

International Literature Project Series

Preparing Social Work Students to Practice in An Interconnected World

USING THIS RESOURCE

Description of Teaching Resource

The International Literature Project Series is a teaching resource that uses international literature from across the world to help prepare social work students for practice in a globally interconnected world. The project is developed by the Council on Social Work Education's Center for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice (Diversity Center), with support from the Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education. The resource maps to the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards competency to advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice based on an understanding of the global interconnections of oppression.

For the development of this resource, the Diversity Center teamed up with Words Without Borders Campus (wwb-campus.org), an organization that makes contemporary international literature in translation accessible to students and educators. WWB Campus curates short form narrative non-fiction and fiction literature, including memoirs, articles, and more. The readings are of varying lengths, taking about ten minutes to forty minutes to read. **Case-centered multi-media learning resources** are available on the WWB Campus web site for each reading, including author bios and representations of socio-geographic-political and cultural context. The Diversity Center has carefully curated, annotated, and linked additional multi-media resources with direct applications to social work to each reading. Together these resources inform service delivery, program planning, community partnerships, advocacy, policy and other areas of social work practice across a broad range of fields. Although using literature to teach about social issues and interculturality is used in other disciplines, it has not been widely applied in U.S. social work education.

We have grouped the readings by theme, including immigration, poverty, family, coming of age, and living in periods of transformation. Each reading within each theme brings a distinct angle in terms socio-geographic-political and cultural context, social class, gender, and many other areas. The readings include short-form literature sourced from WWB Campus and full-length books compiled by the Diversity Center.

Teaching Suggestions

This content is designed to be integrated into existing courses. The introduction to international content in a social work course can involve one class unit or more advanced study. Design an assignment(s) tailored to your teaching objectives. In a unit addressing immigration in a direct practice course, individual students or student groups could do an in-depth study of refugees around the world from the International Literature Project Series on immigration. For examples of assignments, including mapping to EPAS competencies, see [Teaching International Social Work: Online Modules](#), a rich resource developed by the CSWE Council on Global Learning and Practice. Below we provide general instructions for students:

Step 1. Choose a reading from the International Literature Project Series. Click on the title to access the reading and the linked set of teaching and learning resources. All the readings (except full-length books) and resources included in the series are downloadable free of charge.

Step 2. Read and study the reading, which is a story, a memoir, a journalistic account, or an article. (Note for instructor: research shows that rather than assigning a class-wide reading, a more effective learning approach is to allow students to choose readings from a subset curated by the instructor.)

Step 3. Explore the case-centered multi-media learning resources provided for each reading: (a) author bios, socio-geographic-political and cultural context, maps, images, and others, which are on the WWB Campus web site and (b) the annotated social work resources with direct applications to social work practice compiled by the Diversity Center and linked to each reading.

Step 4. Engage in various learning activities assigned by the instructor intended to (a) motivate empathy, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking, (b) gain skills in interculturality, such as those introduced in **UNESCO's Guidelines on Intercultural Education**, which involve the ability to listen, the ability to wonder, and the ability to dialogue, and (c) integrate approaches from across the world specific to working with immigrants into social work practice approaches taught in the class. Explore more resources to learn more about areas that interest you.

Step 5: Optional: Reflect on what you learned. Participate in a student pre- and post-test evaluation. (Note for instructor: contact the Diversity Center if you are interested in being part of a study to evaluate the project in social work classrooms and co-publishing the results.)

Step-by-step teaching unit

EXAMPLE: In a direct practice course, have students explore the experiences of refugees across the world, their unique socio-political contexts, the social work practice approaches used to support them, etc.

Educator

- Select a course and design an assignment tailored to the course objectives
- Plan one class session or multiple ones
- Choose an individual or group format
- Pick a set of readings from WWB Campus for the students to choose from

Students

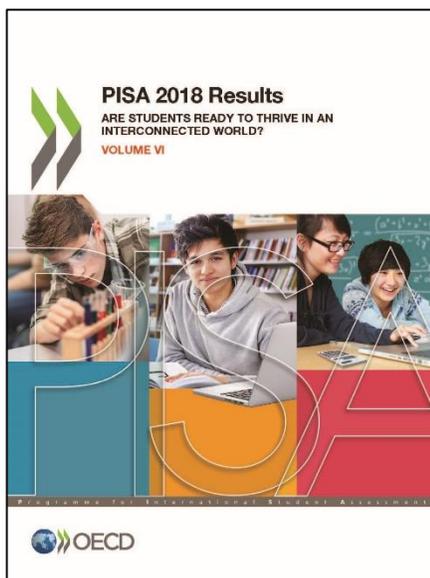
- Pick a reading(s) according to their interests
- Explore the teaching and learning resources
 - Words Without Borders Campus
 - Social work
- Reflect on how literature connected them to the lives of refugees/informed social work

Evidence-base for Reading and Students' Global and Intercultural Competence

There are things that others can't imagine for you. Through literature, we see life through the eyes of other human beings, in the unique socio-geographic-political and cultural contexts of their lives. Literary experiences create emotional tensions that can later be assimilated in actual experiences, according to *Literature as Exploration* by Louise Rosenblatt (p. 217). This is true not only for personal interactions with others, but also for volunteer, field, and professional practice experiences. Narrative literature has been shown to be more effective in motivating empathy, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking than expository literature—facts, theories, analyses—alone (see more at [Pedagogical Resources for Exploring Social Issues Through Literature](#)). As such, literature offers a powerful avenue to meaningfully connect social work students to the lives of others, including the communities with whom they work.

Research supports the positive influence of reading on students' global competence. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a worldwide study of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, measures students' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. [Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?](#) reports on the findings from their 2018 study of 27 countries. See the textbox below for a synopsis of the findings related to reading. In addition to research findings, the report outlines the concept of **global competence** in terms of four components: knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The full report is available for download at no cost.

Reading and students' global and intercultural knowledge, skills attitudes



Existing research shows that reading is a powerful strategy to improve out-group attitudes including tolerance, perspective taking and empathy towards marginalised groups such as immigrants and refugees (Bal and Veltkamp, 2013). Those findings are supported by both experimental and non-experimental evidence (Vezzali et al., 2014). Results from the PISA 2018 survey also support these findings. Students who enjoy reading and who perform well on the reading test report more positive attitudes and dispositions and a heightened awareness about global and intercultural issues. The examined indices are: awareness of global issues; self-efficacy regarding global issues; interest in learning about other cultures; respect towards people from other cultures; attitudes towards immigrants; perspective taking; cognitive adaptability; awareness of intercultural communication; and agency regarding global issues. (Box VI.7.1, p. 184)