

Applications in Social Justice Counselor Training: Classroom Without Walls

FRED BEMAK AND RITA CHI-YING CHUNG

♦ ♦ ♦

The article addresses an innovative approach to promote social justice counseling and advocacy training in graduate counseling programs. The classroom without walls concept involves innovative counseling practicums and field-based experiences, supervision, and mentoring that go beyond the walls of traditional classrooms to help national and international graduate counseling programs more effectively incorporate social justice pedagogy to build a more humanistic, equitable, just, and harmonious society.

♦ ♦ ♦

The counseling profession has been challenged to address social justice and advocacy issues in counselor education training programs (Bemak & Chung, 2005, 2007, 2008b; D'Andrea, 2002; D'Andrea, Foster, & Pedersen, 2008; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010). Growing interest in these areas is reflected in the significant increase in workshops and presentations made on social justice counseling and advocacy issues at professional conventions and conferences as well as in the significant increase in publications and Internet resources on these topics. As a result of the increasing interest in social justice issues in the mental health professions, the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) established task forces and committees that are designed to address a broad range of topics in this area. All of this activity validates the suggestion that the social justice counseling and advocacy movement represents the *fifth force* in the mental health professions (Ratts, D'Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004).

Despite an expressed need for practitioners to develop competencies as social justice counselors and advocates, traditional counseling training programs have not adequately prepared graduate students to work effectively in these areas. To do effective social justice work, counselors must have the knowledge and skills to address systemic social injustices that have an adverse impact on the lives of millions of people in contemporary society (Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, & Hof, 2008).

Only a handful of counselor education programs have developed mission statements and program curricula that address these issues (Talleyrand,

Fred Bemak and Rita Chi-Ying Chung, Counseling and Development Program, George Mason University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Fred Bemak, Counseling and Development Program, College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, MSN 4B3, Fairfax, VA 22030 (e-mail: fbemak@gmu.edu).

© 2011 by the American Counseling Association. All rights reserved.

Chung, & Bemak, 2006). Frequently, issues of social justice counseling and advocacy are addressed through separate classes or events (e.g., the annual social justice conference hosted by the Counseling Psychology Department at the University of Wisconsin), rather than having these issues substantially infused throughout counselor education training programs (Toporek & McNally, 2006).

George Mason University's (GMU) counseling and development master's and doctoral training programs are examples of professional development endeavors that have systematically infused social justice counseling and advocacy concepts, research findings, and practice throughout the entire curriculum. A major component of these endeavors is the implementation of the *classroom without walls* concept. Classroom without walls is a unique way of providing social justice counseling and advocacy training through student participation in innovative field-based experiences where students have opportunities to apply what is learned in the classroom in real-world settings. We have coined the term *classroom without walls* to denote the educational pedagogy that best describes the social justice and advocacy field-based training experiences that constitute this educational initiative.

Fundamentally speaking, the classroom without walls concept is grounded in humanistic principles that affirm clients' dignity and self-worth as well as their potential to realize new and untapped aspects of their human potential. With the latter principle in mind, humanistic counselors implement a broad range of helping strategies that are intentionally aimed at fostering healthy human development. Social justice counseling and advocacy interventions extend many traditional humanistic helping strategies as counselors strive to assist clients in realizing their full potential for health and well-being by addressing those ecological, historical, and cultural factors that enhance or inhibit clients' growth.

In this article, we describe various classroom without walls activities that were implemented by faculty members and students in the GMU Counseling and Development Program. The aim of the article is not to promote the GMU program, but to provide readers with creative and innovative ideas regarding some of the ways to implement social justice counseling and advocacy training into their programs by using the classroom without walls projects as prototypes. To present a framework for understanding how to incorporate such projects into graduate counselor training, we begin with a brief description of the development of the GMU counseling program's social justice mission statement.

We continue by explaining how the mission statement is integrated into the entire graduate training curriculum. We proceed by illustrating how various classroom without walls training activities are used in different settings. Finally, we discuss recommendations for implementing the classroom without walls model in other field-based situations. A detailed description of the evolution of the GMU program can be found elsewhere (Bemak & Chung, 2007; Talleyrand et al., 2006).

GMU'S SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNSELING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The development of GMU's Counseling and Development Program mission statement was influenced by multiple factors. These included the faculty members' knowledge of the multicultural, social justice, and advocacy literature; the advancement of technology; globalization; faculty experiences; and an examination of counselors' efficacy in a continuously changing and challenging world (Talleyrand et al., 2006).

The GMU faculty members' strong commitment to social justice and multicultural work resulted in the development of a new mission statement that illuminated social justice as the philosophical cornerstone of the program. The aim of a social justice counseling and advocacy mission for the program was twofold: (a) to educate counselor trainees to be cognizant of their client from a holistic approach that included the client's historical, cultural, psychosocial, sociopolitical, economic, physical, ecological, and spiritual well-being (Talleyrand et al., 2006) and (b) to move students from an intellectual understanding of social justice to becoming action-oriented, proactive, skilled advocates and change agents prepared to address social inequities on both individual and systematic levels (Bemak & Chung, 2007).

After a series of faculty retreats that took place over a period of a year, a mission statement that incorporated social justice as a core value in the program was developed. Excerpts of this mission statement follow:

The program strives for national and international excellence in implementing a counseling perspective which provides a foundation in basic counseling skills and focuses on social justice, multiculturalism, international, advocacy and leadership. It is our belief that a global perspective on development across the life span, and an understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice are integral to the preparation of professional counselors, requiring that professional counselors are prepared to assume leadership roles, be proactive change agents and become advocates for social, economic and political justice. (GMU, Counseling and Development Program, n.d., Mission Statement section)

With the program's mission statement clearly defining social justice and advocacy as a core value, the faculty proceeded to examine each course in the program to assess how the mission was infused in the training curriculum. Based on faculty assessment and student feedback, 90% of the curriculum for both master's- and doctoral-level courses was redesigned to incorporate content and assignments related to social justice counseling and advocacy issues (Bemak & Chung, 2007).

For example, the Counseling Foundations course was modified to inculcate social justice values as being fundamental to the counselor's identity and role as social justice advocate. The Advanced Human Growth and Development course was revised to help students view life span development from a multicultural social justice perspective. The Diagnosis course was redesigned to emphasize cultural biases in diagnoses. Practicum and

internship courses were revamped to include skill development in social justice counseling, along with practice in advocacy and social justice interventions that were supported by data-driven accountability projects. A new required course that specifically focuses on social justice counseling and advocacy issues was added to the total curriculum. This was done to underscore the program mission and complement the required multicultural counseling class that was already an existing part of GMU's master's and doctoral training curriculum.

In addition to redesigning many of the courses in the master's and doctoral programs, the faculty acknowledged the need to make changes in the department's admissions policies to reflect greater consistency with the programs' central value of social justice. In doing so, the faculty concluded that previous admissions policies had been based on traditional Western biases that emphasized test scores and grade point averages rather than a holistic perspective that took into account applicants' life experiences as well as their attitude and openness toward multiculturalism and social justice issues.

Modifying the admissions policies to reflect a greater commitment to the previously stated values and perspectives led to a significant change in the student population. This change was characterized by admitting students who were more open and committed to social justice values (Bemak & Chung, 2007). Collectively, these structural programmatic changes helped prepare the GMU counseling programs for even more innovative approaches to students' professional growth, including the development and implementation of the classroom without walls concept.

CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS: SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNSELING AND ADVOCACY PROJECTS

Classroom without walls is a unique method to prepare social justice counseling and advocacy practitioners. The GMU graduate counseling courses were expanded to include innovative field-based learning experiences that went beyond traditional classroom-based education. To illustrate how the classroom without walls concept was used in the GMU counselor training program, a sampling of student field-based activities are discussed in the following section. This includes providing a description of the Counselors Without Borders (CWB) program and related partnership projects organized with various professional organizations and community agencies.

CWB Program and Related Projects

The CWB organization was established by the first author to provide counseling support in postdisaster situations through faculty-supervised teams of graduate students. The CWB program provides postdisaster counseling to underserved populations that do not receive timely services and resources

from federal, state, and private agencies in culturally competent ways. CWB provides a unique opportunity for counseling students to apply what they learn in classroom settings to real-life situations by implementing social justice counseling and advocacy interventions among culturally different people in need. To date, the CWB team has implemented three classroom without walls projects in two postdisaster situations in the United States and one in Haiti.

In November 2005, 3 months after Hurricane Katrina, the first CWB team of faculty and students worked in six sites along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The CWB team provided a broad range of counseling and support services among individuals in low-income and ethnically diverse communities where the availability of postcrisis counseling and support services was scarce (Bemak & Chung, 2008a).

The second CWB intervention was implemented in November 2007, immediately following the San Diego wildfires that destroyed many homes in that area. In this CWB endeavor, another team of students and faculty members provided similar postdisaster counseling, support, and advocacy services to Latino migrant communities and American Indian reservations that were adversely affected by the destruction of the wildfires.

The third CWB experience took place in Haiti in April 2010, 3 months after a major earthquake devastated that nation. Again, participants who volunteered for this project provided training, counseling, and support services for many persons traumatized by a natural disaster that resulted in unprecedented levels of death, destruction, and human suffering among the people of Haiti and established a base for future CWB student teams to work in Haiti.

In each of the three CWB projects just described, the first author arranged, in advance, invitations to the respective communities where the three classroom without walls projects took place. Partnerships were also established beforehand with various local, regional, state, and national mental health associations, agencies, and organizations as well as international humanitarian aid organizations.

In the case of the project held at the American Indian reservations in the San Diego area, permission to work at those locations was granted by the Council of Elders. Also, before working with youngsters who were enrolled in the San Diego County Public School system, the first author made advance arrangements with the San Diego Superintendent's Office of Education to gain permission to have GMU faculty members and students participating in the classroom without walls endeavors work with individuals enrolled in Migrant Education Program Region IX and Head Start programs.

Similarly, on the Gulf Coast, the first author made arrangements to have the CWB project hosted by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, the Mississippi Licensed Professional Counselors Association, and the Mississippi Psychological Association. The CWB visit to Haiti was planned by an international nongovernmental organization, Partners of the Americas,

and funded by the United States Agency for International Development. Each of the organizations previously listed was contacted in advance and helped to identify disenfranchised, poor, and/or ethnic minority communities that had received minimal or no resources and services that were necessary to address the mental health needs of persons residing in these postdisaster areas.

Student training, supervision, and mentoring. Prior to the deployment of the graduate counseling students participating in these projects, we provided intensive training that familiarized the students with the types of intervention strategies that would be used when working with persons traumatized by the destructive impact of the natural disasters just discussed. The strategies to be used in this regard were based on the Disaster Cross-Cultural Counseling Model (DCCC; Bemak & Chung, 2007, 2011). The DCCC provided the students with a theoretical counseling, advocacy, and support services framework that they used when working with people traumatized by the destruction and misery caused by Hurricane Katrina and the San Diego wildfires. This model focuses on ways that counselors can implement, in a culturally competent manner, social justice counseling and advocacy principles among persons surviving in the wake of these two natural catastrophes.

Working in postdisaster situations is highly demanding and requires intensive supervision and mentoring. When actually deployed to the areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina and the San Diego wildfires, students and faculty members provided a variety of postdisaster counseling, advocacy, and support services at each site for 9 to 10 hours per day. The direct provision of these services was followed by 2 to 3 hours of supervision with us each night.

Students were confronted with the aftermath of the disasters and the survivors' profound loss and grief. At the same time, students simultaneously experienced firsthand the disparities and inequities of the response services provided to rich and poor communities and White and ethnic minority communities. For example, in Mississippi, the lack of services in poor and ethnic minority communities hit hard by Hurricane Katrina intensified the already high racial tensions in the area. These tensions were exacerbated by widespread rumors. A common rumor that was widely spread among many survivors of color was the assertion that White people were being *given all* the food and water. On the other hand, many White survivors believed in the rumor that was characterized by the avowal that African Americans, Latinos, and Vietnamese were *taking all* the food and water.

In San Diego, signs in English and Spanish gave very different messages as well. The signs in English read, "Go to the FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] sites in your community." However, other signs written in Spanish read, "No food or water here." Situations such as these exposed counseling students participating in the classroom without walls projects to psychological, social, cultural, historical, and sociopolitical injustices that many of them had not experienced previously in their lives.

Subsequently, counseling sessions with survivors of these disasters did not just include addressing issues related to the survivors' coping with loss, death, trauma, and grief but involved discussions about their experiences of discrimination, inequality, and injustice. These social justice counseling experiences resulted in group supervision meetings that addressed students' strong personal reactions to witnessing social inequities and disparities and also explored the types of counseling and advocacy services that would effectively address the broad range of needs manifested by the survivors of Hurricane Katrina and the San Diego wildfires. Through classroom without walls field experiences, students rapidly became aware of the complex realities of inequality and discrimination and the critical need to effectively address these issues in helping situations.

Modeling social justice advocacy strategies. Another notable challenge that emerged during classroom without walls postdisaster interventions was students' feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and a sense of professional paralysis that took root as they listened to clients' stories of despair. It was critical to address these feelings in supervision, while simultaneously describing the social justice advocacy work that the supervisor and other faculty members had done behind the scenes with state and federal officials.

Sharing information about the concrete ways that the supervisor and faculty members effectively advocated to have many of the organizations and agencies described earlier in this article more effectively meet the disaster survivors' needs enabled many graduate counseling students participating in this classroom without walls project to develop an alternative perspective on the hopelessness, helplessness, and professional paralysis they initially experienced when working on these projects. Armed with this newfound information, students were able to better understand how such institutional advocacy efforts were necessary to support the survivors' continuing needs after the project ended. Having the students share this information with the disaster survivors was also very important because it helped to instill a realistic sense of hopefulness that additional resources would continue to be made available as a result of the supervisor's and faculty members social justice advocacy efforts.

Another example of one type of advocacy service that was implemented by the first author and later discussed with the students participating in the classroom without walls project in Mississippi occurred during a group supervision meeting with that group of students. In this supervision meeting, the first author described the types of advocacy skills he used in meetings with a regional mental health team that was responsible for planning and coordinating post-Katrina services for the Gulf Coast. As a participant in these meetings, the first author helped develop plans for more responsive postdisaster counseling and support services to be provided among survivors of color in those areas in Mississippi that were hard hit by Hurricane Katrina.

Similarly, in San Diego, the first author spent time consulting with 30 key administrators who were responsible for coordinating educational

services for migrant workers and their family members in the San Diego school district. Using social justice advocacy skills in these consultation meetings, the first author described the specific types of counseling and support services that were important to include in administering a comprehensive educational program in the aftermath of the wildfire catastrophe. Operating as a social justice advocate in this regard, the first author lobbied for support to include counseling and outreach services to help relieve the personal stress and trauma many migrant youths experienced as a result of this natural disaster.

The social justice advocacy strategies that were effectively implemented by the first author in this regard were the basis of much discussion in group supervisions meetings with graduate students participating in the San Diego classroom without walls intervention. Gaining clarity about the specific ways that counselors could implement social justice interventions such as the one described by the lead author fostered an increased sense of hopefulness and empowerment that helped to diffuse the hopelessness and helplessness numerous students experienced when working with disaster survivors in the San Diego area.

Another example of modeling social justice advocacy in action for students participating in the CWB classroom without walls project in the San Diego area involved the respectful engagement and consultation both authors demonstrated when working with members of an American Indian Tribal Council. These social justice support and advocacy efforts involved sitting for several hours with the members of the Council to seek permission to have the faculty members and students involved in the project provide counseling and related human services to persons living on the reservation and attending the tribal school in the area that was largely destroyed by the wildfires.

These meetings demonstrated to students how social justice work must be done in culturally competent ways on individual and systemic levels. Students commented that having the opportunity to discuss how these social justice counseling and advocacy services are implemented empowered them in ways that lessened the sense of hopelessness, helplessness, and professional paralysis many students felt in these situations.

The growing sense of hopefulness and empowerment that many counseling students experienced when learning about the effectiveness of the advocacy interventions previously described led several students to acknowledge that these experiences were key in developing a clearer understanding of their growing identity as social justice advocates. The impact that these advocacy efforts had on students was further amplified when many survivors expressed their appreciation and deep gratitude for the ongoing services that would be provided as a result of the efforts long after the participants in the classroom without walls project returned to their communities.

The students participating in the classroom without walls projects had opportunities to exercise their own abilities as client advocates as they

continued to provide postdisaster services to persons in need. This included implementing social justice advocacy services when they worked with victims of Hurricane Katrina and the San Diego wildfires in an effort to foster the survivors' sense of personal and collective empowerment. To promote such empowerment, faculty members and students participating in these projects implemented a combination of outreach, educational, and referral services. By reaching out to survivors of Hurricane Katrina, the San Diego wildfires, and the Haiti earthquake, faculty members and students provided information about the types of services survivors could access to meet their needs. This resulted in directly linking many of the survivors with other service providers working permanently in the areas where these natural disasters occurred. The information-sharing process and referral services represented powerful experiences for students, who uniformly expressed a growing awareness of the role they played as social justice advocates when implementing these specific helping services in the field (Bemak & Chung, 2007).

Group supervision and debriefing activities A final aspect of the classroom without walls project involved the supervision and debriefing activities that the faculty members provided with students participating in the projects. These supervision services were typically done in group settings during the evening hours after all the persons participating in the Hurricane Katrina, San Diego wildfires, and Haiti earthquake disasters had finished providing counseling, education, referral, and advocacy services to survivors. The group supervision meetings typically involved discussions that focused on the types of services students provided to survivors. These supervision meetings also provided opportunities to address different emotional reactions many students experienced as a result of working with persons who, although they survived the natural disasters, experienced tremendous pain, misery, and trauma in the process. The debriefing sessions were designed to assist the participants in the projects to reflect on the experiences they had when working as social justice counselors and advocates with the survivors of Hurricane Katrina, the San Diego wildfires, and the Haiti earthquake.

Four themes consistently emerged in the students' debriefing comments during the supervision meetings. First, every student who participated in the CWB classroom without walls field experiences acknowledged that the skills they learned and insights they gained as a result of participating in these unique professional and personal development endeavors could not be taught in a traditional classroom. Second, many students stated that they gained a deep appreciation and understanding of the impact of historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts on people's development. Third, numerous students reported that their understanding of the relationship among social injustice; mental health; and the importance of providing counseling, education, outreach, referral, and advocacy services that focus on social injustices (such as the injustices that the survivors of Hurricane Katrina and the San Diego fires experienced) was directly related to their

participation in these projects (Biderman, 2006; Rollins, 2008). Fourth, all of the students agreed that the CWB classroom without walls projects represented "life-changing" experiences for them.

Continuing social justice learning projects. The CWB classroom without walls social justice learning projects continued after the participants returned to the GMU campus through their hosting of a number of presentations to describe their experiences with other students in the graduate counseling program. Sharing their experiences and teaching their classmates about the ways they implemented social justice counseling and advocacy services among survivors of Hurricane Katrina and the San Diego fires was always a moving experience and one that contributed to other students' deepening their understanding of how they could apply social justice services to address disaster survivors' needs. As a result of participants discussing their classroom without walls experiences in meetings with their peers, increasing numbers of other students in the GMU counseling program felt morally and ethically responsible to become practitioners whose professional identities are grounded in social justice counseling and advocacy interventions and services. The new professional perspectives students gained from these meetings had a reverberating impact that resulted in additional classroom without walls endeavors being implemented in the GMU counseling program.

Partnership Between the GMU Graduate Counseling Program and Community Agencies

Concurrently, while students were participating in the projects just described, there were other classroom without walls projects in the GMU graduate counseling program. The career counseling course was one venue in which students and faculty members expanded and implemented the classroom without walls concept in the GMU program. In doing so, the faculty member who taught the career counseling class developed a partnership with a local community agency that provided a variety of services for homeless persons. This partnership enabled students to gain experiences providing various career counseling and advocacy services for persons coping with economic problems rather than having students work with clients who were upwardly mobile and had established career goals, as was typically done in previous career counseling courses.

As a result, students had numerous opportunities to provide poor clients at community-based homeless shelters with culturally responsive career counseling and advocacy services. Through their direct interactions with homeless clients, students gained unique insights and developed a deeper understanding about the plight of poor people in their communities. These new insights and understanding enabled several students to work through their own preconceived stereotypes of poor people in general and homeless persons in particular.

Through their participation in a career counseling class that used the classroom without walls concept as just described, a number of students also reported that they found themselves informally advocating for homeless persons by discussing what they had learned from their homeless clients with family members, friends, and colleagues. According to these students, these informal types of social justice advocacy enabled them to dispel myths and stereotypes that other family members, friends, and colleagues had about people facing various forms of economic oppression and injustice in society. Other students initiated more formal social justice efforts by providing culturally responsive career counseling training services for the staff members at the homeless shelters under the supervision of the career counseling course faculty member.

Given the success of working with homeless persons, the career course at GMU expanded to place students in other community-based agencies that served clients whose problems were linked to injustices they experienced in their lives. As a result, students in the GMU graduate counseling program now have opportunities to use their social justice counseling and advocacy knowledge and skills with persons in prisons and victims of domestic violence.

Expanding the Classroom Without Walls Concept in the GMU Counseling Program

Many additional classroom without walls projects have been developed since the implementation of this social justice approach to counselor education was initiated at GMU. Because of space limitations, we are only able to briefly describe five such projects.

1. *The Gum Springs Social Justice Multicultural Counseling Project.* Gum Springs, Virginia, is a historic Northern Virginia African American community that goes back to the days of George Washington. Gum Springs has experienced considerable social, economic, and political problems over the years and is now experiencing a significant migration of new residents into the community and changing demographics. GMU classroom without walls developed a critical intervention project in Gum Springs, providing counseling and community interventions with three key Gum Springs organizations. One organization serves students who are suspended from middle and high schools at some of the highest rates in Virginia. A second organization serves Latino/Latina and African migrants who are struggling with postmigration adjustment. The third community-based organization is the Historical Society, which is working on interethnic community tensions. Forty-two GMU counseling students are involved in these projects.
2. *Tunnel of Oppression.* This was a GMU campus-based project in which counseling students who were working on classroom without walls

projects collaborated with the university's Office of Diversity Programs and Services to help build an exhibit, the Tunnel of Oppression, that focused on cross-cultural issues in child abuse. The tunnel stood for 2 weeks on the GMU campus and involved counseling students taking numerous undergraduate and graduate classes and visitors on a guided tour of the expositions in the tunnel.

3. *Conference for the Protection of Unaccompanied and Separated Children.* Counseling students helped organize and facilitate a major global conference with attendees from 47 countries that was hosted through the GMU Counseling Program's Diversity Research and Action Center. Students had firsthand experiences of national and global issues related to vulnerable children worldwide and worked closely with cofunding organizations, including the United Nations and the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services.
4. *Immigrant and Refugee Job Fair.* In cooperation with a local nonprofit agency, GMU counseling students working on a classroom without walls project organized a job fair for newly arrived immigrants and refugees. Numerous students reported that educating potential employers, providing career counseling for the migrant groups, and advocating for hiring immigrants and refugees was a powerful out-of-classroom experience that promoted a deeper understanding of immigration and related social justice issues.
5. *American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Gang Prevention Project.* Another classroom without walls assignment involved GMU graduate counseling students who developed a prevention project to address increasing gang activity in schools and communities. Working outside of the traditional classroom, these students interviewed school personnel, community members, and various youth groups. On the basis of information generated from these interviews and related theories and research findings in the professional literature, the students involved in this project developed gang prevention modules for teachers, parents, and peer groups that were later distributed nationally by ASCA.

The Impact of Classroom Without Walls Experiences

Formal student evaluations have consistently demonstrated the profound impact of classroom without walls experiences on GMU counseling students. These evaluations indicated that participation in the classroom without walls projects led students to become more motivated to implement social justice counseling and advocacy services in their work as professional counselors.

Through these innovative projects, students felt increasingly empowered to engage as social change agents and gained confidence about their own developing social justice counseling and advocacy abilities. As one student stated, "I am an advocacy addict; I can no longer keep my mouth shut when

I see social injustices" (H. Jones, personal communication, April 3, 2010). The commitment to social justice advocacy expressed by students was life transforming for both the participating students and their peers, who repeatedly heard deeply moving presentations about all of the classroom without walls projects (Bemak, Chung, Talleyrand, Jones, & Daquin, 2011).

Students stated consistently that they felt they were "giving back" to the community and larger society in meaningful ways as well as experiencing firsthand how counselors can help promote healthy, positive psychological development as social justice change agents on local, state, national, and even international levels. Through the classroom without walls experiences, students indicated that they evolved from an intellectual understanding of social injustices to a genuine transformative commitment to personal social justice advocacy. Students indicated that they not only were able to "talk the talk" but also had begun to acquire the skills necessary to "walk the talk" in their personal and professional lives.

Recommendations for Classroom Without Walls Training

On the basis of feedback generated from students engaged in the classroom without walls projects and our own observations of the impact of this innovative approach to social justice counseling and advocacy training, we identified six recommendations that are important to consider when incorporating similar field-based activities in other counselor education programs. These recommendations are described as follows.

1. *Infuse cross-cultural socioeconomic social justice strategies.* A significant portion of the classroom without walls training involves working with persons in culturally diverse and low-income populations, who traditionally may not have access to mental health services and resources. Thus, it is critical that students are prepared for and well-versed in working across cultures and socioeconomic boundaries to blend social justice work with cross-cultural principles in counseling. Having a solid understanding of the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development's Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) is an essential foundation for training in these areas.

2. *Build partnerships.* Developing partnerships is a critical component of infusing social justice training through classroom without walls activities. These collaborative relationships are necessary both within one's university environment and outside the university domain with a broad range of allied organizations. These partnerships can build on local, state, national, and international helping and educational initiatives that may include schools, churches, nongovernmental, nonprofit community, governmental, and professional organizations.

3. *Reframe obstacles and resistance as learning experiences.* Not all classroom without walls social justice training activities run smoothly. Institutional barriers as well as individual personal resistance will predictably present

obstacles when developing and implementing the classroom without walls concept. Inherent in all change processes are barriers and oppositional forces. It is useful to help students participating in projects that are derived from the classroom without walls concept to understand that all of the obstacles they may encounter have critical value in learning to become an effective social justice counselor and advocate.

4. *Redefine poor outcomes as learning experiences.* Similar to the obstacles just mentioned in the third recommendation, the outcome that you or the students wanted or expected may not always result from classroom without walls training. For example, when students tried to implement one school-based social justice project, it was met with strong resistance and the project came to a standstill. The thwarted project was carefully examined to better understand how and why this activity was blocked and what might have been done differently.

A critical component in implementing classroom without walls training is learning from both successful and failed projects. Thus, failure to achieve the social justice project goals need not be viewed as a negative result, but rather as an important learning opportunity. Individuals cannot be effective social justice counselors if they see themselves as victims of systems rather than promoters of social change. It is important to keep in mind that efforts are lessons learned and not all efforts result in positive outcomes.

5. *Create meaning from confusion.* When classroom without walls projects were not working as planned, it would often result in confusion for students. Sometimes field-based organizations were unclear about their expectations, which created ambiguity and frustration for some of the counseling students. Because such ambiguity, confusion, and frustration may occur in many social justice counseling and advocacy situations, it is vital to emphasize with students the importance of being flexible, creative, and an effective problem solver and having the willingness to develop skills that will enable them to create meaning from confusion.

Classroom without walls training requires students to stop being the "nice counselor" (Bemak & Chung, 2008b) and to bring meaning to organizational confusion, through appropriate and respectful challenges and confrontation with others. Confusion offers an excellent opportunity for students to learn patience and persistence, which are essential in social justice counseling and advocacy work.

6. *Value self-examination as a healthy attribute.* Classroom without walls training requires critical self-examination. Faculty members participating in this training pedagogy are responsible for regularly examining the impact and challenges that ensue from such projects as they unfold. This necessitates regularly requesting students and participating organizations for feedback. On the basis of feedback received from these sources, faculty members are able to make revisions in the initial plans for classroom without walls projects to more effectively foster students' professional and personal development. An openness to self-critique and feedback is also

essential for all persons involved in classroom without walls endeavors, including both faculty members and students, if they are to develop new social justice counseling and advocacy knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSION

Many persons in the counseling and psychology fields see the infusion of social justice into counseling as a moral imperative to improve society. It is critical that the future generation of counselors is trained in social justice counseling and advocacy strategies, rather than simply learning about theories and research findings related to this new professional force without acquiring the skills necessary to effectively implement new knowledge acquired in this regard. The classroom without walls concept represents a unique way of training future counselors to understand and promote social change, advocacy, and social justice as critical components of their counseling work through the acquisition of a host of skills and competencies in these areas.

The classroom without walls activities offer a means for counselor and psychology trainees to learn how to move from application to practice and apply the principles of equity, fairness, and access in their future work. The out-of-classroom training that is the essence of the classroom without walls concept helps transform social justice ideals from an intellectual understanding to a deeper understanding of social justice counseling through practical field-based training experiences, while nurturing the skills that will allow students to become effective proactive advocates and change agents working toward a more equitable, just, and harmonious society.

REFERENCES

- Arredondo, P., Toporek, M. S., Brown, S., Jones, J., Locke, D. C., Sanchez, J., & Stadler, H. (1996). Operationalization of the multicultural counseling competencies. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development, 24*, 42-78.
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C.-Y. (2005). Advocacy as a critical role for urban school counselors: Working toward equity and social justice. *Professional School Counseling, 8*, 196-202.
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C.-Y. (2007). Training counselors as social justice counselors. In C. C. Lee (Ed.), *Counseling for social justice* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C.-Y. (2008a). Counseling disaster survivors: Implications for cross-cultural mental health. In P. B. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.), *Counseling across cultures* (6th ed., pp. 325-340). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C.-Y. (2008b). New professional roles and advocacy strategies for school counselors: A multicultural/social justice perspective to move beyond the nice counselor syndrome. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 86*, 372-381.
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C.-Y. (2011). Post-disaster social justice group work and group supervision. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 36*, 3-21.
- Bemak, F., Chung, R. C.-Y., Talleyrand, R. M., Jones, H., & Daquin, J. (2011). Implementing multicultural social justice strategies in counselor education training programs. *Journal of Social Action in Psychology and Counseling, 3*, 29-43.

- Biderman, A. (2006, Spring). Counseling and development students get real-world experience in the Gulf. *College of Education and Human Development Magazine*, 4-7.
- D'Andrea, M. (2002). Counselors for social justice: A revolutionary and liberating force in the counseling profession. *Counselors for Social Justice Newsletter*, 2, 3-6.
- D'Andrea, M., Foster, E., & Pedersen, P. (Eds.). (2008). Multiculturalism as a fourth force in counseling: Reviewing our progress and charting our future. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 259-382.
- George Mason University, Counseling and Development Program. (n.d.). *Mission statement*. Retrieved from <http://gse.gmu.edu/programs/counseling/>
- Kiselica, M. S., & Robinson, M. (2001). Bringing advocacy counseling to life: The history, issues, and human dramas of social justice work in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 79, 387-398.
- Lewis, J., Arnold, M., House, R., & Toporek, R. (2002). *ACA advocacy competencies*. Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/Resources/Competencies/Advocacy_Competencies.pdf
- Ratts, M., D'Andrea, M., & Arredondo, P. (2004, July). Social justice counseling: "Fifth force" in the field. *Counseling Today*, pp. 28-30.
- Ratts, M. J., Toporek, R. L., & Lewis, J. A. (2010). *ACA advocacy competencies: A social justice framework for counselors*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Rollins, J. (2008, February). A matter of trust. *Counseling Today Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.counseling.org/Publications/CounselingTodayArticles.aspx?AGuid=a57fe738-2d63-4d87-93e3-533299049b52>
- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 70, 477-486.
- Talleyrand, R. M., Chung, R. C.-Y., & Bemak, F. (2006). Incorporating social justice in counseling training programs: A case study example. In R. L. Toporek, L. H. Gerstein, N. A. Fouad, G. Roysircar, & T. Israel (Eds.), *Handbook for social justice in counseling psychology: Leadership, vision, & action* (pp. 44-58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Toporek, R. L., & McNally, C. J. (2006). Social justice training in counseling psychology: Needs and innovations. In R. L. Toporek, L. H. Gerstein, N. A. Fouad, G. Roysircar, & T. Israel (Eds.), *Handbook for social justice in counseling psychology: Leadership, vision, & action* (pp. 37-43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zalaquett, C. P., Foley, P. F., Tillotson, K., Dinsmore, J. A., & Hof, D. (2008). Multicultural and social justice training for counselor education programs and colleges of education: Rewards and challenges. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 323-329.

