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## Q&A: Educator Pedagogical Approach

### Advancing Intersectionality Through Art and Science

Rogério Meireles Pinto, PhD, MP, MSW, LMSW

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#### ***What is your pedagogical approach and your contributions to social work teaching?***

Grounded in Paulo Freire's [\*Pedagogy of the Oppressed\*](#) and his critical-thinking theories, and reflecting community-engaged research principles, my classroom is an environment for participatory learning, where I promote students' self-awareness, critical consciousness, and critical thinking. I prepare practitioners to provide services to underserved individuals, families, and communities by using multimedia, simulations, and debate. Reflecting my research, I help students develop positive attitudes toward evidence-based practice and overcome barriers (e.g., lack of resources and time) to using research in practice. I value all forms of "knowledge" equally and envision "teaching" as a critical dialogue between student and teacher. Innovative techniques (e.g., tactile exercises, physical movements, drawings, and dramatization) help students develop skills to fight for social justice. I use these techniques to engage and sustain transformative conversations regarding oppression, bigotry, White supremacy, and all the *isms* social workers are ethically bound to identify and confront. I have developed and taught courses such as Diversity and Social Justice Work in Social Work, Human Behavior in the Social Environment, and Foundations of Social Work Practice and Advocacy Practice as well as PhD-level courses on community-based participatory research and implementation science, both in-person and online.

#### ***How do you employ "use of self" in your teaching?***

My teaching reflects my social work practice, allowing me to teach and mentor both master's and doctoral students in different fields. This experience includes clinical and direct services in mental health, HIV, substance abuse, and community organizing. My publications are used at the Columbia University School of Social Work, the University of Michigan School of Social Work, and other institutions (e.g., John Jay College) to teach social justice courses, group and community work, and research ethics and practice. Following Freire's teachings and social work values, my assignments ask students to integrate empirical and theoretical knowledge to develop solutions to psychosocial problems. I help students develop professional identities grounded in social justice, and I encourage them to engage in social and political processes to help abate race- and gender-based oppression. This requires students to develop self-awareness and

critical consciousness. For example, in collaboration with [Clinical Associate Professor Beth Sherman](#), I have developed and taught a course on social justice, advocacy, and policy concerning transgender, bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer, and intersex individuals and their allies. In this course we employed art-based techniques such as those discussed in the *Educator/Resource* above.

***Would you say more about your play and how theater and performance can be used to teach social work?***

My one-person play, [Marília](#) (see [play script](#)), includes autobiographical content—personal life, positionalities, and issues concerning ethnicity, race, gender, class, etc. In order to accomplish self-healing and/or artistic, educational, or advocacy goals, self-referential theater/drama needs to go beyond recounting a person’s story. It is in the transformation of personal conflict that this can be achieved. Through *Marília*, I embody conflicts through theatrical means (rehearsal, property making, performance) and share these with audiences, including my students. “Crossing borders and boundaries” is an overarching concept in *Marília* as it examines at least three forms of crossing:

- 1) The artist/protagonist remembers, evokes, and communes with his sister who died in a bus accident before her third birthday. He invites the audience to cross the realm of the dead in an attempt to resolve personal and familial traumas.
- 2) The artist/protagonist, though assigned male gender at birth, narrates and relives the perennial questions, “Am I a girl? Am I my dead sister?”, and ponders the possibility of crossing from boy to girl.
- 3) The artist/protagonist recounts his crossing from Brazil (poverty) to the U.S. (middle-class). He evokes the current situation at our southern border where poor, vulnerable immigrants, even small children, are detained, imprisoned in cages, and often denied entry into the country.

Reinforcement of what might be learned from the play can be accomplished in the classroom with discussions designed to help students examine the three issues addressed in the play.

***Advocacy is a recurring theme in your pedagogy. Please say more about how you engage social work students in learning about advocacy.***

My curriculum on advocacy draws on social work values calling us to challenge social injustice—poverty, discrimination, racism. My course Foundations of Social Work Practice and Advocacy Practice integrates knowledge and skills from interpersonal, community, and management classes, and it addresses issues regarding privilege, oppression, and diversity. One can draw on the arts to inspire the use of video, music, poetry, and photographs in advocacy. Students can be asked to study images, music, and poetry to learn how these communicate different attitudes toward certain groups of people. For example, the last time I taught this course, my students created materials for the [#1BillionRising campaign](#) to end violence against women, including an image that was displayed on the monitors in our school to help develop awareness about violence against women. This course addressed all nine competencies from the 2015 CSWE

Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards using measurable behaviors reflecting knowledge, values, and skills. Students engaged in skill-building activities. For example, we took a day trip to the state capital in Lansing at the end of the semester. That trip included a tour of the Capitol building, which included historical information on Michigan politics and the legislative process, plus hour-long presentations from the director of public policy of the Michigan chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the University of Michigan Government Relations, and state representative Adam Zemke. Students engaged in vigorous discussions about the role of social work in bringing social justice to the legislative process.

***Would you speak to the issue of how to tackle underrepresentation of certain groups in the context of academia?***

In my [speech/performance](#) in acceptance of the Inspire Award from the University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women, I talked about helping underrepresented students, faculty, and staff tackle the lack of inclusion and equity in academia and beyond. As the co-chair of Faculty Allies for Diversity committee in my school, I was charged to inspire learning, research, and service in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion, a university-wide mandate of great importance to social work faculty and students.

My efforts are grounded in my framework for advancing racial and ethnic minority scholars centered on social capital, which I described in “Advancing Racial and Ethnic Minority Scholars: The Social Capital Benefits of a Minority Fellowship Program” (Pinto & Francis, 2005). In this framework we recognize that social capital is accumulated in the course of social interactions—exchange of instrumental, informational, and emotional support—in social networks. The social capital literature indicates that networks of underrepresented groups have a positive effect on personal and professional development. In order to improve underrepresented individuals’ professional capacities, we engage in network activities to foster social interactions among our students and faculty.

**Reference**

Pinto, R. M., & Francis, E. A. (2005). Advancing racial and ethnic minority scholars: The social capital benefits of a Minority Fellowship Program. *Areté: Journal of the Graduate School of Social Work, University of South Carolina, 29*, 45–57.



Dr. [Rogério Meireles Pinto](#), associate dean for research and innovation and professor of social work at the University of Michigan, is a Brazilian-born psychiatric social work researcher with more than a decade of clinical and community practice. An expert in community based participatory research and mixed-methods research, he is the principal investigator on an NIMH K01 Career Development Award (2007-12) and on an NIMH R01 (2012-17). In the United States, Brazil, and Spain, Dr. Pinto examines how transdisciplinary collaboration and practitioners’ involvement in research improves delivery of evidence-based services. He also studies factors that influence

ethnic and sexual minority women's involvement in research and health care. The focus of his current R01 is an investigation of interagency collaboration among some 300 providers from 30 service agencies in New York City. Dr. Pinto is a scientific reviewer for the National Institutes of Health and Brazil's Ministry of Health and associate editor for the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. He received the Society for Social Work and Research 2004 Outstanding Dissertation Award and the 2010 Deborah Padgett Early Career Achievement Award. In 2013 he received the Graduate Student Faculty Mentoring Award from Columbia University.