

BOOK REVIEWS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Apparently, *The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* received two copies of *Progressive Community Organizing*. Because of my faulty record keeping, two reviewers received the book with me realizing it. I decided to publish both!

[Pyles, L. \(2009\). *Progressive community organizing: A critical approach for a globalizing world*. New York, NY: Routledge.](#)

Reviewed by Wayne C. Evens, Ph.D.
Bradley University

Loretta Pyles is an assistant professor of social welfare at Albany, State University of New York. Her background is in advocacy, organizing, and community based research. She was on faculty at Tulane, and was involved in the post-Katrina revitalization efforts. Dr. Pyles is active in developing community services for the twenty-first century.

Progressive Community Organizing: A Critical Approach for a Globalizing World is well written and clear. The author addresses community organizing in globalizing conditions. In a sense, Dr. Pyles brings Alinsky's methods into the modern world. The book is written as a guide for those who wish to become community organizers and/or for current organizers who seek to expand their skills. It emphasizes critical assessment and leans toward confrontational strategies.

In Chapter 1, she defines progressive community organizing as "Community organizing that works toward the liberation of oppressed and marginalized individuals and the transformation of social systems that perpetuate the oppression" (p. 15). She integrates critical theory and Alinsky to propose organizing strategies. In Chapter 2, "The self-aware organizer," Pyles discusses many of the issues an organizer must address, such as anger, fear, despair, burn-out, and co-

option. She discusses how each of these may negatively affect an organizer. She goes on to discuss how persistence and clarity can help an organizer overcome these issues. She encourages organizers to find the joy in their work. In Chapter 3, "Theories and ideas for progressive organizers," she discusses many theoretical approaches to understanding social change. Pyles closes the chapter with an acknowledgment that these theories may be contradictory and confusing. This encourages the organizer to think of the theories as guides to help one understand social issues and needs for change. She suggests the organizer use the theories, but think of them in critical ways. Chapter 4, "Learning from social movements," and Chapter 5, "Critical organizing frameworks," review the history of several social movements and explain frameworks that have been used to shape organizing approaches. Pyles reports activities that took place in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

Section II, "Tools for community organizing," discusses tools, strategies, tactics, and issues that an organizer must address in planning an intervention. Pyles covers major issues without belaboring them. She illustrates their use by discussing the organizing and activities of the "right to return campaign" that occurred in New Orleans post-Katrina. This section would

be very useful in a social work macro practice course.

Pyles closes the book with a section on entering and emergent issues in organizing. She discusses oppression and liberation with thoughts on developing solidarity. She addresses religious and spiritual issues and how these may affect organizing. The last chapter explores the impacts of globalization. It discusses global justice and localizing movements.

The use of post-Katrina activities strengthens the book by presenting practical experiences. I believe this book would be very useful in social work macro practice courses. It is clear, concise, and thorough. Although she leans

toward confrontational strategies, she does an excellent job of presenting most other approaches and encouraging critical thinking about the issues at hand. My only criticism is that the book pays only minor attention to consensus organizing. I accept that confrontation is often necessary, but most of my students are more comfortable with consensus approaches. I would recommend the book especially for undergraduates, but would supplement it with Eichler's (2007) *Consensus Organizing*.

Reference

Eichler, M. (2007). *Consensus organizing: Building communities of mutual self-interest*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[Pyles, L. \(2009\). *Progressive community organizing: A critical approach for a globalizing world*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.](#)

Reviewed by Veronica Hardy, PhD, LCSW
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

The book titled, *Progressive Community Organizing: A Critical Approach for a Globalizing World* (2009) consists of succinct chapters that provide insight into the social change process. The author, Loretta Pyles, is both an Assistant Professor of Social Welfare at the University of Albany, State University of New York (SUNY), and the Director of the Community and Public Service Program (CPSP) in Albany. Pyles has a background that consists of community engagement, advocacy, and post-Hurricane Katrina efforts. In order to develop this text, she has integrated her experience, empirical research studies, and various professional resources to convey the process of community organizing. As a result, the goals of this book include: explaining the historical and theoretical underpinnings of

community organizing, describing skills that can help promote social change, and communicating challenges community organizers experience as affected by globalization.

The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) as outlined by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) promote competency-based curricula. In relation to these standards, this text includes several factors that can enhance the ability of social work students to engage in community organizing. First, the initial chapters address the concepts of self-evaluation, coping, and cultural competency. These chapters encourage the learner to recognize the impact of practice on the self and how biases and

preconceived notions can negatively affect goal attainment during social change. Second, the text expresses a historical and theoretical focus regarding social change that helps to highlight the concepts of empowerment, promoting leadership development, and mobilizing groups. Third, the author has provided material that can introduce students to pertinent language, decision-making strategies, and an initial understanding of funding to promote social change. Overall, Pyle allows the reader to apply the concepts of community organizing across cultural factors including spirituality, ethnicity, and geographically diverse locations.

Pyle includes several points that are strengths of this textbook, such as social movements that have taken place across populations. For example, feminist organizing that advocated against oppression; as well as disability rights movements to confront discriminatory practices such as forced sterilization. Understanding historical antecedents and the process of consciousness-raising can contribute to the competency development of social work students. Next, the overview about globalization and examples of global justice movements is a benefit of the text. Introducing students to these concepts may enable them to transition their thinking beyond the local environment to transnational occurrences and needs that can be addressed through the social work profession.

In conclusion, *Progressive Community Organizing: A Critical Approach for a Globalizing World* provides an introduction to several concepts and historical events relevant to social change. Further elaboration on topics such as globalization, strategies for change, and organizing coalitions and constituencies may enhance the learning experience of the reader in preparation for professional practice. Based on the overview of concepts throughout

the chapters, questions for reflection, and case examples, it is recommended that this text would be beneficial as a supplemental teaching tool for undergraduate social work courses that focus on community organizing and social movements.