This I Believe

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Abstract

As a future school counselor, understanding the importance of social justice is imperative in order to achieve equality and equity in the way resources are distributed among marginalized groups. One way in which one can reach this goal is by becoming aware of one’s role in the community and the way in which one can change the status quo. For this reason, the purpose of this paper is to state my philosophy about the meaning of social justice from a personal and professional stance .

This I Believe

Social justice in professional practice means to remove barriers that marginalized groups encounter everyday that do not allow them to succeed in the academic, social and professional domains of their lives. As mentioned by Pharr (1996), we do this work of social justice because we believe every person counts, has human dignity, and deserves respect, equality, and justice (p. 593). Who are we to decide what individuals are worthy to receive an equal education and treatment? Who are we to play with the lives of those that over the years have never been given a chance to demonstrate what they are capable of?  Sadly, we are a society that hides behind the illusion of perfection, where class and race are not important factors of success, when in reality they are everything. As long as this society does not recognize that oppression continues to exist to this day, we as a whole will not strive for change.

**What does social justice means to me as person?**

            For me social justice means to distribute resources in an equal and equitable way among marginalized groups in society. It means to provide individuals that have been underserved by the educational system the opportunity to reach their highest potential and live a happy and fulfilling life. Social justice means that all individuals, without any exception, have a voice to give their opinion and to contribute to the good of society. But most importantly for me, social justice means to obtain the American dream. This is not only true for immigrants, but for the whole population of this country. We all hear about how amazing the United States is and how all of our dreams can come true, however, this is not the reality for many individuals. My personal meaning of social justice is similar to what social justice means to me as a professional in that it seeks to give equal opportunity to all individuals to succeed in all domains of their lives. As stated above, as a professional school counselor, it is my responsibility to remove barriers that block minority groups from being successful academically, socially, and professionally, and to be able to give them a voice. Within social justice, advocacy is fundamental in bringing about change. Therefore, social change means to become an advocate for my students, an advocate that will question inequality with those in power.

**What is my responsibility in promoting social justice in my professional practice?**

In the role of a future counselor, my responsibility in promoting social justice is to clearly understand the systems of inequality in the school where I will be working and in the school system as a whole. I will identify which minorities groups are falling through the cracks, and to educate others about the ways we are all socialized to believe nothing is wrong with society. Without knowledge of inequality, we are prolonging the status quo that has marginalized minority groups for so long. The decision to become an advocate for my students will be guided by the fact that as school counselors, I will have a moral and ethical responsibility to advocate for students that do not have a voice and that are completely forgotten by the system. Also, I am a minority in this society as well. The difference between my experience and the experience of other individuals like me is that I had people in the United States, including teachers and a school counselor, that cared deeply for me and that empowered me to become who I am now. I want to share my experience with my students, and to empower them to voice their opinions and help them access resources.

**How will I promote social justice in my role as a professional?**

The way I will promote social change in my profession as a school counselor is by challenging the status quo. I will accomplish this by having meaningful conversations with administrators and teachers about the way we are educating students. I will challenge them to think of ways they are excluding students due to their race, class, age, disabilities, and sexual orientation of opportunities that will brighten their future and that will allow them to reach their highest potential. Throughout my years in high school in this country, especially in the state of Washington, I was able to notice how teachers were giving up on students. Not once was I asked what my career plans were for after high school. Not once was I offered to take an AP class. On the other hand, in California, the counselor that cared for me put me in the AVID program for college readiness. That was specifically what empowered me to eventually go to college.  As mentioned by Ratts (2007), school counselors cannot operate solely from the comfort of their offices, rather, he/she needs to intervene in the social context that affects students (p.5). Advocacy is action, it is going to the classrooms and observing the way teachers interact with the students, it is looking at data to find out what students are sent more often to the discipline office, looking for overrepresentation in special education classes, delivering programs to all students without exception, not just the ones that are already academically and socially successful.

The role as a future school counselor and as a human being that cares for others is to help individuals reach the American Dream. It is to help them become liberated from oppression and become free agents that will contribute to society. Also, my goal is to create awareness not only for those in the dominant group but also to those that have been marginalized. As mentioned by Ratts and Hutchins (2009), individuals that understand how their plight is largely rooted in social, political, and economic conditions are able to come to the realization that they live in an oppressive society (p. 270). As a future school counselor, I will use the power and privilege I have to encourage the educational system to provide and equal and equitable education for all.