

inSocialWork Podcast Series

Episode 293 – “Making Whiteness Strange”: Exploring Anti-Racist Social Work Education: Dr. Donna Jeffery

Speaker 1 [00:00:05] And from the University School of Social Work, welcome to inSocialWork, I'm Peter Sobota. Like everything else currently in the world, we're changing. It'll be gradual, but the inSocialWork podcast is getting a makeover. We'll be expanding our focus, our format and our website, among other changes. Watch it unfold. And we are really interested in what you think about our work and invite you to participate in the conversation along with us. As part of the renewal of the podcast, I will become the sole host and conduct all or most of the interviews. For this soft launch of our renewal, I actually got selfish and I chased the topic, consuming me and maybe a lot of other social work educators. The recent escalation in racist, anti-immigrant and xenophobic narratives in our society present critical challenges for social work. Educators and students committed to racial justice and anti-racism schools of social work across the US

Speaker 2 [00:01:09] and Canada have renewed and in some

Speaker 1 [00:01:11] cases started their commitment to racial equity and anti-racism. As a proud social worker and a social work educator myself, I believe it's

Speaker 2 [00:01:20] healthy and

Speaker 1 [00:01:21] important to have an occasional lover's quarrel with our profession. Can I say it?

Speaker 2 [00:01:26] In recent decades, the presence

Speaker 1 [00:01:28] of anti-racist practice and social work education has seemed to lost its prominence, a concerning development in a profession whose practice is premised on the values of social justice and improving the social functioning of human beings and their communities. That bothered and humbled me.

Speaker 2 [00:01:45] So I started

Speaker 1 [00:01:46] combing the literature to try and better understand this apparent paradox. Nothing I read in the literature and in media grabbed me and held my attention as hard as Dr Donald Jeffery's 2005 article.

Speaker 2 [00:01:58] What good is

Speaker 1 [00:01:59] anti-racist social work if you can't

Speaker 2 [00:02:01] master it?

Speaker 1 [00:02:02] Exploring a paradox in social work. Anti-racist Education. Here's another paradox while we're at it, that article is 16 years old. So that's evidence that she wasn't ignoring social justice and she's been incredibly prescient about the current struggles we face. But now the troubling part in terms of progress, 16 years later, her conceptualization in an article read like they could have been written yesterday. Ouch. So I chased Dr. Jeffrey down. And now from the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada, I got the chance to talk with Donna, Jeffrey, Donna Jeffrey,

Speaker 2 [00:02:41] PhD is associate

Speaker 1 [00:02:43] professor and the interim director of the School of Child and

Speaker 2 [00:02:46] Youth Care at the

Speaker 1 [00:02:48] University of Victoria. Her research and teaching interests include feminist critical race and post-structuralist scholarship in the context of pedagogy, policy, knowledge production, professional identity and social work education. I spoke with Dr. Jeffrey in

Speaker 2 [00:03:04] May of 2021

Speaker 1 [00:03:06] Hi, Donna, and thanks for joining us.

Speaker 3 [00:03:11] Hi, Peter, thanks for inviting me.

Speaker 1 [00:03:13] I just got to get right to why is it so difficult to educate and build and be an anti-racist social worker?

Speaker 4 [00:03:22] Well, that's a big question. It's interesting that you found the 2005 article still relevant, because it's funny when I've been recently thinking about it myself and wondering if I were to write the kind of sequel to this, what would I write? What is the story right now in social work? And I'm not saying I have all the answers, but I am a faculty member in the School of Social Work UVic and I've been teaching here since 2002. There's been lots of kind of preoccupation all of us as we kind of see the reiterations of how we think about exclusion, marginalization, dominance as we try and think through all these things. I kind of go back to the article in that sense. So why is it hard? I don't know. I can tell you why these people I interviewed way back when this is part of my dissertation work

Speaker 2 [00:04:15] and one of my interests

Speaker 4 [00:04:17] at the time, I was at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University

Speaker 2 [00:04:23] of Toronto.

Speaker 4 [00:04:23] I had wonderful teachers and they really got me thinking about what is going on in professional education. So professions like social work, how do we imagine how it's

Speaker 2 [00:04:36] possible to talk about racism within those

Speaker 4 [00:04:39] parameters? What is it possible to say?

Speaker 2 [00:04:42] How do we frame the problems? And so I started

Speaker 4 [00:04:44] off reading a report that came from a task force in the Canadian Association of Social

Speaker 2 [00:04:49] Work Education, and they

Speaker 4 [00:04:51] were meeting between 89 and 91. And they were identifying particularly the sort of educators of color across the country. They were identifying

Speaker 2 [00:05:01] what

Speaker 4 [00:05:01] they were trying to get included

Speaker 2 [00:05:03] into the curriculum to talk

Speaker 4 [00:05:04] about race and

Speaker 2 [00:05:05] racism with social

Speaker 4 [00:05:06] work students and to be teaching this important work.

Speaker 2 [00:05:09] So there I

Speaker 4 [00:05:10] was sitting in the year 2000 reading this and

Speaker 2 [00:05:13] thinking it doesn't

Speaker 4 [00:05:14] sound that different. Where how far have we come? So to that end, I got into the archives

Speaker 2 [00:05:22] and I interviewed educators

Speaker 4 [00:05:24] across the country who sort of identified as people teaching critical social work, trying to take up some of

Speaker 2 [00:05:30] these issues. And several of them

Speaker 4 [00:05:31] had been on the task force. So that kind of made it especially interesting to talk about what change

Speaker 2 [00:05:37] they'd see anyway. Out of

Speaker 4 [00:05:38] those

Speaker 2 [00:05:38] interviews, I learned that there was

Speaker 4 [00:05:41] quite a divide between what

Speaker 2 [00:05:43] it meant to be an anti-racist

Speaker 4 [00:05:46] social worker and what it meant to actually

Speaker 2 [00:05:49] do anti-racist or different kinds

Speaker 4 [00:05:51] of critical social work. And that's the dilemma or this paradox that I could see so clearly in

Speaker 2 [00:05:57] the data was

Speaker 4 [00:05:58] a lot of our and maybe I'll ask you if that's been true in your own institution. A lot of that early pedagogy seemed to be built around self location. Notions of self locate was an important starting place. Sometimes it wasn't made clear. Self locate

Speaker 2 [00:06:13] to what end, what to self

Speaker 4 [00:06:15] locating do. Also, I think the other thing that I

Speaker 2 [00:06:17] noticed was this

Speaker 4 [00:06:18] rather quick shift from talking about anti-racist education to anti-oppressive education, teaching the ALP social worker. It's interesting to watch the shift in language and then wonder about what actually changed.

Speaker 1 [00:06:33] Before you go on, can I ask you to back up just a little bit? Because one of the things that I wanted to ask you about was what you just said about what you learned about the difference between what it means to be a social worker and what's meant to do or practice social work. I had read that a couple of times before. I think I know what you were talking about.

Speaker 2 [00:06:53] Can you maybe

Speaker 1 [00:06:54] explain that in a slightly different way so that at least the folks who are listening understand the difference that you see there?

Speaker 3 [00:07:02] Sure.

Speaker 4 [00:07:02] What I was noticing was that

Speaker 3 [00:07:04] critical race theory. For example, thinking about anti-racism was kind of seen as something too theoretical, rather abstract, kind of heady, and it didn't translate well into practice. And so we've all experienced the social work class, you might think, where there's the conceptual, but people want to know what to do. This theory practice divide, which seems to go back maybe, I don't know, a very long way. And I find it to be such a not helpful divide because acting comes out of somewhere you think something right. And actions, of course,

Speaker 2 [00:07:40] are informed and we

Speaker 4 [00:07:42] learn a lot about what we think

Speaker 2 [00:07:43] through what we go do, so they

Speaker 4 [00:07:45] inform each other so much. So I found it interesting when these educators that I was interviewing were talking about how students were being encouraged to think about privilege, to become aware of their

Speaker 2 [00:07:57] kind of privileged

Speaker 4 [00:07:59] status, what it meant to have white privilege, sort of piggy Macintosh's work and becoming more self

Speaker 2 [00:08:05] aware. And I think

Speaker 4 [00:08:06] the divide I. Was seeing was there was an assumption

Speaker 2 [00:08:09] made that a more

Speaker 4 [00:08:10] self-aware person will ultimately be a better social work

Speaker 2 [00:08:16] practitioner or even know what

Speaker 1 [00:08:17] to do. Yes, once you go out into the real world. Right. And you're talking with real live human beings, what's the bridge between all this kind of self reflection? And that? I got to tell you, that part really fascinated me because I think I was guilty of that assumption myself.

Speaker 3 [00:08:34] Yeah. I mean, we all hope those insights will mean that we will act differently. But what was becoming clear in the interview data was that practice wasn't really thought of as any different practice still looked like practice. As usual. We knew what good practice was.

Speaker 2 [00:08:49] Thank you. But now you need

Speaker 3 [00:08:51] me to be something different, and that is to be more self

Speaker 2 [00:08:55] aware. And by being

Speaker 3 [00:08:56] self aware, I'll understand the ways in which I'm dominant or I'm marginalized. Whatever my position reality is, if I understand that better, then I will just be a better practitioner without looking at, well, what is

Speaker 2 [00:09:10] practice and how

Speaker 3 [00:09:12] is practice steeped in these legacies of dominance,

Speaker 4 [00:09:18] colonization and all kinds of everyday practices of

Speaker 2 [00:09:24] power. People were doing

Speaker 4 [00:09:25] their best to understand themselves and their privilege and their whiteness, where a lot of white students in social work and and still are. But I certainly we can talk about admissions policies later. So that meant that there would be this kind of anger in classrooms. My participants would talk about sort of students that were fed

Speaker 2 [00:09:45] up like, OK,

Speaker 4 [00:09:46] I have self located many, many

Speaker 2 [00:09:49] times now. What do you want

Speaker 4 [00:09:50] me to go do? I will. I do it differently? I don't know. But now teach me how not to go out and make that mistake. I now know I'm going to make mistakes unless I'm more self aware. But you haven't told me yet what the new toolkit looks like. That will be a more informed tool kit. Well, I still have to go into this agency and do my child protection work or I still have these same policies to work under. So what is it you're

Speaker 2 [00:10:17] asking of me? This paradox

Speaker 4 [00:10:19] I ended up

Speaker 2 [00:10:19] with was this distinction

Speaker 4 [00:10:21] between what it means to be this new self-aware person and worker and what it means to go out and practice as a progressive

Speaker 2 [00:10:31] practitioner. But what will I do differently?

Speaker 1 [00:10:34] Didn't you caution

Speaker 2 [00:10:35] against doing

Speaker 1 [00:10:37] anti-racist social work as simply a competency?

Speaker 3 [00:10:41] Yes, that again came through the data.

Speaker 4 [00:10:45] A professional education is all about becoming

Speaker 2 [00:10:48] competent, right?

Speaker 4 [00:10:49] These sets of

Speaker 2 [00:10:50] competencies, how you have

Speaker 4 [00:10:51] to kind of demonstrate these and meet these and feel like

Speaker 2 [00:10:54] you're going out to be

Speaker 4 [00:10:56] competent, able social worker who won't harm

Speaker 2 [00:10:59] people. But at a minimum anyway. And so what I think we

Speaker 4 [00:11:04] were in peril of doing is becoming the anti-racist social

Speaker 2 [00:11:08] worker into one

Speaker 4 [00:11:09] more competency to demonstrate and

Speaker 2 [00:11:12] meet. That's a very

Speaker 4 [00:11:13] kind of dead end analysis, because then you you sort of find students asking, will just show me what to do. So I don't go out and

Speaker 2 [00:11:23] make a

Speaker 4 [00:11:23] racist

Speaker 2 [00:11:24] mistake or

Speaker 4 [00:11:26] say the wrong thing. This tool kit that will

Speaker 2 [00:11:28] now, I guess,

Speaker 4 [00:11:30] stop me from making those kinds of egregious

Speaker 2 [00:11:32] errors. It was really

Speaker 4 [00:11:34] problematic. If we're based in competencies and being professionals, then that part never got scrutinized for the baked in power relations

Speaker 2 [00:11:44] and the

Speaker 4 [00:11:44] professions own history.

Speaker 1 [00:11:46] So maybe students are clamoring. We could talk about maybe why I don't want to make this sound like I'm blaming,

Speaker 2 [00:11:53] but students

Speaker 1 [00:11:53] are almost asking early on in their training and develop as

Speaker 2 [00:11:57] professionals how to

Speaker 1 [00:11:59] manage and control racism.

Speaker 3 [00:12:02] Well, management is a key tool, right. And that became, you know, if we think about liberal, neo liberal context, being able to

Speaker 4 [00:12:11] manage diversity, manage

Speaker 2 [00:12:14] difference becomes

Speaker 4 [00:12:15] yet another

Speaker 2 [00:12:16] skill. That's a hard

Speaker 1 [00:12:17] word.

Speaker 2 [00:12:18] Management. That was

Speaker 4 [00:12:19] the other thing that was interesting was that diversity was seen as something new and it was a problem and it had to be

Speaker 2 [00:12:26] managed. And these

Speaker 4 [00:12:27] were all things that had to be unpacked for students that saw themselves as, oh, there's this new

Speaker 2 [00:12:34] thing, there's a lot of

Speaker 4 [00:12:36] difference and I have to learn better management

Speaker 2 [00:12:39] tools. This whole idea of

Speaker 4 [00:12:40] management, of diversity, I mean, what it does is take these progressive or even radical theoretical changes that we want to bring to the way social work is kind of how it does its job.

Speaker 2 [00:12:53] And some people ask, can

Speaker 4 [00:12:54] it be rebuilt, rehabilitated, given

Speaker 2 [00:12:56] its history? I don't know if

Speaker 4 [00:12:58] that's a very useful question either, but it's how to take

Speaker 2 [00:13:01] these radical

Speaker 4 [00:13:03] concepts and translate them

Speaker 2 [00:13:06] for.

Speaker 4 [00:13:07] Artists who understand themselves to be good, neo liberal subjects who are competent and know how to

Speaker 2 [00:13:13] do the job. And this

Speaker 4 [00:13:14] tension again between what are we trying to

Speaker 2 [00:13:18] teach and where does

Speaker 4 [00:13:19] it take students? So maybe we've all had the experience of white students

Speaker 2 [00:13:24] feeling rather

Speaker 4 [00:13:25] consumed for a period of time with shame and guilt and those kinds of responses to understanding themselves as participants in dominants. I'm always trying to

Speaker 3 [00:13:36] work with students to

Speaker 2 [00:13:37] think about

Speaker 4 [00:13:38] discursive production of your subjectivity. Big words, but thinking in infrastructural terms. Right, this idea of discourse and text and talk and whatever, anything

Speaker 2 [00:13:51] that has meaning and how

Speaker 4 [00:13:52] we come to

Speaker 2 [00:13:53] desire to be.

Speaker 4 [00:13:55] So I want to talk to students about what's a good social

Speaker 2 [00:13:58] worker, how do we come

Speaker 4 [00:14:00] to want what we want that we know that's good. And I want to be that

Speaker 1 [00:14:04] most of the students who I by far, they want to be good at what they're doing.

Speaker 3 [00:14:08] Absolutely.

Speaker 1 [00:14:09] They're very driven. And, man, it is really hard

Speaker 2 [00:14:12] to argue with that. But I'm

Speaker 1 [00:14:13] struck

Speaker 2 [00:14:14] by if those

Speaker 1 [00:14:16] well-intentioned folks, people of

Speaker 2 [00:14:18] goodwill, to be honest,

Speaker 1 [00:14:20] if they actually do the self reflective

Speaker 2 [00:14:23] piece and the

Speaker 1 [00:14:24] self-examination piece, well, that's going to bring them closer and closer to some very, very uncomfortable realizations, I think. And so you kind of left

Speaker 2 [00:14:36] with if you do the

Speaker 1 [00:14:37] deep

Speaker 2 [00:14:37] dove around

Speaker 1 [00:14:38] self reflection. I'm not only a part of this so-called problem. If I'm a white student, I've benefited from it. Absolutely. Now, you're faced with this kind of like

Speaker 2 [00:14:50] really, I think, really

Speaker 1 [00:14:52] tough, demanding dilemma. I'm having an increasing awareness that I'm a beneficiary of racism.

Speaker 4 [00:14:59] That's I think that's a very kind of productive thing.

Speaker 2 [00:15:02] You can

Speaker 4 [00:15:02] do

Speaker 2 [00:15:03] a lot working with

Speaker 4 [00:15:04] students who really

Speaker 2 [00:15:06] want to do their

Speaker 4 [00:15:07] job well and they really care about people. We have students coming into social work. Typically, they kind

Speaker 2 [00:15:13] of like people and

Speaker 4 [00:15:14] they want to help. So this notion of help even taking that idea apart to start

Speaker 2 [00:15:21] understanding that there is

Speaker 4 [00:15:23] no place of innocence here. Yeah, that's rough. But it can also be

Speaker 2 [00:15:27] exciting because

Speaker 4 [00:15:29] if you

Speaker 2 [00:15:29] have been produced

Speaker 4 [00:15:31] to kind of think of yourself as this innocent, benign helper, if that's kind of

Speaker 2 [00:15:36] what you've been produced to be,

Speaker 4 [00:15:39] then you can be something

Speaker 2 [00:15:40] else. I kind of see

Speaker 4 [00:15:42] in the classroom the excitement and possibility about working with these desires

Speaker 2 [00:15:48] to do good work, but at the

Speaker 4 [00:15:50] same time kind of

Speaker 2 [00:15:51] interrogating this desire

Speaker 4 [00:15:53] for innocence or to find the innocent ground

Speaker 2 [00:15:56] to stand on. We're asking

Speaker 4 [00:15:58] students to do that at the same time they're

Speaker 2 [00:16:00] standing on it. And while they're just

Speaker 1 [00:16:02] really almost even being socialized for many of them into this profession.

Speaker 3 [00:16:06] Yes. And it's something that gets hard, right. When you start talking about the Canadian context. So I'll go kind of

Speaker 2 [00:16:13] West Coast when we start

Speaker 3 [00:16:15] talking about the role of social work in

Speaker 2 [00:16:17] nation building and we go way back

Speaker 3 [00:16:20] residential schools. But before that, morality and prohibition and the role of early social work as a professional, I mean, there were all kinds of communities, marginalized communities that

Speaker 2 [00:16:32] their own we wouldn't call it social

Speaker 3 [00:16:34] work, but their own kind of community practices of helping. But I think about the profession itself and

Speaker 2 [00:16:39] its role in nation

Speaker 3 [00:16:41] making, then it becomes really important, I think, to go back and see the profession's

Speaker 2 [00:16:48] history and how we can

Speaker 3 [00:16:50] talk now about it is absolutely

Speaker 2 [00:16:52] steeped in colonial legacies and every one

Speaker 3 [00:16:55] of these we have to encounter. That's why in the classroom, I think that it's just always fun to start noticing what feels like common sense. What are these moments of what we just do it that way, these moments of practice being

Speaker 2 [00:17:11] naturaliste or

Speaker 3 [00:17:12] we just do it that way? Or it makes sense to do it this way. Or these places of comfort are often really good places to start and where assignments

Speaker 2 [00:17:22] might start with just

Speaker 3 [00:17:23] trying in a small moment to start. I guess in a way we don't talk that much about privilege in my classrooms, but only enough to know that it's not the end point in terms of the learning and the analysis. It's an interesting beginning to notice that there is such a thing and how you might have something and to start talking of more intersectionality and thinking about them. So what is this privilege that we started talking about? How does it play out? What does it do?

Speaker 1 [00:17:51] In some ways you are sounding a lot more hopeful and optimistic than where you ended in two thousand and five. Is that fair?

Speaker 3 [00:18:00] I was pretty new in my career when this was published. And as I say, it's out of my dissertation.

Speaker 2 [00:18:05] So I

Speaker 3 [00:18:06] think. A lot of learning, subsequent learning has happened being in classrooms and supervising students and sort of just doing more research in this area, but kind of looking at different things, so am I. Oh, I think that's the wrong word. I think that

Speaker 4 [00:18:24] I ended this paper with we are stuck in this bind.

Speaker 2 [00:18:27] Yes. That this

Speaker 4 [00:18:29] paradox is

Speaker 2 [00:18:30] almost impermeable.

Speaker 4 [00:18:32] Like, what do we do with such a paradox?

Speaker 2 [00:18:34] Yeah, I would argue that a lot

Speaker 4 [00:18:36] of wonderful scholarship and teaching, particularly

Speaker 2 [00:18:41] from

Speaker 4 [00:18:42] social work, educators

Speaker 2 [00:18:43] of color, has

Speaker 4 [00:18:44] changed classrooms as we go in terms of thinking, what are we trying to accomplish? So, yes, this paradox sits there, but I don't think we have to

Speaker 2 [00:18:54] be stuck in it because the two pieces

Speaker 4 [00:18:56] that seem important to me is to rethink this notion of what self-awareness is and does and what we do it for and to

Speaker 2 [00:19:04] actually take apart practice, to invite thinking,

Speaker 4 [00:19:09] social work, practice differently. For example, indigenous social workers are really sort of reimagining and have been all along. But now sort of in terms

Speaker 2 [00:19:19] of my own reading and

Speaker 4 [00:19:20] learning about it, reimagining what does indigenous social work

Speaker 2 [00:19:25] practice look like and

Speaker 4 [00:19:27] what are the goals through

Speaker 2 [00:19:28] that? I think that it's been really

Speaker 4 [00:19:30] productive for me to kind of move to teaching in the classroom around, again, these

Speaker 2 [00:19:35] ideas of common

Speaker 4 [00:19:37] sense. So, for example, in the last few years, I had the opportunity to design a graduate elective on environmental justice for social work. And that

Speaker 2 [00:19:46] course has been

Speaker 4 [00:19:48] a wonderful

Speaker 2 [00:19:49] opportunity to kind of

Speaker 4 [00:19:51] bring some of these concepts, like what are we talking about with anti-racism, with whiteness, with representation? How do we depict the environment? And what why is that useful? Why is it even

Speaker 2 [00:20:03] relevant to a

Speaker 4 [00:20:04] profession like social work? Because all these

Speaker 2 [00:20:06] concepts, what I've learned is

Speaker 4 [00:20:08] come home to roost in taking up some of these ideas

Speaker 2 [00:20:12] around food security and food

Speaker 4 [00:20:14] deserts and consuming being a good consumer. And many of the indigenous students here have done a lot with thinking

Speaker 2 [00:20:22] about traditional foods and

Speaker 4 [00:20:24] feasts and sort of pulling together some of these ideas. So I've kind of jumped ahead what I was trying to do in terms of thinking again

Speaker 2 [00:20:33] about the

Speaker 4 [00:20:34] way whiteness is universality

Speaker 2 [00:20:38] and

Speaker 4 [00:20:39] nothing and everything at the same

Speaker 2 [00:20:41] time. And that's why I

Speaker 4 [00:20:42] go back to what seems natural and common sense to you. So little things like I'll ask students to pause for a moment and imagine in their head an image of an environmentalist,

Speaker 2 [00:20:52] and that can sometimes

Speaker 4 [00:20:53] be revealing in terms of it's often someone young, it's often

Speaker 2 [00:20:58] someone white, someone who's

Speaker 4 [00:21:00] sort of the outdoorsy person. And I'm not saying it's always that way, but it has come up enough that it becomes an interesting interruption

Speaker 2 [00:21:08] to that came out of

Speaker 4 [00:21:10] somewhere. So now we have to unpack. Where did those underpinning assumptions come from? Yeah, and that's where I guess I'm saying I see the utility because by then we will have talked about environmental racism.

Speaker 2 [00:21:23] We will have talked

Speaker 4 [00:21:24] about racism and whiteness and white

Speaker 2 [00:21:26] supremacy. But then when it

Speaker 4 [00:21:28] comes to thinking about representation

Speaker 2 [00:21:31] of the environment, nature, who's supposed

Speaker 4 [00:21:34] to be in nature, who's that environmentalist that you picture all these things,

Speaker 2 [00:21:39] reveal some of the

Speaker 4 [00:21:41] ways in which it wasn't immediately apparent that this was a conversation about whiteness and colonial legacies and all of the ways in which the profession is steeped in it and and that each of us is. But it was a moment of revealing, holy cow. Isn't it interesting? That's what came up.

Speaker 1 [00:21:59] Can I build on that and just read you

Speaker 2 [00:22:01] something that really

Speaker 1 [00:22:03] grabbed me from your article? Here we go. White power reproduces itself regardless of intention,

Speaker 2 [00:22:11] power,

Speaker 1 [00:22:11] differences and

Speaker 2 [00:22:12] goodwill. And overwhelmingly, because it's

Speaker 1 [00:22:15] not seen

Speaker 2 [00:22:16] as whiteness, but as

Speaker 1 [00:22:18] normal, we must begin by making

Speaker 2 [00:22:22] whiteness stretch,

Speaker 4 [00:22:24] making the familiar strange. So many early scholars wrote about this, even using that phrase.

Speaker 2 [00:22:31] And I just find it

Speaker 4 [00:22:33] so helpful because it does kind of hit that idea

Speaker 2 [00:22:37] of the universality

Speaker 4 [00:22:39] benefits, the air you're breathing, then you're really kind of not seeing it. So that's

Speaker 2 [00:22:43] where it

Speaker 4 [00:22:44] has been so important, I think, for sometimes for students, it's for white students in particular. It's this aha moment

Speaker 2 [00:22:53] of what was so

Speaker 4 [00:22:55] self-evident that it didn't even need to be

Speaker 2 [00:22:58] explained or understood.

Speaker 4 [00:23:00] So that moment of, you just read this or you just looked at this

Speaker 2 [00:23:04] image, but this

Speaker 4 [00:23:05] image required. Urge you to know

Speaker 2 [00:23:07] stuff that you had to

Speaker 4 [00:23:08] tap into what you

Speaker 2 [00:23:09] think you know, and that

Speaker 4 [00:23:11] very thing you tapped into reveals what

Speaker 2 [00:23:14] you privilege. So there's a different

Speaker 4 [00:23:15] use of privilege. It's not just a roped recitation of I have these privileges in the world, but it does reveal what are the knowledge

Speaker 2 [00:23:23] you privilege, what

Speaker 4 [00:23:24] kinds of ways of knowing do you privilege?

Speaker 1 [00:23:27] Well, I was thinking about and even just when you were talking now, I was putting that all into my own experience in the courses that I set with the students that I'm with. And what you're talking about and what I think I see is that that's a pretty heavy lift for students. That's rough business, because you have to kind of for the student who is having these

Speaker 2 [00:23:50] has you've kind

Speaker 1 [00:23:51] of got to acknowledge or sometimes even abandon the

Speaker 2 [00:23:54] privileges and a lot

Speaker 1 [00:23:56] of the kind of ideology that has worked for you up until this point in your life and is informed almost every aspect of it.

Speaker 3 [00:24:03] It's so important to talk about investments like Sheryl

Speaker 2 [00:24:07] Harris article, oldie but goodie. But whiteness is

Speaker 3 [00:24:10] property. She's a

Speaker 2 [00:24:11] legal scholar and all the

Speaker 3 [00:24:12] ways in which you start to think about these privileges as the materiality of those benefits, whiteness as property, then we can start thinking in terms of how deeply we are invested in things being a certain way and the way they are. And it becomes a question of, well, if I question this, what's at stake then from what's at stake? You can get to how far am I willing to go?

Speaker 1 [00:24:38] And you know what? The other thing that I'm thinking about this in the most practical way, I'm kind of putting myself in that room while you're talking and all of this is going on while there are people, students of color in the room with them listening to them. I can imagine that that's no picnic for them either

Speaker 3 [00:24:58] to be having to listen, for example, to white students of have these realizations or come

Speaker 2 [00:25:04] to that.

Speaker 3 [00:25:04] Yeah, I mean, we are in diverse classrooms, and

Speaker 2 [00:25:08] that's where I take

Speaker 3 [00:25:09] very seriously the kind of learnings

Speaker 2 [00:25:12] that I have from students

Speaker 3 [00:25:13] of color that

Speaker 2 [00:25:14] have been in my classrooms and from

Speaker 3 [00:25:16] some of

Speaker 2 [00:25:16] my colleagues and

Speaker 3 [00:25:18] a lot

Speaker 2 [00:25:18] of what I read,

Speaker 3 [00:25:20] especially from educators and scholars of color,

Speaker 2 [00:25:23] trying to be

Speaker 3 [00:25:24] ever more attuned to what does it mean to talk about positionally and different entry points in these classrooms. I don't want to get into moments of confession or these dramatic realizations of something.

Speaker 2 [00:25:40] And maybe

Speaker 3 [00:25:41] rightly or wrongly, I tend to go in my social work classes because I'm usually

Speaker 2 [00:25:47] teaching more

Speaker 3 [00:25:49] conceptual or sociological concepts and theory. And so I tend to go to that. We're not just talking

Speaker 2 [00:25:57] about white people

Speaker 3 [00:25:58] here. We're talking about whiteness

Speaker 4 [00:26:01] as a set of

Speaker 2 [00:26:02] practices that's steeped in

Speaker 3 [00:26:04] replicating forms of dominance. And we are all implicated and positioned in these kind of

Speaker 2 [00:26:10] systems in different

Speaker 3 [00:26:12] places. And some of us kind of just breeze through just fine things and some of us do not. And some of us are impervious to all of it. Somehow we haven't needed to see it because we haven't needed to, whereas our students will

Speaker 2 [00:26:27] be quite familiar with this.

Speaker 3 [00:26:30] But it's even coming back to there is the kind of personal. But I think it's really important that we consistently and continually linked to the

Speaker 2 [00:26:41] systemic all of this.

Speaker 3 [00:26:43] It's built to replicate these kinds of practices. A big conversation. And certainly my school and maybe across Canada is thinking

Speaker 2 [00:26:52] about how do we

Speaker 3 [00:26:53] decolonize social work and social work education here, too. OK, so this idea of

Speaker 2 [00:26:59] decolonization and what we're

Speaker 3 [00:27:01] talking about and to keep

Speaker 2 [00:27:03] decolonizing that conversation alive

Speaker 3 [00:27:06] within a broader context of anti-racist discourse, to keep these to kind of wedded and informed, because otherwise it becomes a new binary, I think, between indigenous peoples and white

Speaker 2 [00:27:18] settlers. So I think that

Speaker 3 [00:27:19] there's kind of a

Speaker 2 [00:27:20] vigilance needed

Speaker 3 [00:27:22] to hold on to the complexity, but invite that kind of hard work. I'm not saying that it's easy work. And there are moments in classrooms, of course, where there's this immediacy, which is why one of the interesting things a colleague at Ryerson and I did and as part of a research project was thinking about what happens to critical pedagogy when they go online. And part of

Speaker 2 [00:27:45] that was these

Speaker 3 [00:27:46] experiences of something happens in the classroom. There's the immediacy of response that you can do that doesn't happen in asynchronous online courses.

Speaker 2 [00:27:57] And so what is

Speaker 3 [00:27:58] gained and what is lost?

Speaker 1 [00:27:59] We're getting close to the end of our time here. But I just want to circle back because that vigilant. And that ongoing effort and

Speaker 2 [00:28:08] complexity, when we go back

Speaker 1 [00:28:10] to the beginning of our discussion on how many students are clamoring for what to do in the here and now, on Wednesday, when I go to my field placement, there's the rub in many ways, right. Those are the competing

Speaker 2 [00:28:24] tensions in really students kind of moving

Speaker 1 [00:28:28] through this.

Speaker 3 [00:28:29] Absolutely.

Speaker 2 [00:28:30] And I think sometimes

Speaker 4 [00:28:33] it's as much as asking different questions. Sometimes it's as much as understanding this relationship.

Speaker 2 [00:28:41] Sara IMiDs

Speaker 4 [00:28:42] work. I like it very much. Her utility of the idea of encounter.

Speaker 2 [00:28:46] We are never

Speaker 4 [00:28:47] just ourselves in these moments. We bring all of

Speaker 2 [00:28:50] our context and all of

Speaker 4 [00:28:51] our history, and we are mutually producing each other in these moments. And that's kind of a heady way of trying to talk about the messiness of trying to be with

Speaker 2 [00:29:01] somebody, but also

Speaker 4 [00:29:02] understanding

Speaker 2 [00:29:03] that you

Speaker 4 [00:29:05] are always being read and

Speaker 2 [00:29:07] interpreted through these histories and

Speaker 4 [00:29:10] this sort of current moment. And I go back to that's what had me running back to grad school. This experience of I was in northern

Speaker 2 [00:29:18] B.C. and I

Speaker 4 [00:29:19] was a new child protection worker and I worked in several indigenous villages that we had to fly into. And we have our nice little briefcase that stamped with the province of B.C. and we have authority. And I just remember I wasn't a very good flier in the small plane, so I just remember trying to be less nauseous while I

Speaker 2 [00:29:39] stood on the dock and wondering

Speaker 4 [00:29:40] about what am I doing here in this moment? I don't have the language for it. I didn't then I'm not sure. But I have a sense of unease. And the unease is I am the epitome of white middle class. I'm standing here with my briefcase

Speaker 2 [00:29:57] with authority

Speaker 4 [00:29:58] representing a profession that has had a terrible

Speaker 2 [00:30:02] history with

Speaker 4 [00:30:03] communities like this. And so this is bigger than me. You know, that moment when you realize you wish you'd listen closer and your skills class, because now you probably finesse this when then you realize that, no, you would not find this is bigger than you. It's bigger than smiling enough. It's bigger than being the nicest, loveliest person you can be in this moment. This is about an entire colonial history that you embody in this moment and in the

Speaker 2 [00:30:31] counters that history and context will in

Speaker 4 [00:30:34] part define this encounter

Speaker 2 [00:30:36] and that social work. Yeah, it's

Speaker 1 [00:30:38] almost like a legacy and a destiny in many ways. I mean, I often have similar thoughts when I stand in front of some of my courses.

Speaker 2 [00:30:46] I'm all

Speaker 1 [00:30:46] of the things you are and

Speaker 2 [00:30:48] male. And so I wonder, like,

Speaker 1 [00:30:50] what am I doing? Why am I the one speaking here? It's really a time for a certain degree, I think, of

Speaker 2 [00:30:57] vulnerability and authenticity and humility. Yeah, yeah. So I guess to me it's

Speaker 3 [00:31:03] about honoring everybody who has taught me so much along the way and being very grateful to people who've written and taken the time to help me better understand and sometimes just trying to, I guess, help students with this. I mean, we're back to this paradox

Speaker 2 [00:31:23] of you're

Speaker 3 [00:31:24] being asked to dig deep and

Speaker 2 [00:31:26] be different to an end.

Speaker 3 [00:31:28] And that end isn't just self awareness. That's the beginning. And then it's thinking about, well, what would practice look like if we did it differently? Does it always have to be done? And I think it's it's interesting,

Speaker 2 [00:31:41] even just interviewed in

Speaker 3 [00:31:42] college. I think about that. I think about administration and the institution in the academy as a scholarly work where these policies really need to be read through this critical lens for do we always do it this way? Do we always have to do it this way?

Speaker 2 [00:32:00] What are we trying

Speaker 3 [00:32:01] to accomplish even in terms at the level of faculty or higher thinking about what do these policies do? And is that the outcome we want?

Speaker 2 [00:32:11] And is there a way

Speaker 3 [00:32:12] in which these two are simply steeped in a universality and common sense that is antithetical to the kinds of changes we want to make?

Speaker 1 [00:32:20] Yeah, and what is our role in moving it forward? It's certainly a lot easier not to think about it and to perpetuate. Donna, thank you so much for agreeing to do the podcast, we're really grateful and we really wanted you to be the person that we spoke to about this. I know it's a busy time and I know we chased you. So from all of us, I'm really grateful.

Speaker 3 [00:32:44] It's been a pleasure. It's been nice to

Speaker 2 [00:32:46] meet you, too. This is just

Speaker 3 [00:32:48] really important as we move forward through this decolonizing work. So thank you.

Speaker 1 [00:32:58] A final note. Thanks again to Donna Jeffrey, if you would like to link to the article we spoke about, you can haul that in on researchgate.net where the full text is available. And while you're on the web ready, please go to the inSocialWork web page at inSocialWork.org, where you'll find links to every podcast we've ever made. And while you're already there, please consider commenting, reviewing or letting us know what you would like to hear about on our podcast series. We also want to shout out to Nancy Smyth, the dean of the School of Social Work, who first provided the inspiration and resources for our podcast 11 years ago. Nancy is stepping down as Dean after 16 years. And after a break, we'll be returning to our faculty. Caitlin Bearss, Michele Melton and Steve Sturman are the inSocialWork podcast team. I'm Peter Sobota. And we'll see you next time, everybody.