduate social work educators had a significantly lower mean belief score (53.35) than other higher education faculty and the overall TPI sample. These respondents were also significantly lower in their mean belief score than the other 148 identified social work educators. Conversely, these educators held mean intention (60.0) and action (59.38) scores that were both significantly higher than other higher education faculty ( $p < .001$ ) and the overall TPI sample ( $p < .001$ ), but not higher than the other social workers.

When participants complete the TPI online, they are given an individual profile and a summary and interpretation guide. In the interpretation guide, participants are given ten steps to interpret what they were given in their individual profile. One item has the participant check for consistency in their belief, intention, and action sub-scores. For each perspective, the participant is given a total of their belief, intention, and action scores (sub-scores) for that perspective. The

Table 14

*Means and p Values for Beliefs, Intentions, Actions – Sample vs. Overall Faculty and Overall TPI Scores*

Indicator	Sample <i>M (SD)</i>	Overall Faculty <i>M</i>	Sample vs. Overall Faculty <i>p</i>	Overall TPI <i>M</i>	Sample vs. Overall TPI <i>p</i>	SW <i>M</i>	Sample vs. SW <i>p</i>
Belief	53.35 (5.51)	55.0	.044*	56.9	<.001*	55.8	.004*
Intention	60.0 (5.98)	56.6	< .001*	56.9	<.001*	59.8	.818
Action	59.37 (5.70)	55.8	< .001*	55.5	<.001*	59.0	.651

Note: sample ( $n = 48$ ); overall faculty = seasoned higher education faculty whose responsibilities include at least 50% teaching ( $n = 11,045$ ); overall TPI data for 116, 621 respondents of the TPI taken from Collins & Pratt, 2011; SW = social work educators ( $n = 148$ )

\* significant at the .05 level based on one-sample t-tests

authors of the TPI suggest that participants review those to understand how much agreement there is between what they do (actions), what they want to accomplish (intentions), and why that is justified or important (beliefs). Sub-scores within one or two points of each other indicated that the participants' beliefs, intentions and actions all corroborate each other. This study's sample had a great deal of variability in the consistency of these sub-scores. No one participant had consistency in all five perspectives.

When examining the internal discrepancies, as suggested by the interpretation guide, 100% of those who held a Transmission perspective as dominant had high internal consistency. Their action, intentions, and beliefs all corroborated each other. Eighteen participants in this study held an Apprenticeship perspective and only 5 (28%) of those had high internal consistency. Likewise, only 5 (25%) of those who held a dominant Developmental perspective had internal consistency. The Nurturing perspective respondents had relatively high internal consistency with 4 of the 10 (40%) having their belief, intention, and action sub-scores within a couple of points of each other.

For the Social Reform perspective, half of those who had this as a dominant perspective had high internal consistency.

To consider the concept of consistency further, a Cronbach's alpha was completed for each of the commitments and for each of the teaching perspectives for this study's participants.

Cronbach's alpha is a common measure of reliability; reliability meaning the internal consistency of several items or scores to arrive at, in this case, a teaching perspective (Morgan et al., 2004).

Table 15 shows the overall alpha for the 48 participants for each teaching perspective. The alphas for the TPI scores in this sample were lower

Table 15

*Cronbach's Alpha for Indicators of Commitment and the Teaching Perspectives (n=48)*

Indicator	Sample Alpha	Overall TPI Alpha
Beliefs	.65	.72
Intentions	.79	.78
Actions	.78	.80
Transmission	.58	.72
Apprenticeship	.60	.73
Developmental	.65	.70
Nurturing	.84	.82
Social Reform	.73	.83

Note: overall TPI data for 116, 621 respondents of the TPI taken from Collins & Pratt, 2011

than the overall TPI alphas with the exception of the Nurturing perspective. A correlation matrix provided further information about each teaching perspective and this sample. The Nurturing perspective had the highest alpha and was the only perspective to have no negative correlations amongst the items that make up the questions to this scale. In fact, many of the Nurturing scale questions were moderately and positively correlated with the other items in the scale whereas in the other perspectives fewer questions had moderately positive correlations. The Transmission perspective had the least internal consistency amongst the questions of the scale. Overall, when the

questions that comprised each teaching perspective scale were negatively correlated with other items of that scale, the correlation was small (e.g.  $-.287$  as the largest).

Commitments of belief sub-scale had the lowest alpha (.65) which indicated relatively little agreement among these respondents to all 15 questions related to beliefs. Additionally, the overall mean beliefs score was significantly lower than the comparison groups and examination of individual participant profiles indicated that beliefs were often involved in the internal discrepancy in each of the perspectives. When considering the corrected item-total correlation, a moderately high correlation is considered to be .40 or above (Morgan et al., 2004). For the belief sub-scale, only four of the fifteen questions were moderately correlated with the rest.

**Is there a difference between educators who teach at public institutions and those who teach at private institutions in teaching perspectives?** There were no significant differences in mean teaching perspective scores, for any of the perspectives, for those who teach at public versus private institutions. Each of the private institutions (denominational vs. other) had only 6 and 5 respondents, respectively. To determine if there was an overall difference between public and private the two types of private institutions were combined. For this comparison, no significant differences were found between institution type and the mean score for any of the five teaching perspectives.

**Is there a difference between educators who teach at denominational institutions and those who teach at all other institutions in teaching perspectives?** There were no significant differences in mean teaching perspective scores, for any of the perspectives, for those educators in this study who teach at denominational institutions versus those to teach in all other types of institutions.

**Is there a difference between educators who teach in different social work courses (e.g., practice or policy) in teaching perspectives?** There were some significant differences in mean teaching perspective scores based on the class that was used as a reference for the HRSEJ content. When compared as individual courses, there were no significant differences; however,

when the courses were combined into micro, macro, research, and other classifications differences were found. A statistically significant difference was found among the four levels of courses on mean scores for the Apprenticeship perspective,  $F(3, 43) = 4.05, p = .008$ , Developmental perspective  $F(3, 43) = 4.46, p = .008$ , the Nurturing perspective,  $F(3, 43) = 4.75, p = .006$ , and the Social Reform perspective,  $F(3, 43) = 5.74, p = .002$ . Post hoc Tukey HSD Tests indicated that the research course was significantly lower in every perspective previously listed.

**Do graduate social work educators' report that their students perceive they act in ways that support the theoretically ideal environment in this study?** All fifty participants completed the Classroom Environment Scale. As previously mentioned, Cronbach's alpha is a common measure of reliability and the alpha of the 12 question CES was .891. A one-sample t-test utilized the CES and a test value of 60. Sixty is the mean score that would be obtained if someone answered the minimum Likert value of 5 for all twelve questions. The Likert value of 5 = frequently, so the utilization of this answer for all questions would indicate that most of the time their students perceive that they take actions that support this study's theoretically ideal classroom environment. The sample mean (66.40) is significantly higher than the hypothesized mean value of 60 ( $p < .001$ ). The mean difference between the sample and hypothesized mean was significantly different at the 95% CI. The difference between the sample and the hypothesized mean was likely to be between 3.55 and 9.25 which did not include zero.

Descriptive statistics were also run on individual CES questions. Four questions had mean scores over 6 which is indicative of *very frequently* engaging in the related action: hold high expectations that challenge them (6.24), trust my students by giving them freedom to explore (6.18), challenge all assumptions (6.18), and model the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking (6.00). Five of the questions fell into the *occasional* range. Questions 1 through 4 had means that ranged from 5.00 as the lowest to 5.56 as the highest and question 6 had a mean of 4.64 (see Table 16).

Table 16

*Means for CES Items*

CES Item	<i>M</i>
1. refrain from judgment of students' views even if they are contradictory to my own.	5.56
2. include students when setting the guidelines for each classroom.	5.00
3. present positions that I may not agree with to foster diversity in perspectives.	5.07
4. reflect upon beliefs I have with respect to the course content	5.36
5. mediate aggressive responses of one student to another.	5.73
6. utilize debate as a technique to give voice to different points of view.	4.64
7. challenge all students to explore their assumptions.	6.18
8. model the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking.	6.00
9. recognize that risks exist for students to evaluate deeply held assumptions.	5.82
10. demonstrate respect for viewpoints that are “in minority” in the social work profession (e.g. politically conservative, religiously fundamental).	5.64
11. hold high expectations that challenge them.	6.24
12. trust my students by giving them the freedom to explore their own ideas.	6.18

**Is there a relationship between educators’ teaching perspectives and the reported actions for creation of a classroom environment?** To investigate if there is a relationship between teaching perspectives and classroom environment a correlational matrix was computed. Table 17 shows that three of the five TPI pairs of variables were significantly correlated with the CES at  $p < .01$ . The strongest positive correlation, which would be considered a large effect size, was between CES score and the mean Developmental teaching perspective score,  $r(46) = .612, p < .001$ . This means that educators who have a high CES score are likely to have a higher mean Developmental score. CES was also positively associated with the Nurturing perspective,  $r(46) = .550, p < .001$  with a large effect size, and the Social Reform perspective,  $r(46) = .505, p = .001$  with a large effect size. Educators who hold a Developmental, Nurturing, or Social Reform



Table 17

*Correlations for Teaching Perspectives and CES (n = 48)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. CES	--	.209	.291*	.612**	.560**	.505**	66.40	10.03
2. Transmission	--	--	.380**	.264	.324**	.144	32.00	3.82
3. Apprenticeship	--	--	--	.385**	.561**	.299*	36.31	3.37
4. Developmental	--	--	--	--	.477**	.680**	36.08	3.67
5. Nurturing	--	--	--	--	--	.550**	35.00	5.02
6. Social Reform	--	--	--	--	--	--	33.33	4.16

\*\* correlation significant at the  $p = .01$  level

\* correlation significant at the  $p = .05$  level

teaching perspective report that more actions have been taken in relation to the classroom environment as outlined in this study.

**What components did these educators report as important in the creation of a classroom environment for critical thinking?** An open ended question was utilized to capture the relevant classroom environment components these educators identified for the support of critical thinking. The question read, *what do you think is the most important component in the creation of an environment for critical thinking.* This study theorized that the environment outlined in chapter two and the CES would ultimately support critical thinking in social work education. While this is not a qualitative study, an analysis framework outlined by Shank (2006) was used to increase the trustworthiness of the results. More specifically, open ended responses utilized a comparative thematic analysis to liken themes with each other (Shank, 2006). Basic themes were identified after two initial passes over the question responses and then organizing themes were identified based upon consistencies in overall concepts (Shank, 2006). The organizing theme for all responses was based upon the survey question asked; analysis was to determine what specifics of that topic were identified (Richards, 2005). Forty-six of the fifty respondents responded to this question. Many of the respondents identified several components related to a classroom environment for critical thinking. Table 18 shows the overall themes and counts identified from

Table 18

*Themes from Open Ended Question (n=46)*

Theme	Count
Exposure and listening to many perspectives and viewpoints	14
Mutual respect	12
Safety/safe climate	9
Modeling skills, receptiveness to questioning	8
Relevant material, engagement, debate	8
Student engagement in critical thinking	5
Challenge students	4

the open ended responses. What follows are illustrative quotes for each of the identified themes.

The quoted responses are identified by respondent's number.

***Exposure and listening to many perspectives and viewpoints.*** Table 18 showed that 14 (30%) respondents identified the issue of exposure and listening to many perspectives or viewpoints as vital to the creation of an environment for critical thinking. One respondent (ID 23) said that “when an ‘assumption’ is put forth, engaging the class in a discussion about alternative ways of thinking about the ‘assumption’” is necessary. Respondent 49 simply stated it is vital to allow “all views to be discussed.” While many respondents discussed the necessity of many points of view in general, a couple of respondents placed some value on what this might include more specifically. Respondent 53 shared that “communities and individuals who have been marginalized” must be included through non mainstream media avenues and respondent 11 felt that a “bi-partisan factual information” approach would help students “make a decision about their beliefs and thoughts.” Many of the respondents discussed both an educator’s responsibility as well as the students’ responsibility to engage with their fellow students, listen, and not judge. “An atmosphere where students view themselves as learners, where it is okay to reveal their prejudices and ask challenging questions” (ID 34).

***Mutual Respect.*** Table 18 showed that 12 of the respondents identified the issue of respect as vital in creating an environment supportive of critical thinking. Included in this overall theme

were related issues such as trust, honesty, care, and allowing students to decide and make choices for themselves. In addition, a couple of respondents focused on respect as it related to acceptance and openness to others' ideas. One respondent (ID 48) stated that "students need to respect each other's right to think out loud about difficult issues, knowing that they won't be attacked for what they say" and "freedom to speak their views without being judged" (ID 25).

***Safety/safe climate.*** Table 18 showed that nine of the respondents also identified the general issue of safety or safe climate as a vital component. Included in this theme were issues related to safety versus comfort, democratic classrooms, and climates that support students questioning. These sub-themes were added into the overall theme of safety, despite not specifically identifying *safety* because they still addressed the notion of needing the quality of *safety* to explore. Holley and Steiner (2005) also addressed the notion that safety does not necessarily equal comfort; safety as aligned with a climate where honesty, risks, and security are present. In this sample, one respondent (ID 10) also stated that there needs to be discussion around "if what is happening is unsafe or merely uncomfortable." ID 28 echoed the work of Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) and Pratt (2005) when stating that "creating a classroom where students do feel free to express all their points of view is extremely important. I try to do this but admit that sometimes my own biases make it difficult." While educators may ideally want to support an open, honest, and free climate where all points of view can be shared, there is often difficulty in letting points of view that conflict with personal values, ideas, or beliefs be expressed. The difficulty with expression of multiple points of view was shared by only one respondent, but the necessity of these points of view was shared by several.

***Modeling skills, receptiveness to questioning.*** Thirty-six percent of this sample held an Apprenticeship teaching perspective where educators see themselves as competent experts in their field and that modeling that knowledge is the key to effective practice (Pratt et al., 2001) and 8 (17%) respondents identified modeling as vital to the critical thinking environment. From "modeling receptiveness" (ID 7) to "allowing students to see that you are willing to challenge and

be challenged about your own beliefs” (ID 13), these educators often felt that modeling was a good way to show students that “they can do it” (ID 36). In addition to actually showing students, these educators identified that by allowing students to question or giving them permission to do so was another way to model critical thinking skills and promote a critical thinking environment.

***Relevant material, engagement, debate.*** One of the 8 respondents who identified the necessity of relevant material, engagement with ideas, and debate as necessary to a critical thinking environment summarized to state that, “I find that social workers...often have a difficult time discussing and debating ideas. In our attempts to see people holistically and remain sensitive, we often leave ideas unchallenged or feel uncomfortable with debate....providing a toolbox for debate...will aid in making critical thinking less threatening” (ID 5). Respondent 18 agreed to say “healthy debates to get a 360-degree perspective” while respondent 21 said “challenged and critical thinking exercises, real life scenarios, and time sensitive case studies” will support a critical thinking environment.

***Student engagement in critical thinking.*** Table 18 showed that five respondents expressed the idea that it is vital to have students who will engage in critical thinking to promote the overall environment. Respondent 19 stated that “building a ‘moral conversation’ climate where students willing to question themselves and others” and “find the errors in their own thinking” was necessary. While many did not specifically point to student characteristics related to willingness, responses such as “helping students avoid personalizing differences” (ID 5) or the “reflection or recognition of assumptions” exemplified a willingness or spirit of engagement by the student in the necessary tasks and skills required to think critically.

***Challenge students.*** Only four respondents identified the necessity of challenging students as a vital component to an environment for critical thinking. Many respondents combined challenge with another idea like respondent 12 who simply said, “respect and challenge” or respondent 28 who said, “I think helping students to understand their values and to challenge them is critical.” One respondent (ID 34) combined several themes to say it is vital to create “an

atmosphere of safety where students can be ‘in process with their thinking... where it is okay to reveal prejudices and ask challenging questions. A place where students can check out assumptions...and experience multiple perspectives and the complexity of situations related to social problems.’”

**Supplemental Findings**

Research questions related to the relationship between the CES and teaching perspectives led to the finding that 3 perspectives (Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform) were correlated with the CES. Table 19 shows the counts of these cross-perspective and cross-commitment correlations and those with a larger than typical effect sizes (greater than .50) were included in the analysis. Additional analysis was completed to determine how these perspectives were related to each other and if any other individual

Table 19

*Cross-perspective and Cross-commitment Correlations*

Overall Perspectives	Count
Developmental and Nurturing	2
Nurturing and Social Reform	2
Developmental and Social Reform	9
Total	13
Cross-perspective and Cross-commitment	
Developmental I and Social Reform A	2
Developmental I and Nurturing A	1
Social Reform I and Developmental A	2
Social Reform I and Nurturing A	1

Note: I = Intention item; A = Action item

aspects of the five perspectives would be correlated. Inconsistencies were noted in the five perspectives and this led to the analysis of individual items to examine where relationships existed and if these are cross-perspective and cross-commitment (e.g. intention and action). Correlations were run for all 45 items that compose the Teaching Perspectives Inventory.

The Developmental perspective intention questions were positively correlated with two cross-perspective action statements and two intention statements with larger than typical effect sizes. The Social Reform intention questions were positively correlated with three cross-perspective action statements and one cross-perspective intention statement with larger than typical effect sizes. The two biggest effect sizes were found between the Developmental intention statement, *I expect people to develop new ways of reasoning about the subject matter*, with the Social Reform action statement, *I link instructional goals to necessary changes in society* (.68) and the Developmental action statement, *I encourage people to challenge each other's thinking*, with the Nurturing action statement, *I share my own feelings and expect my learners to do the same* (.64).

Additional analysis was also conducted with the teaching perspectives and the summed CES. The outcomes the previous additional analyses warranted an additional consideration of the relationship between the teaching perspectives and the components that construct a classroom environment score. Table 20 shows the significant correlations between specific teaching perspective items and the summed CES score. All of the Developmental intention and action items were positively correlated with CES score with the statement *I encourage people to challenge each other's thinking* with a large effect size. The Nurturing perspective also had most of the intention and action items positively correlate with the summed CES with the exception of one intention item related to building learners' confidence and self-esteem. The statement *I share my own feelings and expect my learners to do the same* had the largest overall effect size. The Developmental and Nurturing perspectives were the only two perspectives to have belief items significantly correlated with the CES. The Social Reform perspective likewise had most items positively correlate with the CES with the exception of an action item related to emphasizing values more than individual learning.

Analysis was also conducted with the individual items of the CES and total perspective scores for all five perspectives. Table 21 shows that 6 of the CES items are positively correlated

with the Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform perspectives. The Developmental perspective has the most and the strongest relationship with items of the CES. None of the perspectives analyzed were correlated with the CES item of including students when setting guidelines. Interestingly, the first three items in Table 21 are differently correlated with the three teaching perspectives. None of those correlations are particularly strong despite being significant at the .05 level.

Table 20

*Significant Correlations between Teaching Perspectives and Summed CES score*

Perspective	TPI item	Summed CES score
Apprenticeship Developmental	I want people to understand the realities of working in the real world (I)	.462**
	Teaching should focus on qualitative changes in thinking (B)	.351*
	My intent is to help people develop more complex ways of reasoning (I)	.404**
	I expect people to develop new ways of reasoning about the subject matter (I)	.479**
	I want people to see how complex and inter-related things really are (I)	.432**
Nurturing	I ask a lot of questions while teaching (A)	.395**
	I challenge familiar ways of understanding the subject matter (A)	.340*
	I encourage people to challenge each other's thinking (A)	.514**
	It's important that I acknowledge learners' emotional reactions (B)	.389**
	In my teaching, building self-confidence in learners is a priority (B)	.325*
	I expect people to enhance their self-esteem through my teaching (I)	.460**
	I want to provide a balance between caring and challenging as I teach (I)	.315*
	I find something to compliment in everyone's work or contribution (A)	.397**
Social Reform	I encourage the expression of feeling and emotion (A)	.452**
	I share my own feelings and expect my learners to do the same (A)	.587**
	My intent is to challenge people to seriously reconsider their values (I)	.403**
	I expect people to be committed to changing our society (I)	.429**
	I want to make apparent what people take for granted about society (I)	.441**
	I use the subject matter as a way to teach about higher ideals (A)	.411**
	I link instructional goals to necessary changes in society (A)	.399**

Note: B = belief, I = intention, A = action

\* correlation significant at the .05 level

\*\* correlation significant at the .01 level

Table 21

*Significant Correlations between the CES Items and Total Teaching Perspective Scores*

CES Item	TR	AP	DV	NU	SR
Refrain from judgment of students' views even if they are contradictory to my own				.370**	
Include students when setting the guidelines for each classroom					
Present positions that I may not agree with to foster diversity in perspectives			.310*		
Reflect upon beliefs I have with respect to the course content					.381**
Mediate aggressive responses of one student to another			.482**	.378**	.379**
Utilize debate as a technique to give voice to different points of view			.493**	.378**	.432**
Challenge all students to explore their assumptions		.351*	.561**	.421**	.418**
Model the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking		.298*	.594**	.450**	.457**
Recognize that risks exist for students to evaluate deeply held assumptions	.312*		.492**	.519**	.403**
Demonstrate respect for viewpoints that are in "minority" in the social work profession (e.g. politically conservative, religiously fundamental)	.290*		.471**	.422**	.317*
Hold high expectations that challenge them		.359*	.487**		
Trust my students by giving them the freedom to explore their own ideas			.366*	.444**	

Note: TR = Transmission perspective, AP = Apprenticeship perspective; DV = Developmental perspective; NU = Nurturing perspective; SR = Social Reform perspective

\* correlation significant at the .05 level

\*\* correlation significant at the .01 level

### Summary of Results

This chapter described this study's graduate social work educators' teaching perspectives and actions taken in relation to the classroom environment. The data analysis provided insight in to what teaching perspectives are held by graduate social work educators as well as their perceptions about the actions they take in relation to classroom environment. The majority (60%) of educators in this study held one dominant perspective while 27% held a combination of perspectives. Faculty



in the study held a Developmental perspective as dominant (42%) most often followed by Apprenticeship (26%) and Nurturing (21%).

Educators in this study were compared against similar educators and other professionals. Interestingly, this sample of graduate faculty was different from all other comparison groups on one particular perspective: Social Reform. As Table 22 shows, this sample of faculty had a higher

Table 22

*A Summary of Comparisons of the Teaching Perspective Means for the Current Sample and Several Other TPI Samples*

TPI component	Current Sample <i>M</i>	Overall faculty	Overall TPI	SW	PH	PT/OT
Transmission	32.0	--	--	--	--	--
Apprenticeship	36.3	--	--	↓	--	↓
Developmental	36.1	↑	↑	--	↑	↑
Nurturing	35.0	--	↓	↓	--	--
Social Reform	33.3	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Belief	53.4	↓	↓	↓		--
Intention	60.0	↑	↑	--		↑
Action	59.4	↑	↑	--		↑

Note: ↑ = the current sample's mean as compared to the cell mean for the other TPI sample is significantly higher ; ↓ = the current sample's mean as compared to the cell mean for the other TPI sample is significantly lower; -- = there was no significant difference in means

mean score for Social Reform than any other group when considering HRSEJ content. While the Developmental perspective was held most often as the dominant perspective, the sample mean score (36.1) was consistently significantly lower from most of the comparison group means.

When comparing educators who teach in private vs. public or denominational vs. all other types of institutional auspices, no significant differences were found. Also, this study compared the social work course where the HRSEJ content was covered by the faculty member and no

significant differences were found for individual courses. Other demographic variables (e.g., age, years in practice, years teaching) also had no significant relationship to teaching perspectives.

To summarize actions in relation to classroom environment, it is important to note that the new CES's Cronbach's alpha was .891. The overall sample's mean (66.4) indicated an overall perception by these faculty that they *very frequently* take actions that support an adult, constructivist, brain-based learning environment. Individual means for questions ranged from 4.64 to 6.24. There was a relationship between the actions related to the classroom environment and the scale scores for the Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform with large effect sizes, and to the Apprenticeship perspective with a medium effect size.

The final question asked educators to think about what they considered to be important in the creation of a classroom environment for critical thinking. The open-ended question was analyzed using a comparative thematic analysis and seven primary themes emerged. Forty-six respondents answered this question and 30% of those respondents reported a belief in the necessity of exposure and listening to many perspectives or viewpoints for critical thinking environments. A quarter of the respondents reported the necessity in creating an environment of mutual respect where there is acceptance and openness to others' ideas and experiences. Overall, the responses to the final question, relating to critical thinking, thematically illustrated an environment that is aligned with the theoretically ideal environment outlined in this study.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

Teaching philosophies are at the foundation of what educators do in the classroom and if ignored can disrupt student learning and leave the educator at risk (Brookfield, 1995). Social work educators have long researched and written about educational issues (e.g. inclusion of religious content), but there has been a distinct focus on the applied aspects of teaching and student characteristics or outcomes. This study was conducted to begin a conversation in the profession about what educators bring with them into the classroom and how that might impact the classroom environment they create.

### **Summary of Results**

When the results of this study were reviewed, it was found that the majority of graduate social work educators in the sample held dominant teaching perspectives that align with the theoretical basis of this study. Forty-two percent held a Developmental perspective and 21% held a Nurturing perspective while 36% held an Apprenticeship perspective. A Developmental perspective, as noted in chapter two, is centered on the student, on fostering deep approaches, conversational inquiry, prior knowledge, and ways of thinking (Pratt & Associates, 2005) which align with the systems, cognitive developmental, adult educational, brain based theories of this study. Likewise, a Nurturing perspective is also student centered with emphasis on trust and respect of the student, self-esteem, challenge with care, and dignity which support this study's theoretical foundation.

Of note is the relatively high proportion of these educators who held a Social Reform perspective as compared to an overall average. Eight percent of this sample held a Social Reform perspective compared to 2.7% from the overall respondents of the TPI (Collins & Pratt, 2011). Beyond holding a Social Reform perspective as dominant more often, these educators also have higher mean Social Reform scores (33.3) than the overall faculty sample (26.4), all respondents of

the TPI (28.8), and to similar professions such as public health (28.7) , physical and occupational therapists (27.3), and a sample of the other 148 social worker educators (27.3). When considering human rights, social and economic justice course content, social work educators in this study had higher mean Social Reform scores and held that perspective more often.

Additionally, when considering the commitments that make up each teaching perspective there were many inconsistencies. It was noted that the belief, intention, and action sub-scores for each perspective are indicators of how much corroboration or internal consistency there is for each participant on each perspective. In this sample, there was low internal consistency for most of the respondents. When considering a respondents' dominant teaching perspective, that perspective where they felt most *at home*, there was still low overall internal consistency. Two dominant perspectives did have relatively high internal consistency among beliefs, intentions, and actions – the Transmission (100%) and Nurturing (40%) perspectives. Likewise the Cronbach's alphas for these indicators of commitment varied with beliefs (.65) being marginally reliable while intentions (.79) and actions (.78) fell in the acceptable range (Morgan et al., 2004).

Two research questions were related to the reported actions these educators take in the creation of their classroom environment as outlined theoretically in this study and whether that was related to a particular teaching perspective. These educators reported that student's perceived that they more than frequently take actions to support this classroom ideal. The *t* test value of 60 was utilized as it represented a minimum threshold for *frequently* completing actions that support this classroom environment. In addition, as was to be expected based upon prevailing literature, the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) was correlated with three of the five teaching perspectives: Developmental ( $r(46) = 6.12, p < .001$ ), Nurturing ( $r = .560$ ), and Social Reform ( $r = .505$ ). Jarvis-Selinger, Collins, and Pratt (2007) connected the Developmental and Nurturing perspectives to the tenets of student-centered and constructivist teaching which deemphasizes the transmission of content. In this study, the two perspectives (Developmental, Nurturing) that *should* have found an association with the CES did associate with it. While Social Reform did not have as large of an

effect size as the other two perspectives, it was still highly positively associated with the CES. Paul (1987) believed that educators must model and develop empathetic responding to points of view that are different from our own through reflective dialogue, challenging dilemmas, and active engagement with content. The three perspectives that correlated with the CES, find congruence with Paul's outline. The concern is if differences emerge when the topic of ideology comes into focus. Educators in social work "frequently fail to interrupt and challenge inappropriate comments" (Seelman & Walls, 2010, p. 116) that target privileged groups (e.g. men, Republicans). The Social Reform perspective places the ideal as central, all other elements of the general model are used as a vehicle for that aim and if not reflected upon, the ideal can dominate and overshadow the student and all other elements of the educational process (Pratt, 1992). Based upon the self-report of these educators, there are some attempts to not let that happen.

When looking more closely at the relationships of the teaching perspectives with each other and with the CES, a more nuanced view of these respondents emerged. The Developmental and Social Reform perspective had several strong relationships among their intentions and actions. Interestingly, utilizing debate as a technique to give voice to different points of view had the lowest mean score (4.64), but when educators reported more frequency of encouraging students to challenge each other's thinking they also reported more use of debate. Also, educators in this study who more often encouraged students to challenge each other's thinking also reported a high frequency of mediating aggressive responses, challenging all students to explore their assumptions, modeling the importance of questioning, recognizing that risks exist for students, demonstrating respect for viewpoints in the profession's "minority", and sharing their own feelings in an effort to have students reconsider their values. An educator who holds a higher mean Developmental perspective score is more likely to present positions they may not agree with fostering diversity of perspectives in the classroom whereas a Nurturing perspective is more likely to refrain from judgment of students' views.

Finally, as stipulated by CSWE's accreditation criteria one of the profession's educational competencies is for critical thinking. So, what did these educators say are the necessary components for the creation of an environment for critical thinking and do those conceptualizations align with the two or three teaching perspectives that were associated with the CES? Overall, the educators in this study conceptualized the components along lines similar to that of the general teaching model (Figure 1); themes were related to the educator, the content, and to the learner. Most educators stated that it is necessary for students to have exposure to and hear many different perspectives on whatever content is being presented.

### **Interpretation of Results by Construct**

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study that warrant consideration from social work educators. The results of this study were presented in chapter 4 and summarized in the previous section by research question. The rest of this chapter will be organized by construct. The three overriding constructs used to organize this chapter are: context, teaching perspectives and classroom environments. At the onset of this study, it was conceptualized that the context, or culture of teaching, would impact the experience of educators and students in the classroom (see Figure 3). Adult educators incorporate the symbiotic relationship of the cognitive and epistemological development of adult learners with how the human brain functions and learns, and the ways in which adult learners make meaning with content. The beliefs, intentions, and actions that an educator has with relation to a professional content area will undoubtedly impact the student's experience in the social work classroom. Some evidence (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009; NAS, 2007) has shown that those experiences have varied.

#### **Context**

At the foundation of this study is systems theory; a theory where human behavior is seen as adapting to and constantly changing the environment (Payne, 1997). This study considered the differences between groups in teaching perspectives among the different institutional auspices. Hamilton (2009) found that students rated their preparation higher in private institutions than their

counterparts in publicly housed programs. NAS (2007) focused their report on 10 social work programs housed in public institutions and also outlined three case examples of students who were in attendance in social work programs in public institutions. Students at denominational institutions rated the advising they received slightly higher than students at non-denominational institutions (Hamilton, 2009). Further, the reported incidents in the NAS report involved two students who experienced conflict related to their religious beliefs. Did the culture around the educators in these varying types of institutions lead to the varying experiences of their students? Is there a difference in teaching perspectives that led to those differences?

While the sample size limited the ability to identify statistically significant differences, the finding that teaching perspectives of educators in public vs. private or denominational vs. all other institutions did not differ was interesting. While no overall differences in perspectives were found, a closer look at the outcomes in this study revealed some subtle differences. It was interesting to this researcher that the Social Reform perspective had the lowest mean score amongst educators at denominational institutions. Denominational institutions' educators in this sample highest mean score were for the Nurturing perspective and then the Apprenticeship perspective. For all other institution's educators, the Transmission perspective received the least support while the Apprenticeship perspective held the highest mean score among this group. Based upon those nuanced differences, one could wonder about the possible contextual influence based upon institutional auspice. Is the culture of teaching in a denominational institution influence the fact that Social Reform was the least supported? Would an alignment of this particular content area and the Social Reform perspective violate some basic tenet of what educators in denominational institutions find important? Even as recently as 2009, Streets noted that there are still social workers "who quietly struggle to balance their personal faith with some of the ethical and values expectations of the social work profession" (p. 186).

David Hodge has written extensively about the intersection of the profession and religion. In 2011, Hodge addressed the issue of learning environments to support diversity and difference

within the profession based on the idea that “social work education should transcend the different orthodox and progressive value systems...in a way that respects everyone’s fundamental human rights” (Hodge, 2011, p. 236). This study has argued for certain environments and teaching perspectives that would uphold those ideals and support all types of diversity when addressing HRSEJ content. Overall, the dominant teaching perspectives of these educators would theoretically uphold those tenets and yet there were many inconsistencies within the perspectives. What may cause those inconsistencies? What could be the consequences of those inconsistencies?

Social work is unique in the stance it takes in the social and political action realms (Buila, 2010). Staniforth, Fouché, and O’Brien (2011) found that practicing New Zealand social workers in their study had moved to a broader approach to the debate about social work’s mandate rather than the dichotomous social change versus micro focused change. Defining social work is a social construction. “Time, place, culture, economics, and political structures have all competed and contributed towards defining what social workers do or should do” (Staniforth et al., 2011, p. 194). Funge (2011) found that most graduate social work educators he studied reported that it was their role to *expose* students to a social justice perspective and not to *promote* one in particular whereas the other respondents asserted that it was their role to cultivate a particular conviction in students. Specht and Courtney (1994) might call that unfaithful, but what it may mean is that the socio-cultural context around social work education has changed and the profession has responded.

Critical reflection about the foundational beliefs of teaching has generally been abandoned to pursue more pressing social issues or ideological positions (Brookfield, 2006; Pratt & Nesbit, 2000). The social work educator holds membership and participation in a sociocultural discourse; a discourse that shapes how people think, value, and act in relation to others in the community (Pratt & Nesbit, 2000). The overall culture in social work education, particularly around HRSEJ content, provides the frames and norms around what content is covered, by what texts, and in what manner. All of that will impact an educator’s approach and a student’s experience. Nelson-Becker (2005) considered the professional integration of religion or spirituality in professional practice by



considering two groups of graduates: MSW-only and dual degree in social work and religion/divinity. Nelson-Becker did not extensively comment on why difference occurred, but did report that a dual degree graduate was more holistic in their approach to practice. Overall, dual degreed social workers offered broader, more holistic, and strengths-based assessments of the religious views of their clients. Are the differences individual based or are the differences in views because of the educators who taught in these denominational institutions? Despite faith being important to many of the clients that social workers interact with, by and large the profession has continued to distance itself from the inclusion of this type of diversity (Streets, 2009). For the cultures of teaching where distance is evident, a silent message may be sent to the student (who is not in a position of power) that the diversity they may hold with regards to religion is not as valued. One wonders, then, when matters of religion do arise in the classroom, how the devaluation of religious diversity may complicate the dialectic process.

### **Teaching Perspectives**

In the conceptualization of the study, it was suggested that adult learning is active, socio-cultural, dialogic, constructed, and purposeful. Those theoretical tenets led to the conceptualization that depth in learning and thought required environments that – based in constructivism, brain-based learning, and critical thinking literature – are respectful, dialectic, collaborative, flexible, questioning, supportive and challenging. A thematic comparison of the teaching perspectives found two with the greatest meaningful connections to the outlined environment: Developmental and Nurturing.

Caine, Caine, McClintic, and Klimek (2009) outlined twelve mind/brain principles with the belief that incorporation of those would lead to increased executive functioning where learning is “the ability to make good decisions in the real world, based on the knowledge that people have and the sense they have made of experience” (p. 6). An infinite amount of information reaches us every day, but the sources of all that information do not ask for us to think critically or analytically about the content. Rarely, are we challenged to think about the point of view, assumptions, or

actions (Caine et al., 2009). What it means to know, how information is obtained, and *authorities* have all changed dramatically in the last decades which have made learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century different.

The complex and pluralistic endeavor of teaching is often still regarded as unproblematic and enacted “habitually without reflection on the hidden values and assumptions that lie beneath the surface” (Pratt & Nesbit, 2000, p. 117). The perspectives of this current study are aligned with adult education theory and constructivism, but whether educators in social work do or do not find congruence with these theories there has still been little in the professional literature with regards to reflection on the underlying values and assumptions of teaching. While attention in the literature may not exactly equate to whether individuals or groups of educators are attending to such matters, the inconsistencies in the perspectives in this study may be indicative of educators not spending the time to reflect on the aspects contained in the teaching perspectives inventory which is at the foundation of this study.

Beliefs about knowledge and learning are the most central of all beliefs about teaching; “our beliefs about knowledge determine what we will teach and what we will accept as evidence that people have learned” (Pratt, 2005, p. 21). Educators in this study were much more firm about what they intend and how they act than what they believe. This is an interesting finding because the profession spends a great deal of time understanding many of the hidden values and assumptions in other domains (Buila, 2010; Thyer & Meyers, 2009) and yet with the inconsistencies found here it does not seem to have carried over to beliefs about knowledge and learning.

The theoretical basis for this study has not always been accepted by educators. Pearson first studied the educational orientations of social work educators in 1992. In this study she considered pedagogical (traditional) versus andragogical orientations and found that the majority viewed their teaching along pedagogical lines where transmission of the subject matter is important. When Pearson conducted her study into educational orientations of 346 graduate social

work educators in 1998, she used a *master* (traditional) versus *mentoring* approach. Despite almost a decade having passed since her original study, the *mentor* approach was still viewed as suspect stating that the *master* approach has been the norm with mentoring approach as an innovation. Pearson's (1998) definition of the master approach is compatible with the Transmission perspective where the educator holds the role of expert and determines what will be learned. In 1998, Pearson found that graduate social work educators still tended toward a traditional master approach. So, while the educators in the current study may still find their perspectives a bit muddled, here the trend appeared to be a movement towards what Pearson (1998) called a mentoring approach which was student-centered, dialectic, constructive, and collaborative. This study rests on prevalent educational and adult educational theories with a student-centered, constructivist focus which is consistent with a Developmental and, to a lesser extent, Nurturing perspectives (Jarvis-Selinger et al., 2007).

Graduate educators in this study (42%) reported through their Developmental perspective a support for the necessity of effectively challenging student's thinking (Hale, 2008) while bridging new content with personal meanings (Caine et al., 2009). It was anticipated at the inception of this study that Social Reform would dominate this study due to the conceptual linkages between that particular perspective and the mandates in social work education around diversity, human rights, and social economic justice content. Parallels are conceptually concentrated around hegemony, advocating for an ideal, challenging the status quo, and the central influence of ideology.

Overall, only four social work educators held the Social Reform perspective as dominant. This may seem like an unimpressive number, but the relative proportion of the sample that held the Social Reform perspective in this sample is greater than that of every other group that has taken the TPI. So, comparatively Social Reform was overrepresented in this sample. While this researcher anticipated that the Transmission and Social Reform perspective would dominate when educators considered HRSEJ content, it was a surprise that this sample of educators' mean Social Reform score was higher than all other comparison groups which included other social work educators.

Where do these differences come from? The current study focused on human rights, social and economic justice content because of the controversy surrounding the core concepts in and outside of the profession (Hodge, 2006; NAS, 2007; Specht & Courtney, 1995). The majority of the sampled educators, held a Developmental, Apprenticeship, or Nurturing perspective. The respondents in this study are aligned with trends in higher education as a whole, but not everyone in social work is ready to applaud the profession's educational efforts. In *A Dream Deferred*, Stoesz, Karger, and Carrilio (2010) critically examined social work education. In the end, they concluded that the lack of credibility for the profession is due in large part to the poor quality in education. Stoesz et al. (2010) included weak scholarship, internal dissension, pedagogy based upon moral pronouncements from practice wisdom and not empirically driven research, and lack of leadership from CSWE as evidence for their reasoned critique of the profession's education. Stoesz et al.'s (2010) finding may not be surprising given that few programs had faculty members with expertise in teaching, pedagogy, or educational theory (Valentine et al., 1998).

Academics today have had little preparation in understanding *what it means to teach* and the profession has continued to silence parts of human diversity (e.g. religion, political ideology) (Galambos, 2009; Hodge, 2011; Streets, 2009). Buila (2010) concluded that social work is the only profession that “articulates within a code of ethics a commitment to challenging discrimination with a list of specific vulnerable and oppressed persons or groups and that carries this responsibility beyond the realm of professional practice to the realm of society” (p. 7). Are the educators in this study simply agreeing with statements that seem to uphold the professional values around diversity and justice? Are statements that appear to uphold these values simply agreed with on the basis of unreflective beliefs about the inherent goodness of their aims? Educators often believe that they are teaching for critical thinking, for example, but are actually teaching in ways that are inconsistent with that belief (Pratt, 2005). So, while social work educators may have the best of

intentions or can clearly report certain aspects of their teaching, the reality in the classroom may be far more muddled.

What factors likely contribute to social work educators' perspective inconsistencies? Some of it can be contributed to one of the factors inherent in measuring reliability. Reliability is about the scores of an instrument and not the instrument itself, so the variability in these scores is due to the *nature* of this group (Huck, 2000). Social work educators often feel the pull between several competing value systems: educational standards (EPAS), the institutional auspice where the department, school, or college is housed, the actual social work department, school, or college, the profession, and of course, personal perspectives. Even if an educator is unaware of their perspective on teaching it still plays an important, but silent role. The inconsistencies surface when educators try to appease too many of those competing values systems without knowing how to reconcile those differences.

Social work educators do think about educational issues and one area of controversy where this is evident is in the approach of social work educators to the concept of diversity which is often a portion of the HRSEJ content. Diversity about religion or spirituality has been shown to be an issue whereby contradictions have existed. Social work has championed many groups that have been at the margins in society however, it may be the behavior towards groups *not* at the margins that provides the most evidence about social work's success at diversity, justice and critical thinking. To empower students through an "inclusive, safe environment that respects and values the opinions of the varied culture groups that comprise our increasingly diverse society" (Hodge, 2011, p. 241) can clash with the desire and *mandate* to promote human rights, and economic or social justice through the accurate transmission of theory and professional knowledge (Dessel, Bolen, & Shepardson, 2011). The Transmission perspective which was held by 6% of the sample and the Social Reform perspective which was held by 8% of the sample would find traction with the later. In 2008, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) stated that social work education "shapes the profession's future through the education of competent professionals, the

generation of knowledge, and the exercise of leadership within the professional community” (p. 1). Any one of those aims alone is difficult to achieve. The combination of them has led some to say that defining social work is a “tricky proposition” (Staniforth et al., 2011, p. 192). Educators are faced with the complexities of professional education where competency for practice is the ultimate goal. The integration and application of knowledge, values, and skills (CSWE, 2008) is a tall order and educators may feel caught in the middle which may explain, in part, the inconsistencies found here.

Social work educators may hold personal aspirations to better society, but the complexity arises when that ideal meets the ideals of higher education. Students who have reported objections to social work education may have experienced the clash of the unrecognized dimensions in faculty’s teaching perspectives. Striving for justice inherently *means* inclusion and acceptance. Thyer and Myers (2009) wrote their concern that educators in the profession may believe that they are enforcing the profession’s central principle in social justice, but are often doing the opposite. They reported that a student reporter for the campus newspaper independently observed a social work educator imposing a left-leaning ideology on students who accepted statements without refute. Being associated more heavily with one particular value set (e.g. progressivism) can lead to the notion that our values are absolute and meant to exclude certain groups of people (Buila, 2010), but educators must reflect upon the personal and professional pull to place the ideal over all else to guard against injustice.

The relationship found in this study of Social Reform actions with aspects of the Developmental and Nurturing perspective may be suggestive of this reflection taking place. While the alignment of this particular value laden content area with the Social Reform perspective may not be surprising given the conceptual alliance, knowing that a proportionally high percentage of educators held this perspective as dominant in this content area now allows educators to at least pause. A pause when a former student reported, “The social work education I experienced was complete indoctrination...Social work education should be the most tolerant place of all of

education. My experience was that it was the most intolerant [especially on issues of religion]” (Thyer & Meyers, 2009, p. 153).

In the Social Reform perspective all commitments are an investment in the conceptualization of the ideal and this sample of educators were proportionally high on this perspective. What could we be doing in our classrooms for a student to verbalize such an experience? It begs the question, does the Social Reform perspective, with its alignment to advocating, social change, and imbalances of power, lead to the differing experiences of social work students or would students equally experience unsafe or silencing environments with any of other perspectives?

### **Classroom Environments**

Adult education theorists have highlighted the necessity for adult learners to be active, feel respected, supported, and challenged (Knowles, 1980). Critical thinking scholars have pointed to the necessity for questioning, dialogue, openness, challenge, intellectual standards, and respect in the classroom (Browne & Freeman, 2000; Paul, 1995). Social work researchers have suggested that educators remain mindful about their classrooms so that they remain both safe and challenging, that they amplify voices in the minority, manage conflict, and appreciate the costs for students who examine deeply held beliefs and assumptions (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009). Hodge (2011) addressed the issue of learning environments that support diversity and difference within the profession based upon the idea that “social work education should transcend the different orthodox and progressive value systems...in a way that respects everyone’s fundamental human rights” (Hodge, 2011, p. 236). He offered five principles to create an inclusive and civil discourse to help students hear and understand each other’s narratives: the use of common self-descriptors (e.g. gay not queer); avoid ideological modifiers (e.g. radical religious right); discuss populations in a fair, strengths-based manner, to present conflicting perspectives with equitable empathy; and attend to power differentials.

Educators in this study thought that their students perceived them as *very frequently* taking actions that trusted them with freedom to explore their own ideas or challenged them to explore assumptions and *frequently* modeled the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking, for example. With the difficult endeavor that education is and the lack of clear evidence that reflection by social work educators has taken place, it is interesting that all of these things get accomplished in classrooms that consider HRSEJ content. One explanation for the seemingly skilled inclusion of various classroom environment aspects may be due to the need to give the socially desirable answer (Nardi, 2006). This is a bias to over represent what actually occurs to present ourselves in the best possible light or to appease the researcher. Pearson (1998) linked teaching philosophies to the notion of social desirability. She connected the tension between graduate educators viewing themselves as the expert scholar who should impart knowledge to their student with the reported belief that as educators they also have the duty to empower their students.

Several scholars (e.g. Seelman & Walls, 2010; Gross, 2000) have noted that a prevailing belief exists about the necessary role of gatekeeping in the profession. A great deal of trust is located with social work professionals who help the most oppressed and marginalized. Educators may be less open to students' biases, or even dissention, when it comes from views that may represent an ideology where aspects do or have been distorted to marginalize and oppress. Gross (2000) cautioned that often gatekeepers believe that only a few bad social workers hold prejudices and their job is to catch them. He further states that the reality is that we *all* have prejudices and the real role of gatekeeping should be to help students identify them and supportively explore them. Most students know what to say; they have been socialized to the *right* answers. They have been socialized to understand that there are possibly parts of them that they need to hide in order to be accepted in the classroom and the profession (Gross, 2000). This may lead to the overrepresentation of this sample of educators' positive actions and the reports that students have experienced far different environments.



Socialization in the profession through gatekeeping measures may lead to a more homogeneous profession, but that misses the fact that everyone struggles with prejudice and bias (Buila, 2010). It has been posited that the desire to fit in the profession may not actually lead to less prejudice, but to many students and professionals who have not grappled with their beliefs, biases, or prejudices (Seelman & Walls). Instead of congruency with values, the profession is left with students who hide incongruent beliefs and attitudes. Students' feeling they must hide their beliefs, values, or questions is in opposition with the classroom environment of this study.

Students have reported that they have been silenced and been in unsafe classrooms (Fleck-Henderson & Melendez, 2009; Holley & Steiner, 2005). Instead of experiencing support, challenge, dialogue, and respect, students in these studies found intimidation, unwarranted generalizations, dismissals of opposing views, judgments, and an unresponsiveness to student comments. While Fleck-Henderson and Melendez had a relatively small sample with no comparison group, what they found corroborated what Holley and Steiner (2005) with 121 students; students had both safe and unsafe experiences in social work classrooms. So, the educators who self-selected to participate in this research study may be the educators who were seen as safe or more open to respectful dialogue, nonjudgmental, open-minded, and comfortable with managing conflict (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Educators who dismiss opposing views or do not challenge prevailing doctrine may not have participated or may have given what was perceived as the socially desirable answer. Respondents may have given the answer for what they *hope* to enact but in reality fall short of.

Author hooks (1994) discussed that the purpose of education is a practice in freedom (autonomy) and Saleebey and Scanlon (2005) wondered if such a practice was really possible for the profession. Citing competing demands on students, the rapid generation of knowledge, and the friction within the profession (e.g. justice versus professionalization) the authors discussed the necessity of viewing education as a practice in autonomy and linked that with critical thinking. Educators in this study that intended for learners to reconsider their values also encouraged people

to challenge each other's *thinking* and were open to sharing their own feelings. Educators who expected learners to be committed to changing society also wanted their learners to see how complex and interrelated things are and also encouraged dialogue about each other's *thinking*. Critical thinking and freedom have been linked (e.g. Freire, 2007). Others have linked critical thinking with dialogically centered classrooms (e.g. Hodge, 2011). This sample of social work educators also indicated the need for dialogue when creating a space for critical thinking. One respondent (ID 23) stated that "when an 'assumption' is put forth, engaging the class in a discussion about alternative ways of thinking about the 'assumption' is necessary".

In the current study, it was also posited that the theoretical basis of this study not only supports adult education theories, brain-based theories, constructivist teaching, but by doing all of that justice, qualitative changes in knowledge (depth), and critical thinking will be supported as well. Much of the literature cited in this study about classroom environments, is supported by experts in the critical thinking field (e.g. Brookfield, 1987; Paul, 1995). In 2000, Browne and Freeman outlined several features of critical thinking classrooms and this study asked graduate social work educators to outline the components necessary to create an environment for critical thinking. Browne and Freeman outlined four features of a critical thinking classroom which included the use of frequent and evaluative questions, encouragement of active listening, the use of developmental tension, and a fascination with contingent conclusions. Critical thinking classrooms were abuzz with questions and educators developed an active and engaged approach to teaching and learning (Browne & Freeman, 2000). Similarly, educators in the current study also identified the importance of modeling critical thinking skills and being receptive to questioning.

Finally, social work educators have researched dialogue and the social work classroom. Fleck-Henderson and Melendez (2009) offered the voices of 11 graduate students who viewed themselves as holding worldviews different than what was perceived as dominant in their program. As has been previously discussed, students had felt silenced and disappointed in the one-sidedness, but confident that their worldviews were less dogmatic than the perceived dominant. What

students identified as more ideal situations for the expression of their views was tied with a safe environment where dialogue occurred. Again, this sample of educators agreed with the necessity for listening to many perspectives and for safe climates. One respondent (ID 28) thoughtfully reflected on the topic and admitted that while students need to “feel free to express all their points of view” it is difficult because “of my own biases.” There was more agreement amongst the respondents who identified a safe environment than those who identified the necessity of listening to multiple points of view as essential to critical thinking environments. Some identified raising marginalized voices; some identified bi-partisan and factual information while others did acknowledge that students need to be able to reveal their prejudices by viewing themselves as learners. Learning based on the inclusion of dialogue in the classroom is learning based upon listening and supporting the expression of multiple points of view. The symbiotic nature of that relationship cannot be overlooked. Galambos (2009) commented on the nature of this relationship when she stated that, “the instructor must serve as a guide...there is a fine line between being a guide and imposing one’s own values through the educational process” (p. 346), but through a true deliberative, critical thinking classroom environment social work education can reach a better understanding of all types of diversity.

### **Future Research**

While the current study explored the teaching perspectives of graduate social work educators along with classroom environments, much more can still be known. Several questions remain unanswered: First, is this sample of social work educators representative of all social work educators in accredited programs? What are the teaching perspectives of more social work educators? Demographically, little was known about the other 148 social workers used as comparison in the current study. Secondly, are there differences when all social work content is taken into consideration? Would Social Reform remain overrepresented in social work? Thirdly, how are teaching perspectives related to student outcomes? Do certain perspectives produce better student outcomes as related to EPAS? Or specifically for critical thinking? Finally, additional

research needs to be done into classroom environments. Does direct observation match self-report? What experiences do students have in the social work classrooms that align with this study's theoretical base? Answers to these questions would provide important information to social work educators and would improve teaching and the whole educational process.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations with this study. The use of two sampling methods, with one being a convenience sample, limits the generalizability of these findings. Although a systematic, random start sampling method was initially used to increase the representativeness of the sample, a low response rate indicates a response bias is likely and it is unknown why respondents self-selected in or out of this study. The respondents likely differ in many other ways other than their decision to participate in the study (Babbie, 2001). While the overall response rate was low and the sample was small, the relative proportion of institutional auspices represented in this study was fairly equivalent to the total population of social work programs. The resulting small sample size prevented a thorough exploration of differences of participants who resided in different institutional auspices and taught different social work courses. Another limitation is related to the inherent weaknesses of the research design. Survey methods are based upon self-reports to researcher determined questions. The strengths of survey research (e.g. less cost with the ability to reach more people) were weighed against the weaknesses of the design that are bound by self-report which are more artificial and not based upon direct or observed behaviors (Morgan et al., 2006). Additionally, the Teaching Perspectives Inventory was considered a valid and reliable measure; however, the Classroom Environment Scale had not been empirically tested and validated. While this study provided an exploration into the teaching perspectives of these respondents, more depth would have been provided by further open-ended questions or interviews.

### **Conclusion**

Pearson's research (1992; 1998) identified several questions for future research and among them was an interest about the extent to which educational philosophies are influenced by

institutional factors or specific learning contexts. This was a component in this study, but there were no institutional differences between public and private auspices or denominational and non-denominational contexts. Additionally, in Holley and Steiner's (2005) study, they were interested in understanding more about educators' perspectives about the creation of safer classroom environments. The ideal classroom environment in this study is based upon the theoretical components consistent with literature on safe environments. Through the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) teaching perspectives of graduate educators were explored in relation to classroom environments. Respondents in this study held teaching perspectives that aligned with the theory base of the study; however, the many inconsistencies point to the necessity for concerted efforts in understanding teaching perspectives in social work. Finally, Seelman and Walls (2010) invited future research to consider what undergirds the process of student change within the context of social work education. This study began to reconsider, after Pearson's work, what undergirds the process of teaching which impacts student learning.

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## APPENDIX A

Permission to use TPI

Re: Teaching Perspectives Inventory

**DAN PRATT** On: Apr 04/29/09 2:18 PM

To: Kristin Danhoff

Cc: "John Collins" <john.collins@[REDACTED]>; "John Collins" john\_collins@[REDACTED]

Hi Kristin,

Nice to hear that we (John Collins and I) might be helpful with the TPI in your dissertation research. The answer to all of your questions is 'yes', but it may be useful to have a phone conversation at some point, rather than trying to do it all through email. John is back from Singapore in May. Is it possible to have a phone conversation sometime in the middle of May? We are also revamping the web site, so would be better positioned to put a 'button' on for your project then. Dan

On 29-Apr-09, at 1:14 PM, Kristin Danhoff wrote:

Dr. Pratt,

My name is Kristin Lindsay Danhoff and I am a doctoral student in Education/Social Work at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO, USA. I am interested in exploring the possibility of using your Teaching Perspectives Inventory in my dissertation study. I have learned of the TPI through my extensive research into the related construct of educational and teaching philosophies. I have completed the inventory myself and found it to be accurate and useful.

At your convenience, I would be interested in learning more about your research and to begin discussions about the possibility of utilizing the TPI in my dissertation study. I have your book, *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education*, and have read several articles related to the teaching inventory and related perspectives. I am intrigued and excited to explore social work faculty and I think the TPI would be a perfect fit.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Regards,

Kristin Lindsay Danhoff, MSW



## APPENDIX B

Online survey (in word document format)

### Teaching Perspectives and Classroom Environments

---

#### Introduction

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University**

**TITLE OF STUDY:** *A survey of graduate social work educators: Teaching perspectives and classroom environments.*

This survey research study is being completed as part of the requirements for doctorate of philosophy degree at Colorado State University. The research team consists of co-chairs, Dr. Victoria Buchan and Dr. George Morgan, and doctoral candidate Kristin Danhoff. You have been asked to participate in this research study because you are a graduate social work educator who has had human rights, social and economic justice related content in your social work course(s). The purpose of this survey study is to describe and understand the teaching perspectives of social work faculty and actions taken related to classroom environments.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are asked to complete an online survey instrument. The survey should take approximately 15-25 minutes of your time.

This survey is confidential. As the lead investigator, I will have access to your name, university, and e-mail address as part of the survey invitation process. Also, some identifying information is collected as part of your online survey response (e.g. city, state, response link). Once the survey data has been collected and downloaded from the online survey site, your individual responses will no longer be connected with specific identifiers. At that point, your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. Part of this survey is an established instrument with proprietary scoring, so the de-identified raw Teaching Perspectives Inventory scores will be sent to the authors of the instrument for scoring. Once scored, the authors will send the data back to the CSU research team for further analysis as previously described. Again, no identifying information will be sent with the TPI raw scores.

#### **What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

There are no known risks associated with survey completion.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

If you have questions: Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please call or email any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Kristin Danhoff at 970-491-2088 or faculty advisor Dr. Victoria Buchan at 970-491-5211. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study!

Kristin Lindsay Danhoff, MSW  
Doctoral Candidate

Department of Education, School of Social Work, Colorado State University, 970-491-2088.  
Faculty advisor: Dr. Victoria Buchan, Professor, School of Social Work, Colorado State University, 970-491-5211

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on 10 May 2011.

Your consent to participate is given by checking the box at the bottom of this page. It acknowledges that you have read the information included and give your consent to participate.  
 I have read the informed consent information and agree to participate in this research study.

---

Survey

**Welcome!**

Overall, this survey has three sections: Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI), classroom environment scale, and background information. You are about to begin taking the Teaching Perspectives Inventory.

The TPI was developed by Dr. Daniel D. Pratt and Dr. John B. Collins and can also be found online. Overall, the TPI consists of 45 questions about your views of teaching. The 45 questions are broken down into subsections which ask for your views related to your beliefs, intentions, and actions about teaching. At the very end you will be asked information about your background. You should be able to complete the entire TPI in less than 20 minutes.

This inventory will identify your perspective on teaching. As you consider the following statements, I want you to think about a specific content area. You have, at some time, taught graduate social work students content that deals with human rights, social and/or economic justice. On the next screen I will ask you to give a name to the course where you taught such material, to help you focus exclusively on that course when you answer the survey questions. I realize you understand the importance of completing answering all survey questions and I appreciate your willingness to thoughtfully complete this survey!

Please note, because these statements represent contrasting views of teaching and learning, you will agree with some, but not all, of the statements below. Try to discriminate between statements that do and do not represent your views.

Please be assured of the confidentiality of any information you supply and thank you again for your thoughtful participation!

---

**Teaching Perspectives Inventory**

You are now going to complete the Teaching Perspectives Inventory. Please read the following instructions before you begin.

You are asked to think about a time when you have taught graduate social work students about human rights, social and economic justice content. To aid in the completion of this inventory, please give a name to the course in which you taught graduate social work students human rights, social and/or economic justice content - you can use the course name or a fictitious name - but make it 'real' enough that it means something to you.

Please put the name of **your course** here:

---

### **Educational Beliefs**

For each of the following statements in this section, focus exclusively on **your course** & select the response that best represents your agreement or disagreement to the question: What do you believe about instructing or teaching?

It is important that you stay focused on **your course** throughout all of the survey items!

	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Learning is enhanced by having predetermined objectives					
To be an effective teacher, one must be an effective practitioner					
Most of all, learning depends on what one already knows					
It's important that I acknowledge learners' emotional reactions					
My teaching focuses on societal change, not the individual learner					
Teachers should be virtuoso performers of their subject matter					
The best learning comes from working alongside good practitioners					
Teaching should focus on developing qualitative changes in thinking					
In my teaching, building self-confidence in learners is a priority					
Individual learning without social change is not enough					
Effective teachers must first be experts in their own subject areas					
Knowledge and its application cannot be separated					
Teaching should build upon what people already know					
In learning, people's effort should be rewarded as much as achievement					
For me, teaching is a moral act as much as an intellectual activity					

---

## Educational Intentions

Again, for each of the following statements in this section, think about **your course** & select the response that best represents how **OFTEN** that statement reflects your educational intentions. In other words, What do you try to accomplish in your instruction or teaching?

It is important that you stay focused on **your course** throughout all of the survey items!

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
My intent is to prepare people for examinations					
My intent is to demonstrate how to perform or work in real situations					
My intent is to help people develop more complex ways of reasoning					
My intent is to build people's self-confidence and self-esteem as learners					
My intent is to challenge people to seriously reconsider their values					
I expect people to master a lot of information related to the subject					
I expect people to know how to apply the subject matter in real settings					
I expect people to develop new ways of reasoning about the subject matter					
I expect people to enhance their self-esteem through my teaching					
I expect people to be committed to changing our society					
I want people to score well on examinations as a result of my teaching					
I want people to understand the realities of working in the real world					
I want people to see how complex and inter-related things really are					
I want to provide a balance between caring and challenging as I teach					
I want to make apparent what people take for granted about society					

---

## Educational Actions

As you continue to focus on **your course** for each of the following statements, select the response that best represents how OFTEN you do that action. What do you do when instructing or teaching?

It is important that you stay focused on **your course** throughout all of the survey items!

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
I cover the required content accurately and in the allotted time.					
I link the subject matter with real settings of practice or application.					
I ask a lot of questions while teaching.					
I find something to compliment in everyone's work or contribution.					
I use the subject matter as a way to teach about higher ideals.					
My teaching is governed by the course objectives.					
I model the skills and methods of good practice.					
I challenge familiar ways of understand the subject matter.					
I encourage expression of feeling and emotion.					
I emphasize values more than knowledge in my teaching.					
I make it very clear to people what they are to learn.					
I see to it that novices learn from more experienced people.					
I encourage people to challenge each others' thinking.					
I share my own feelings and expect my learners to do the same.					
I link instructional goals to necessary changes in society.					

---

## Classroom Environment Scale

In this next section, you are asked to think further about your actions in relation to the last time you taught a course with *human rights, social and/or economic justice content*. These questions ask you to think more specifically about the actions you took related to the classroom environment. Again, it is important that you stay focused on your course as you answer these questions!

In addition to thinking about your course, please reflect on how OFTEN you think your students would perceive you participate in the described action and base your answer upon consideration of that. Please read each statement carefully and think about each statement before you respond with the scale provided.

The following bolded introduction is to be applied to the beginning of each statement.

**As a social work educator, I believe my students perceive that I consciously seek to...**

	Never	Very rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very frequently	Always
refrain from judgment of students' view even if they are contradictory to my own.							
include students when setting the guidelines for each classroom.							
present positions that I may not agree with to foster diversity in perspectives.							
reflect upon beliefs I have with respect to the course content.							
mediate aggressive responses of one student to another.							
utilize debate as a technique to give voice to different points of view.							
challenge all students to explore their assumptions.							
model the importance of questioning habitual ways of thinking.							
recognize that risks exist for students to evaluate deeply held assumptions.							
demonstrate respect for viewpoints that are "in minority" in the social work profession (e.g. politically conservative, religiously fundamental)							
hold high expectations that challenge them.							
trust my students by giving them the freedom to explore their own ideas.							

**What do you think is the most important component in the creation of an environment for critical thinking?**

Essay

---

## **Background**

**Which social work course best describes the course you chose to focus on for the completion of this survey?**

- Practice
- Policy
- HBSE
- Research/Evaluation
- Diversity
- Spirituality/Religion
- Community/Organization
- Other

**What social work degree program does your institution have?**

- BSW/MSW (combined)
- MSW only
- MSW & PhD
- Combined & PhD

**Select the option which best describes the institution where you teach.**

- Public-state
- Public-other
- Private-denominational
- Private-other

**What is your age?**

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+

**What is your gender?**

- male
- female
- transgendered
- other

**What is the highest academic degree you have earned?**

- Masters - social work
- Masters - other
- Doctorate - social work or social welfare
- Doctorate - other
- Law
- ABD or in doctoral program
- Other

**What teaching rank do you hold?**

- Professor
- Associate Professor
- Assistant Professor

- Instructor
- Lecturer
- Clinical Appointment
- Adjunct
- Other

**Approximately, how many years have you been teaching?**\_\_\_\_\_

**In addition to teaching, approximately how many years have you practiced social work?**

\_\_\_\_\_

---

If you would like to provide your information to be entered into a drawing for one of two **\$100 Amazon.com gift cards** and/or receive an abstract of the study, you will now be redirected to another page where you can enter that information.

Would you like to be entered into the drawing and/or receive a study abstract? Y/N

---

Thank you for helping with this important study - I appreciate your time and effort!

Your careful consideration of the survey questions will inform the study's objectives related to understanding teaching perspectives and classroom environments in MSW education.



## APPENDIX C

Letter to department heads



School of Social Work  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-  
1586  
Phone (970) 491-6612  
Fax (970) 491-7280

Dear Dr. [name], Director

I am a doctoral candidate from Colorado State University in the School of Social Work where I am conducting an online survey research study about MSW educators' teaching perspectives and the actions taken related to classroom environment. The title of my project is - A survey of graduate social work educators: Teaching perspectives and classroom environments. My faculty advisors are Dr. Victoria Buchan and Dr. George Morgan.

I am writing to ask for your help in recommending graduate (MSW) social work faculty. I am requesting that you identify as many (at minimum two) graduate educators in your social work program who have some human rights, social or economic justice related content in their current or past course(s) that would be willing to complete an online survey utilizing SurveyGizmo. Participation will take approximately *15-25 minutes* to complete the entire online survey. Once you have identified respondents, please email me at [kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu](mailto:kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu) with the following information:

**Name (Title, First, Last)**  
**University**  
**E-mail address**

Each respondent will receive an email invitation which will contain the study description and a link to the online survey. Respondent confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. As the lead investigator, I will retain a secure list of respondents' names, university, and email addresses for study invitations. Once the results of the survey have been downloaded from the online survey site the survey responses will be unidentified from respondent names. The TPI instrument related to teaching perspectives has a proprietary scoring system. The academic authors (Dr. D. Pratt & Dr. J. Collins) will be sent de-identified raw TPI scores for scoring purposes only. No respondent identifiers will be associated with the data sent to the TPI authors. The survey results will also be shared with faculty advisors, but responses will not be able to be individually identified at that point.

We hope to gain more knowledge about graduate social work education through the responses of educators about their teaching perspectives and specific actions taken related to the classroom environment. At the end of the online survey, participants will have the option of being redirected to another online site whereby they can indicate if they want a report summary and/or be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of two Amazon.com gift cards. I hope you are able to assist me with this research project. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me, Kristin Danhoff at 970-491-2088 or by email at [kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu](mailto:kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu), or my advisor, Dr. Vicky Buchan at 970-491-5211 or [victoria.buchan@colostate.edu](mailto:victoria.buchan@colostate.edu).

## APPENDIX D

### Invitation to participate sent via email

Dear Graduate Social Work Educator,

Greetings! My name is Kristin Danhoff and I am a doctoral candidate from Colorado State University in the School of Social Work. I am conducting a survey research study about MSW educators' teaching perspectives and related classroom environment. The teaching perspectives inventory has been developed by Drs. D. Pratt and J. Collins and provides insight into the beliefs, intentions, and actions that educators have related to teaching in higher education.

You are receiving this survey because a dean, director, or other administrator with your MSW program identified you as someone who has taught human rights, social or economic justice content in a graduate level social work class. We asked for nominations to ensure that participants were familiar with the course content specified above.

To participate, you will complete an online survey utilizing SurveyGizmo. Participation will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the entire online survey. Participation in this research project is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. I will obtain informed consent and give further instructions once you have entered the survey website. If you agree to participate, please go to the survey by either clicking on the link here, or cut and paste this URL into your web browser:

[invite("survey link")]

This survey is confidential. As the lead investigator, I will have access to your name, university, and e-mail address as part of the survey invitation process. Once the survey data has been collected and downloaded from the online survey site, your individual responses will no longer be connected to your specific identifiers. At that point, your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. Part of this survey is an established instrument with proprietary scoring, so the de-identified raw Teaching Perspectives Inventory scores will be sent to the authors of the instrument for scoring. Once scored, the authors will send the data back to the CSU research team for further analysis as previously described. Again, no identifying information will be sent with the TPI raw scores.

There are no known risks to participation in this research study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. We hope to gain more knowledge about graduate social work education through the responses of educators about their teaching perspectives and specific actions taken related to the classroom environment.

At the end of the online survey, you will have the option of being redirected to another online site whereby you can be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of two \$100 Amazon.com gift cards and/or receive an abstract of the study.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me or my advisor Dr. Vicky Buchan via phone or e-mail (contact information below). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655.

The survey will remain open until October 31, 2011. Thank you for your careful consideration of this request. I greatly appreciate your time and effort!

Sincerely,  
Kristin Danhoff, MSW  
Doctoral Candidate  
Colorado State University  
School of Social Work  
kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu  
970.491.2088

Dr. Victoria Buchan  
Faculty Advisor  
Colorado State University  
School of Social Work  
victoria.buchan@colostate.edu  
970.491.5211

## APPENDIX E

### Invitation to participate MSW listserv

My name is Kristin Danhoff and I am a doctoral candidate from Colorado State University in the School of Social Work. I am conducting a survey research study about MSW educators' teaching perspectives and related classroom environment. I am looking for graduate faculty with human rights, social, economic justice content experience to complete a short survey for my study. The teaching perspectives inventory was developed by Drs. D. Pratt and J. Collins and provides insight into the beliefs, intentions, and actions that educators have related to teaching in higher education. The online survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

If you are interested in assisting me in completing this study, please click on this link:  
<http://edu.surveymzmo.com/s3/440423/Teaching-Perspectives-and-Classroom-Environments>

Respondent confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. The TPI instrument related to teaching perspectives has a proprietary scoring system. The academic authors (Dr. D. Pratt & Dr. J. Collins) will be sent de-identified raw TPI scores for scoring. No respondent identifiers will be associated with the data sent to the TPI authors. I hope to gain more knowledge about graduate social work education through the responses of educators about their teaching perspectives and specific actions taken related to the classroom environment.

At the end of the online survey, participants will have the option of being redirected to another online site whereby they can indicate if they want to be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of two \$100 Amazon.com gift cards and/or receive an abstract of the study. I hope you are able to assist me with this project.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at 970-491-2088 or by email at [kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu](mailto:kristin.danhoff@colostate.edu), or my advisor, Dr. Vicky Buchan at 970-491-5211 or [victoria.buchan@colostate.edu](mailto:victoria.buchan@colostate.edu) if you have any questions.