

Embodied Social Justice Learning: Considerations for Curriculum Development and Training in Counseling Programs

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Abstract

Social justice curriculum development continues to be an evolving area in the educational and professional training of counselors and counseling psychologists. While many programs facilitate trainees' exploration of social justice knowledge through infusion into multicultural counseling courses, there is a growing trend in counseling curriculum development to provide students with specific social justice-oriented awareness and approaches to advocacy. This article describes the development of two-course sequence in a mental health counseling program where trainees are introduced to multicultural and social justice content pedagogically organized around liberation and critical history frameworks. The theoretical frameworks, process of implementing specific curricular activities with a focus on a culminating service-learning experience, and strategies for enhancing social justice and advocacy curriculum development through an *embodied social justice learning* curricular approach are discussed. This article aims to advance curriculum development by encouraging faculty in counseling programs to consider implementing curricular activities that are guided by social justice embodiments and critical-liberatory frameworks to facilitate trainees' social justice knowledge and their approach to advocacy in their roles as helping professionals.

Keywords: social justice curriculum; counseling programs; embodiment; service-learning; liberation

Challenges to structural barriers based on social group marginalization-privilege dichotomies, access to power and opportunity, and respect for historically accurate sociopolitical realities are among the central concerns in social justice and liberation discourse (Adams, 2007; Comas-Diaz & Rivera, 2020; Goodman et al., 2004). Threads of this discourse have been evident throughout the history of counseling and counseling psychology from emphasizing the moral nature of providing mental health services to individuals living with mental illness (Brooks & Wiekell, 1996) to Frank Parson's work centering the provision of services for homeless and unemployed individuals (Toporek, 2011) to more recent calls for decolonizing and liberation-based approaches to counseling practice (Comas-Diaz & Rivera, 2020; Goodman et al., 2015). Competency models and frameworks for examining notions of power, oppression, and privilege (Singh et al., 2020; Speight & Vera, 2008; Vera & Speight, 2003) and guidelines for working with marginalized populations (see American Counseling Association (ACA) and American Psychological Association (APA) for guidelines) also contribute to the current, albeit debatable, zeitgeist in field. Though the notion of social justice in counseling and counseling psychology is not a new phenomenon (Crethar et al., 2008), movement toward establishing social justice as integral to future counseling professionals' education and training programs' curricula has been more measured (Bemak et al., 2011). Several scholars address the importance of social justice issues in counseling contexts (Ali et al., 2008; Bemak et al., 2011; Field et al., 2019; Gazzola et al., 2018; Goodman et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2015); however, less has been written about *how* to re-envision counseling programs' curricula in a manner that facilitates social justice as an integral part of future counselors' and psychologists' training and professional identities.

As we exist in social and political contexts where clients and students (and others) are negotiating social (in)justice on a day-to-day basis, it remains of central importance to develop curricula that prepares future generations of counselors and psychologists to recognize, understand, and address social justice issues (Counselors for Justice, 2020; Goodman et al., 2015; Ratts et al., 2016; Steele, 2008). Thus, approaches to counseling programs' curricula development warrants an intentional focus on how to embody social justice training. Liberation, critical, and embodied pedagogies may offer educators unique insights to develop curriculum that facilitates trainees' social justice orientation. These approaches identify trainees as active, whole (e.g., intellectual and physical) and knowledgeable participants in their training, who have the right to engage critical inquiry and historical accuracy. As curricular approaches, liberation, critical, and embodied pedagogies have supported students in deepening their learning experiences and increasing their attunement to social issues (Goodman et al., 2015; LaMantia et al., 2016; Killian, & Floren, 2020). The purpose of this article is to explore the role of critical-liberatory frameworks to initiate exploration of social justice curriculum and training, to describe a course example of re-envisioning infusing social justice curriculum for counselor trainees, and to propose an innovative approach to social justice curriculum and training. For the purposes of this article, we define social justice curriculum and training approaches as those that emphasize the role of systemic and social inequities throughout the learning process, and facilitate growth opportunities to negotiate these social inequities through advocacy (Adams et al., 2010; Beer et al., 2012; Comas-Diaz & Rivera, 2020; Vera & Speight, 2003). Implications for developing curriculum and preparing future social justice counselors and psychologists are also included. To begin, we present a brief overview, based on available literature, of approaches to integrating social justice in counseling programs' curricula.

¹ Throughout the article the term *counseling programs* is used to describe education and training programs for counselors, mental health practitioners, and counseling psychologists.

Social Justice in Counseling Programs' Curricula

Trends in social justice education in counseling programs have reflected both innovation in conceptualizing social justice competencies and training models, and inherent growth edges in translating proposed competencies and training models into curricula. Much of the scholarship examining counseling programs' curricula focuses on multicultural counseling rather than a social justice perspective in counseling. Whereas multicultural counseling focuses on awareness, knowledge and skills that center individuals' life experiences and cultural values (Sue & Torino, 2005), social justice in counseling emphasizes purposeful attention to societal concerns, systems of power, and advocacy (Abe, 2020; Vera & Speight, 2003). Despite clear differences in foci, literature exploring social justice curriculum in counseling programs is limited. This gap in the literature may be attributed to the fact that many programs do not provide structured learning opportunities on how to engage social justice issues (Speight & Vera, 2008). Even in instances when programs integrate multicultural and social advocacy content across the counseling curriculum, it is an uncommon occurrence for social justice issues to be incorporated as a focal area across course requirements (Vera & Speight, 2003; Speight & Vera, 2008). Previous scholarship has also identified that courses dedicated to social justice content are uncommon. Singh and colleagues (2010) found that 85% of doctoral trainees in counseling psychology program had not taken a social justice focused course.

Given the limited number of social justice focused courses in counseling programs, it is not surprising that there are only a few practical illustrations of approaches to integrating social justice in counseling programs' curricula. Motulsky and colleagues (2014) put forth a collection of pedagogical strategies to infuse social justice content across the curriculum from including critical reflection about social issues in content heavy, technical courses to centering the voices of authors whose scholarship focuses on marginalized groups. These authors further emphasize the importance of framing curricula expectations for students and faculty within critical and liberation pedagogies. As a manner of enacting critical and liberation pedagogies to integrate social justice in counseling curricula, other scholars focus on using service-learning opportunities, practicum experiences, or other experiential methods to foster students' interaction with systems and marginalized populations (Ali et al., 2008; Burnes & Singh, 2010; Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018; Murray, et al., 2010; Sanabria & DeLorenzi, 2019; Toporek & McNally, 2006). These kinds of structured learning experiences similarly emphasize self-reflection, systems awareness, and consciousness raising to facilitate students' knowledge of social justice in clinical contexts.

Social advocacy has been another area of curricular focus among some counseling programs. Education and training programs emphasizing critical and experiential pedagogy have been found to have a positive impact on trainees' attitudes toward social justice advocacy (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018). Further, trainees' perceptions of their program as providing a safe holding environment to explore issues of power and oppression have been associated with their self-reported inclination to do social justice work (Beer et al., 2012). Faculty mentorship in attending to and exploring social justice issues has also been established as facilitative of trainees' engagement with social justice advocacy (Goodman et al., 2004). Nonetheless, other scholars have suggested that neither the quantity nor the quality of social justice training, as currently pedagogically executed, in counseling courses is necessarily indicative of trainees' investment in social justice-oriented practice (Na & Fietzer, 2020; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005). The combination of mixed findings and limited practical illustrations of social justice in counseling curriculum demonstrates the importance of continually building upon and exchanging knowledge in the field, heeding numerous calls to intentionally develop social justice curricula that cultivates professionals who are committed to social change.

Challenging Status Quo Curriculum: Liberation Pedagogy

To understand the dynamics of developing social justice curricula within counseling programs, we must first understand the consequences of status quo curriculum. Status quo curriculum is educational and learning

praxis that embeds Eurocentric educational practices, figures, and ideologies as the standard for teaching within higher education (Goodman et al., 2015; hooks, 1994). This kind of curriculum also preserves White supremacist ideology, utilizes course materials, such as textbooks, and, syllabi that center dominant narratives and reinforce interpersonal dynamics (e.g., teacher as expert and student as passive recipient of knowledge) within classrooms that uphold power imbalances (Goodman et al., 2015; Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994; Speight, 2000). Status quo curriculum mimics models of oppression through the erasure of contributions, perspectives and knowledge from scholars of Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other marginalized backgrounds (Goodman et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2020). Thus, trainees' lack of visibility to the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), queer, trans, immigrant, differently abled, and other marginalized communities may create barriers to some trainees seeing themselves as advocates and change agents (Bemak et al., 2011). Moreover, status quo curriculum limits the ability of instructors to model for counseling trainees' mechanisms for disrupting oppression narratives, which can otherwise be translated to future clinical practice, research, teaching, and professional service (Killan & Floren, 2019).

In direct response to status quo curriculum and the evolving needs of the communities that counseling professionals serve, counseling programs have integrated multiculturalism as a central competency (Arrendondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992). In recent years, this integration has extended to social justice and social advocacy (ACA Advocacy, 2010; APA Multicultural Guidelines, 2003). The movement toward social justice and advocacy as a competency for counseling professionals stems from innovative scholarship produced by ACA (e.g., Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development) and the, APA Taskforce on the Implementation of Multicultural Guidelines. The connection between persistent forces of oppression and the psychological consequences of navigating daily forms of compounded oppression reinforced the extension of social justice training and competency within counseling and counseling psychology (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020; Goodman et al., 2004; MSJCC, 2016; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Consequently, counseling and psychology professionals are expected to move outside the silos of therapeutic office in creating social change, and engage within community, organizations and legislative entities to effect change in communities psychologically impacted by intersectional forms of injustice (ACA Advocacy Competencies, 2016). Thus, counseling training programs are responsible for preparing counseling trainees to *do* social justice work. This preparation begins with curriculum development. Like other scholars (Crethar et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2004; Ratts et al., 2016), we contend that liberation and critical pedagogies are essential to enacting social justice learning. In the next section, we overview critical history and liberation ideology as pedagogical approaches relevant for counseling education and training programs.

As noted, the history of counseling and psychology has systematically omitted the contributions and perspectives of numerous marginalized groups. The area of pedagogical practice that examines these gaps in the field's canon is that of critical history. Harris (2009) discusses critical history as purposeful critique and unlearning of revisionist history. Critical history embeds sociocultural and historical contextual details in the retelling of counseling and psychology historical narratives, thus transforming taken for granted history to reflect the complexity of oppression and liberation within the counseling and psychology fields. Critical history provides a framework for critical inquiry in counseling and psychological education, training, and practice. The critical history lens too compliments liberation pedagogy (described in the next section) by emphasizing learners as active within their own educational experiences and seeking to problematize status quo ideologies.

Also challenging status quo ideologies, liberation pedagogy is rooted in the works of Ignacio Martin-Baro (1994), Maritza Montero (2009) and Paulo Freire (1972) and others such as W.E.B DuBois and Frantz Fanon (as cited in Burton & Guzzo, 2020). Foundationally, liberation pedagogy centers engagement with and alongside oppressed communities to facilitate the process of unlearning oppressive imagery, stereotypes, and false narratives of marginalized communities by recovering historical memory and deideologizing daily

experiences (Tate et al., 2013). Liberation scholars further emphasize the significance of relearning and reclaiming marginalized community's cultural strengths, values, and stories of resistance (Martin-Baro, 1994; Montero, 2009). Taken together this approach to learning engages social action through a process Freire (1968) and Martin-Baro, (1994) describe as understanding issues from the standpoint of the oppressed community (i.e., problematization), becoming conscious of the lived reality of oppressed people (i.e., conscientization), and utilizing that awareness to engage in social action (i.e., praxis). Contemporary theorizing and evaluation of liberation psychology or liberation psychologies (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) emphasizes practice guidelines that calls counseling and psychology professionals to commit to reconceptualizing training and practice centered through the lens of the oppressed. In their review of liberation psychology, Burton and Guzzo (2020) highlight the importance of embracing training models and professional practices that require critically "reading the world" (Freire, 1972), attending to sociopolitical, cultural, and economic circumstances relevant for marginalized people groups. These scholars further contend that advancing liberation theory through practice requires professionals to engage the *talking about* and *doing* of liberation work.

To Burton and Guzzo's (2020) point, implementing liberation pedagogy in counseling training programs relies on co-constructing learning communities that actively engage in critical inquiry, reflection, and transformation at the individual, cultural, and institutional level (Goodman et al., 2015; Tate et al., 2013). This necessarily means that trainees are provided learning opportunities in which they can identify and, at times, challenge their ideological positioning to center the concerns of marginalized populations and transform counseling practice. Within counseling curriculum and development, liberation pedagogy can be cultivated through critical inquiry into the history of counseling and psychology, inclusion of various perspectives in course content, and experiential class activities that encourage learners to engage themselves as whole beings. Broadening exposure to the voices of those relegated to the margins of counseling curricula prompt development towards a comprehensive understanding and practice of social justice (Field et al., 2019).

A Social Justice Course Example

As discussed in the previous section, preparing counseling and psychology trainees to be culturally competent, social-justice oriented practitioners require a paradigm shift from status quo training approaches to more creative, reflective training approaches (Brady-Amoon, 2012; Chung & Bemak, 2012; Murray et al., 2010; Motulsky et al., 2014; Sanabria & DeLorenzi, 2019). Based on our experiences co-teaching (first author instructor of record and second author graduate teaching assistant) mental health counseling trainees at a large research institution in the southeastern region of the United States in a 60-credit hour license-eligible master's program, we describe a two-course sequence as an example of integrating social justice into counseling trainees learning experiences. We briefly describe the first course as a lead into a more detailed description of the second course which focuses on enacting social justice curriculum, the primary aim of this article. The two-course sequence description is then further contextualized with instructors' reflections about teaching and learning in the social justice course. Among the reasons this course sequence differs from a more commonly used approaches to teaching social justice in counseling programs is threefold. The courses are designed and taught in a linked consecutive course sequence, multicultural counseling followed by social justice in counseling. Many of the concepts examined at the end of the multicultural counseling course set the stage for the beginning of the social justice course. Additionally, students are encouraged to engage in reflection on course concepts with specific attention to historical narratives or a critical history approach. In contrast to course materials that center dominant narratives, readings and related course media are drawn not only from psychology but also disciplines and frames such as ethnic studies, disability studies, and queer critical theory to support trainees' breadth and depth of knowledge. Moreover, trainees are exposed to population specific scholarly journals and professional organizations, podcasts, television shows and the like to support their ability to engage critical

reflection. Finally, through specific practice with systems level analysis and attention to somatic experiencing, students are provided an opportunity to deepen their awareness of social justice topics, how they are affected by them, and how these topics influence the lives of the individuals with whom they will interact professionally.

Two-course Sequence

Like most master's programs in counseling across the United States, the first course in the two-course sequence we describe, is a three-credit hour multicultural counseling course offered in the fall semester, "Cross-Cultural Counseling". This course is designed to facilitate students' awareness, knowledge, and skills in counseling practice with diverse populations and engaging diverse perspectives. The course is conceptualized in three units that focus broadly on foundational concepts in multicultural counseling, cultural analysis, and culturally responsive care practices. From the outset of the course, trainees examine the origins of counseling through a critical history lens, attending to narratives that have been omitted and overlooked as well as considering how such revisions or omissions in the field influence the practice area that we understand contemporarily as multicultural counseling. Having the backdrop of critical history, trainees proceed through the course engaging readings, didactic instruction, and experiential activities. There is specific focus on utilizing course materials that centers the narratives of marginalized group members' experiences and focus on building intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness to construct a knowledge base that facilitates skill development. Trainees engage ongoing reflective practice and are called to attend to how they move through the world. For example, students complete reflection assignments designed to foster their awareness of how sociopolitical histories influence concepts explored in class. They may respond to prompts such as what social and/or historical events shape the study of a particular concept or their personal connection to a concept. In contrast to a status quo curricular approach, trainees are provided opportunities to learn about and challenge perspectives presented by the authors they read. For example, trainees are encouraged to explore the narratives of the authors of assigned readings to better understand the positionality of the individuals from whom they are learning and explore how various authors positions have changed over time in connection with social and political evolutions. The goal of these instructional activities is to support trainees' exploration of their social identities, those with social identities different from their own, and the impact they may have on clients, peers, and others. Though a wide range of planned topics are explored from ethnocentric monoculturalism to broaching culture in dialogue to racial trauma healing models, the course ends with a call for advocacy in counseling. Trainees are introduced to the counselor-advocate-scholar model (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Ratts & Pedersen, 2014), a framework in which the authors describe the shifting nature of counselors' roles in clinical practice depending upon the needs of the client. This framework emphasizes counselors as change agents who have power to help clients negotiate systemic barriers (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Thus, this course serves as a bridge into the next course, translating the processes of intrapersonal- and interpersonal-focused discovery to systems-focused discovery.

The second required course is "Social Justice in Counseling". This course is also a three-credit hour course offered in the spring semester, and in many ways is a unique part of trainees' curriculum as stand-alone social justice courses in counseling training programs are rare (Singh et al., 2010). The first goal of this course is to introduce trainees to how systems impact individuals' and groups' lived experiences and life chances. Using critical history and liberation pedagogies, the course focuses explicitly on issues of equity, power, oppression, and privilege. Like the first course in the sequence, trainees are called to use their knowledge of history both in counseling and more broadly to consider the role that systems play in shaping people's lives including their own life. This engagement with critical history draws attention to reductionistic historical narratives that serve to uphold social inequity and deny trainees active participation in their own educational process as critical thinkers. Simplistic or acritical history narratives limit trainees' capacity to discern the "contested nature of all ideas as well as past struggles that have changed the field (Harris, 2009, p. 33)." As such a key component of this

course is advance counseling trainees' knowledge and skill in responding to the question, *how has counseling and psychology changed and what made those changes possible?* This question demonstrates a deviation from status quo curriculum by emphasizing a critical examination of historical narratives. We view this question as central to examining power and oppression and as consistent with the notion of critical inquiry (Freire, 1972) in liberation pedagogy. To support trainees in responding to this question, course activities focus on examining socialization messages regarding their identities and social locations. As trainees engage this exploration process of who they are as social beings, they are encouraged to attend to their whole experience including bodily and somatic sensations (e.g., rapid heartbeat, holding the breath, stomach discomfort), relational moments (e.g., connection and disconnection), and intellectual curiosity or defensiveness. As a specific example, trainees are assigned the task of completing a digital scrapbook page that explores their salient social identities and the social location of those identities. Trainees additionally may write about what they feel in their bodies when unpacking their relationship to power and reflecting on their somatic experiences as informational. Menakem (2017) highlights the importance of attending to one's body in learning about the self and the experiences of others to promote openness, compassion, and growth. Hence, the digital scrapbook assignment aims to both support trainees' knowledge of where their identities may be located within systems of power and their ability to attend to the "self" as an instrument of information, practices important for cultivating sensitivity to social injustice and beginning to develop advocacy skills.

As trainees become more attuned to their role in systems and understand their potential power in the counseling role, the course transitions to a focus on specific social justice issues—examining a range of isms and phobias like sexism, racism, ableism, transphobia, xenophobia and other topics. Trainees engage in learning opportunities to facilitate critical reflective practice and inquiry (e.g., journals, responses to media, in-class activities such curating living museums, etc.) with the aim of applying what they have learned about themselves and from the entire learning community to addressing social justice issues as counseling trainees in real world contexts. Thus, a second goal of this course is to encourage trainees to "try on" the *counselor as advocate* role, that they were initially introduced in the Cross-Cultural Counseling course through a variably offered, tailored community service-learning experience named by the first author as C³ (Counselors-in-training Connecting through Community). Recognizing that the counselor as advocate is a role that develops over time and continually evolves with experience, developing advocacy skills and engaging advocacy practice is a process that is well-facilitated by community service-learning. Community service-learning reflects a curricular strategy that provides firsthand, in-vivo experiences of connecting trainees with populations who have been systematically marginalized (Ali et al., 2008; Burnes & Singh, 2010; Goodman et al., 2004; Toporek & McNally, 2006), and it has been demonstrated to facilitate trainees' integration of social justice concepts (Murray et al., 2010).

Trainees are introduced to the notion of community-based service learning and learn of their community partner at the beginning of the Social Justice in Counseling course. Thus, initial exploration of course concepts is also discussed with intentional focus on the needs of trainees' community partners. This focus provides trainees the opportunity to practice exploring the tangible influence of critical history narratives, social identities, and social location relevant to their community partners. For example, prior to establishing contact with their community partners, trainees are tasked with completing a pre-engagement plan assignment. The points of inquiry for this assignment were informed by aspects of liberation psychology including understanding the perspective of marginalized communities and identifying community-specific narratives and strengths. To complete this assignment, trainees conduct in depth research to understand the history of the organization and how the organization's existence has been influenced by social systems and legislative actions that may impact the provision of services to the organization's target population. Trainees also examine narratives of strength and resistance relevant to the organization and/or its constituents. This process of pre-engagement is

an important aspect of advocacy, reflecting the counseling trainees' attention broader systems level issues that may shape one's role as an advocate (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). Once trainees start to learn about their community partner(s), they begin to assess how they can operate in an advocate role via direct consultation with their community partners. Over the course of several weeks, trainees and community partners collaborate to craft a project that advances the mission of the community partner. This aspect of trainees' interaction with their community partners is directly connected to conscientization as trainees become increasingly aware of the realities of their community partners. Through intentional and collaborative engagements with community partners trainees' projects have included developing resource guides, promotional materials, event planning, and mental health awareness campaigns. Trainees' conceptualization of their projects with their community partners is also guided, in part, by conducting a power, oppression, privilege (P.O.P.) analysis, which allows trainees to connect course concepts with their real-world observations of how power, privilege, and oppression directly impact community-based organizations and the people they serve.

Critical reflection is also integral to the C³ experience for trainees. Ash and Clayton (2009) suggested that critical reflection in service-learning aims to foster personal growth, facilitate deepened engagement with academic learning, and improve capacity for change agency. These authors further contend that *all* aspects of service-learning are opportunities for critical reflection. As such, trainees complete prompt-specific critical reflection journal entries and collaborative assignments. Trainees detail their cognitive, affective, behavioral, and/or somatic responses to prompts like, when you learned you were assigned to "X" as a community partner, what was your response? Describe your understanding of service and identify what feelings and somatic sensations engaging in service bring up for you. What assumptions and expectations are you bringing to this service-learning experience? How has your knowledge about social injustice as it relates to this population changed given your work with "X" community partner? This critical reflection aims to reinforce trainees' integration of course concepts with their exploration of their roles as advocates. The C³ experience culminates with presentations for community partners and other community stakeholders (e.g., work products), and a letter written to future trainees detailing general reflections about the experience, lessons learned, and hopes for future trainees engaged in C³. The letter along with all C³ work products creates a portfolio specific to each service-learning community partner that is preserved by the first author for future trainees who may decide to advance the project or want to learn about how others engaged advocacy in working with their community partners.

Instructors' Reflections

As scholars of color engaged in critical and social justice focused practice, we were acutely aware of the potentially harmful nature of status quo curriculum on the development of counselor trainees' professional identity. Through our collaborative and reflective conversations, we acknowledged how power, oppression, and privilege may "show up" in counseling curriculum. We particularly attended to how exclusion, elitism, and power imbalances may pervade the social justice course, and the ways in which we, as members of the academe, may reinforce notions of injustice in the teaching and learning process. It was through this intentional focus on the learning environment and our roles in the environment that allowed us to engage the fullness (e.g., cognitive, affective, behavioral, and somatic awareness) of what we perceive it means to learn about and do social justice-oriented practice. As such, we used our knowledge of and connection to critical and liberation ideologies to help shape engagement with all aspects of the course. We aimed to create opportunities for students to engage in self-work (i.e., critical awareness and consciousness) and systems work (e.g., C³ community partners). We entered the course acknowledging that we are all learners, attending to notions of power and explored with our trainees their experience of learning about social justice with two Black womxn as co-instructors. We further processed our learning community interactions with one another acknowledging our own areas of growth, experiences of vulnerability, and moments of deepened awareness.

In reflection on the goals and outcomes of this course, particularly the C³ experience, we discussed a vision beyond that of institutional and professional obligations of trainees to learn foundational skills, rather we focused on cultivating opportunities for trainees to engage in the being and becoming of social justice work. Through trainees' involvement with community partners and the course content broadly, we observed trainees experience the challenges inherent in doing systems work such as lack of resources, time and institutional barriers; we listened to trainees narrate experiences of unlearning and/or relearning about how power and oppression operates, and we witnessed trainees question dominant narratives, some for the first time. It is from these reflections, our engagement in the teaching and learning process, and feedback from our learning community that we began exploring how to describe a curricular strategy that fosters the kind wholeness in learning social justice we observed in our teaching experience.

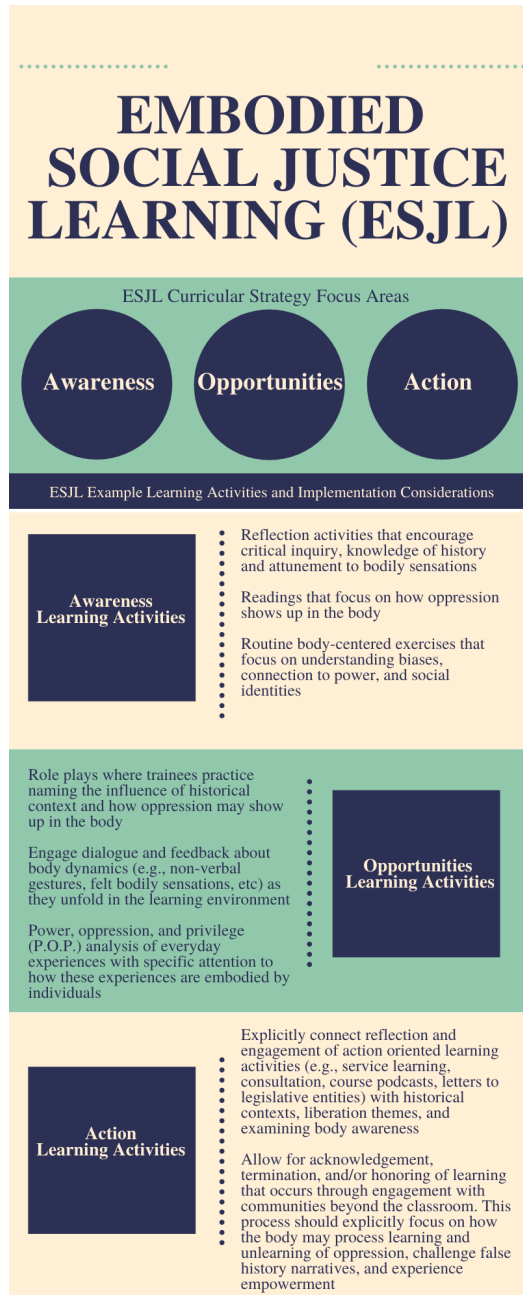
A Curricular Strategy: Embodied Social Justice Learning

Integrating our observations from the Social Justice in Counseling course with liberation and critical history frameworks, we propose training activities that facilitate *embodied social justice learning* (ESJL) are central to trainees knowing the *what and how* (Arthur et al., 2009) of social justice work. We locate our understanding of ESJL in an interdisciplinary context drawing from theory in higher education and various specialties in psychology, joining a growing number of scholars who emphasize the importance of “bodies as agents of knowledge production” (Wilcox, 2009 p. 105). Perry and Medina (2011) contend that bodies reflect multifaceted ways of being and knowing that are socially and contextually influenced. This perspective aligns well with liberation and critical pedagogies that emphasize awareness of the physical and social self in relation to systems of power, oppression, and privilege (Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015). This too is consistent with Johnson's (2014) discussion of the cycle of embodied critical transformation that describes the process of helping individuals explore how oppression is experienced in and through the body. By attending to intellectually- and body- based experiences of how individuals connect with marginalization-domination, oppressed-oppressor identities, or disadvantage-advantage dynamics, ESJL provides opportunities for trainees to develop skills in dialogue and unified action (Freire, 1972) relevant for social justice-oriented counseling.

Embodied learning may open the door to exploring a range of social justice concerns as trainees become more aware of themselves and others' experiences, exercising cognitive and body-centered capacities for knowing and being. In a qualitative investigation, Johnson and colleagues (2018) found that experiences of oppression, such as microaggressions, uniquely impact the way people feel and express themselves in their bodies. Because so much of how oppression is communicated is non-verbal (Johnson, 2014) or reflective of subtle slights as is the case with microaggressions (Johnson et al., 2018), it is increasingly important that social justice curriculum in counseling programs attend to embodiments. By learning to become aware of and communicate about personal and interpersonal intellectual- and body-based experiences, trainees are required to not only understand domain concepts but also be able to discuss and feel them in the context of their (and others') day-to-day lived experiences as manifested in the body. The goal of ESJL, thus, is to enhance counseling programs' training activities or curricular approaches to facilitate “thoughtful awareness about [how] body, space, and social context” (Nguyen & Larson, 2015, p. 332) are relevant for social justice-oriented counseling practice. Translating social justice themes into curricula requires innovative, non-traditional teaching methods (Flores et al., 2014; Gazzola et al., 2018; Motulsky et al., 2014) to directly challenge status quo, colonized pedagogical approaches (Brady-Amoon et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2015). ESJL may be conceptualized as a non-traditional approach as it calls trainees and educators to engage learning and teaching as active participant-observers (on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels) and curators of knowledge rather than as passive receivers of knowledge to be applied in the future (Chung & Bemak, 2012). As a curricular approach, we suggest that ESJL strategies

focus on three areas: a) awareness, b) opportunities, and c) action. These areas are described below and Figure 1 provides examples and considerations for implementing an ESJL curricular strategy.

Figure 1. *Embodied social justice learning areas, curricular examples, and considerations*



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ESJL *awareness* constitutes identifying and designing course content that fosters trainees' attention to social justice concerns as they are historically and contemporarily grounded, and the complexity of these concerns in recognition of the mind-body dynamics. These dynamics of an individual or a group have been

discussed as attending to thinking, feeling, relating, and physically experiencing simultaneously (Generative Somatics, 2014). Awareness in this sense also constitutes including content that acknowledges the complex interplay of these ways of being and introducing trainees to language and other means of expression (e.g., imagery, music, digital media) that allows for both intellectual and body-based awareness. Readings and other course content to facilitate ESJL awareness should intentionally include a normative focus on one's experience of the body as a source of knowledge. The body as a source of knowledge may lend to deepened trainee insights (Johnson et al., 2018) regarding awareness of their (and others') social location, and experiences of power, oppression, and privilege.

Learning opportunities is another strategy area associated with ESJL. There are many opportunities during counseling trainees' education and training journeys to engage social justice practice. However, these opportunities must be made readily available and strategically designed to support trainees' development. From an embodied learning perspective, curricular activities may focus on helping trainees learn to acknowledge and prepare to respond to social justice issues present in everyday life, including those present in their home training programs. In developing such opportunities, trainees should be encouraged to reflect upon how they are being impacted by a particular social justice issue as well as how they may be impacting others, again emphasizing body awareness in this reflection. "Part of the task of learning from [oppression narratives and social justice issues] must be becoming more attuned to nonverbal [and sensory] components of our everyday interactions with others – to how we read (and are being read by) others on a body level" (Johnson, 2014, p. 84). This too includes centering opportunities to examine how trainees may feel discomfort in their bodies when examining various social justice topics, and consideration for how the intellectual and body-based interactions may shape trainees' responses to key stakeholders such as instructors, peers, clients, and supervisors. For example, instructors may invite trainees to take a moment of pause to attend to their thoughts and related feelings in their bodies as they learn about narratives different from their own. Specific instructor inquiries may focus on noticeable changes in body temperature, breathing patterns, and body movements. With practice, this kind of attending may be informational as trainees interact with others and integrate greater self-awareness.

Action is the final ESJL curricular strategy area, and it constitutes curricular activities that encourage trainees' ability to do social justice-informed counseling. We contend that trainees need in-vivo or experiential learning activities as these experiences, as previously discussed, have been demonstrated to enhance trainees' social justice practice orientation (Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018; Toporek & Worthington, 2014). These activities may be designed such that trainees are not only attentive to their intellectual and body-based experiences but also to the experiences of those with whom they are interacting. The goal of curricular activities that comprise action are to lay the groundwork for sustained investment in social justice-oriented practice. This sustained shift or embodied transformation reflects a manner of engaging with the world that is more attuned to how social justice concerns holistically impact the self and others (Johnson, 2014, Generative Somatics, 2014).

Conclusion

In developing counseling curriculum for trainees, an embodied social justice learning approach to counseling training calls educators to exercise intentionality and consideration for the whole self when designing and curating curriculum. The opportunity to reflect on our experiences of engaging critical and liberation pedagogies as co-instructors builds upon previous literature concerning social justice learning and training within counseling programs (Crethar, et al., 2008; Edwards et al., 2017; Steele, 2008). Thus, we add to scholarship serving to disrupt status quo curriculum through grounding counseling and psychology

curriculum development and in pedagogies that force us to decolonize our course design, content, and instructional implementation, informing a more agential counseling training experience. To conclude, we reiterate key points to support the integration of social justice in counseling programs' curricula and broader training culture.

- *Integrate critical and liberation pedagogies and frameworks in social justice training.* Counseling instructors expand trainees' knowledge and understanding of social issues and advocacy praxis through the introduction of critical pedagogies from various disciplines and scholars. This work further extends to helping individuals explore how their learning is experienced in and through their bodies, attending specifically to sensations connected to specific concepts or course material. The introduction of critical pedagogies and frameworks, in concert with reflective inquiry and dialogue builds a foundation for both social consciousness and action for counseling and psychology trainees.
- *Foster active community learning spaces.* In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) implores instructors to set up collaborative educational learning communities that transgress dominant structures of education. Fostering a learning environment requires a co-construction of community guidelines, trust and willingness to embrace the whole individual from their contextual backgrounds and experiences. This too includes providing trainees' opportunities to practice attending to their somatic experiences as informational and growth-fostering. It is within our learning communities that we model for trainees the dynamic of humanity as invested in liberation and freedom which likely fosters an investment in social action and transformation.
- *Integrate ESJL beyond the classroom.* In a study by Bemak et al., (2011) the integration of multicultural social justice ideology and practice within a counseling program reflected a transformation among counseling faculty and the department. True embodiment of a pedagogical and cultural shift toward centering social justice learning, requires equal commitment to critical reflection, somatic awareness, and action by all members of the community. Trainees often observe and model their faculty and are professionally socialized within their departments. As such embodiments of social justice teaching and learning are neither unidirectional nor one dimensional, this work requires all dynamics to shift away from status quo dominant-subordinate narratives to narratives of empowerment, agency, and inclusion.

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