

“we need a r/evolution”: Transformational Resistance as a Framework in Advancing ADEI in Social Work Education

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ABSTRACT In a time of great political unrest when strides on Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) are being upended in the United States, the profession of social work is once again at a juncture to uphold its mission, values, and principles or capitulate to the silencing and intimidation of oppressive institutions. In the belief that social work education and classrooms are sites of r/evolution, this paper uses counter-narrative autoethnography as a method where experienced social work educators and scholar activists identify pedagogical problems and tensions in the classroom and offer tools and activities informed by critical theories and frameworks to guide social work students toward transformational resistance. Through these critical counter-narratives, we aim to reimagine social work as a discipline capable of challenging traditional, hegemonic ways of knowing and doing, while preparing students to not only assess their immediate circumstances but also situate those circumstances within the broader sociopolitical and historical harms that shape present-day marginalizations and commit toward collective liberation and structural change.

KEYWORDS transformational resistance; social work education; counter-narrative; theory

we need a r/evolution of the mind. we need a r/evolution of the heart. we need a r/evolution of the spirit. the power of the people is stronger than any weapon. a people's r/evolution can't be stopped. we need to be weapons of mass construction. weapons of mass love. it's not enough just to change the system. we need to change ourselves. we have got to make this world user friendly. –Assata Shakur

SOCIAL WORK HAS HISTORICALLY OCCUPIED A DUAL ROLE in professing a commitment to social justice while simultaneously facilitating the racialized surveillance and subjugation of those most marginalized (BlackDeer & Ocampo, 2022). Numerous examples across the field's history illustrate this enduring racial paradox: the erasure of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) social workers to sustain the profession's settler-colonial logic of white benevolence and

paternalism (K. C. Wright et al., 2021), racialized disparities in passing rates of social work licensure exams (Kim, 2022; Nienow et al., 2023), the sustained lack of anti-racist and anti-oppressive theories and frameworks in social work education (Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021), and pervasive racism experienced by BIPOC students in social work programs (Maglalang et al., 2023). However, along with a national reckoning in 2020 with anti-Black state violence, catalyzed by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and countless other Black Americans, the social work profession was called to account. In response to long-standing critiques, national social work associations and leaders began to publicly acknowledge their failures to advance racial equity and justice. In response, *Eliminate Racism* was established as the thirteenth Grand Challenge of Social Work (Teasley et al., 2023), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) included anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in its accreditation standards (Council on Social Work Education's Commission on Accreditation & Commission on Educational Policy, 2022), and social work scholars made concerted efforts to increase the literature on ADEI (Yearwood et al., 2021). In the face of national outrage and growing calls for institutions to confront structural harm, these actions suggested the profession might begin to fulfill its ethical mandate to improve the well-being of exploited and under-resourced groups through advocacy and services grounded in social justice (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.).

Yet, as history in the United States has shown, even modest steps toward racial, economic, and other forms of justice are actively—and often violently—met with backlash by a state whose priority is maintaining white hegemony and white power. Across more than four centuries, tracing back to chattel slavery, the United States has been organized around a distinctive, punishment-based social order, one built upon the policing, surveillance, criminalization, and mass incarceration of Black people and other people of color. These practices are foundational to U.S. state power and part of a globally pervasive carceral logic rooted in settler-colonial logics and systems of subjugation and elimination, particularly of Indigenous communities (Estes et al., 2021; Wolfe, 2006). Through these logics, the state maintains “legitimacy” through regimes of punishment and control, positioning domination as “order” and repression as “safety” (Davis, 2003, 2016; Foucault, 1995). Even social work, in its 2020 efforts to address structural harm, fell back on the same policing logics it claimed to resist by proposing social workers as replacements for police, thereby reaffirming the state's authority to surveil and control (Frederique, 2024). This is the context in which the field of social work, and social work education, operates: one that remains deeply entangled with the very systems it claims to resist.

This is all the more significant amidst contemporary assaults on ADEI initiatives. In the months leading up to the 2024 presidential election, anti-ADEI rhetoric gained prominence anew, galvanizing political support and contributing to the re-election of the former 45th president (Aaron et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2025). Since then, ADEI progress has been systematically rolled back. In recent years, a new wave of state laws and executive orders has sought to dismantle or restrict ADEI programming, higher education, and other public institutions (Aaron et al., 2025). Trump's Executive Order (EO) 14173 rescinded EO 11246 and directed the termination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) mandates across federal agencies and contractors (Aaron et al., 2025). Social work, a profession that purports itself to be committed to its values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.), is once again at a juncture to actively uphold its ethics and mission or continue to reproduce and legitimize systems of oppression.

Social work has had a long history of such schisms. For instance, in the 1960s, the National Federation of Settlements (NSF) had a tenuous history of debating whether social workers should engage in civil rights action, opting for an integrationist approach while rejecting the strategies and tactics of the Black Power Movement (Bell, 2014). Furthermore, in 1969, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) approved the resolution to require the regulation of social work licensure at the state level that would be afforded only to individuals with a master's or doctoral degree despite the National Association of Black Social Workers' (NABSW) opposition due to the low number of Black social workers with advanced graduate degrees because of racism in the admissions process in social work schools across the country along with discriminatory practices in standardized testing (Bell, 2014). In light of these ongoing realities and social work's turbulent racial history, we are compelled to interrogate: how does social work operate within racialized systems of violence, and what will it take to transform them? Recent literature in the profession reflects troubling anti-ADEI rhetoric disguised as so-called "diversity of thought" (Lens et al., 2025, p. 180). This framing is harmful, particularly when articles claim empiricism in promoting concepts like "Black Supremacy" (Thyer, 2025, p. 307) or misrepresenting Critical Race Theory (CRT; Mills, 2025) that reduce its criticisms of structural oppression to the individual level. Such arguments are erroneous and damaging.

Empirical research has systematically proven that the realities of structural oppression, such as racism (Williams & Mohammed, 2013), sexism (Homan, 2024), ableism (Lundberg & Chen, 2024), and trans/homophobia (Drabish & Theeke, 2022; Zeeman et al., 2019) have consequential physical and mental health effects. Studies have also proven that integrating ADEI in education improves mental health, cognitive growth, empathy, retention, attendance, graduation rates, and engagement in anti-oppressive action among students at different education levels (Bonilla et al., 2021; Bowman, 2010; Cole et al., 2011; Pillen et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022). As a profession dedicated to addressing the mental health and well-being of clients and communities, it is imperative that we not only are aware of these impacts but are also competent in treating them. While the field of social work has made efforts to integrate ADEI in its curriculum, very few have examined its effects (Copeland & Ross, 2021). One school in the southeast region of the United States compared a dedicated diversity and social justice social work course to an infused model (integrated diversity and social justice in all curriculum) and an undergraduate psychology course with no diversity component (Pitner et al., 2018). Findings showed that compared to the other two comparison groups, master's level social work students in the dedicated diversity and social justice course had greater capacity to identify forms of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism), levels of oppression (i.e., individual, institutional, and societal), and cultural responsiveness when comparing their scores before and after the semester (Pitner et al., 2018). This shows that teaching social work students about ADEI improves their critical thinking to acknowledge systems of oppression.

While individual efforts are critical, ADEI must be systematically integrated not only into social work practice but, more critically, into social work education, where future practitioners must learn to both practice with and within racially diverse communities and dismantle the white supremacist, settler-colonial systems of domination they are trained to work within. In using ADEI, here it is important to note that we do not refer only to its conventional or institutionally prescribed meaning; engaging abolitionist frameworks, we aim to extend each term within ADEI to demand a deeper, more radical engagement. *Anti-racism* is not a statement of intent or an institutional training module, but a collective struggle to dismantle the deeply entrenched, racial-capitalist systems in the United States that sustain state violence against BIPOC. While *Diversity* typically signals the limits of

liberal reform that prioritizes representation over transformation, we understand it as something far more vital: diversity not just in identity or lived experience, but in perspective and thought, as well. This orientation acknowledges we can and should learn from one another, and that ways of building and knowing exist in communities and spaces well beyond the academy. *Equity* requires the redistribution of power and resources; true equity moves past representation and access, and instead insists upon confronting the material conditions and carceral structures that produce inequity in the first place. Finally, *Inclusion* cannot solely rely upon entry into violent institutions, but must work toward the creation of new transformative, liberatory spaces outside them. **We see the classroom as a key site for (re)imagining these spaces**, where, as bell hooks (1994) reminds us, education can become a practice of freedom.

Grounded in this commitment, this paper uses counter-narratives to present tools and activities, rooted in critical theories and frameworks, that social work educators can use to foster transformational resistance among students. In doing so, we push back against the current wave of state-led attacks on ADEI efforts, not through reformist policy responses, but through counter-narratives that expose and resist the logics underlying such repression. This framing is expanded in the objectives section, where we situate our pedagogical approach more fully within an abolitionist praxis. More broadly, we situate this within the transformative work of scholars like Dylan Rodríguez, whose work “traces how insurgent communities of people inhabit oppressive regimes and logics in ways that enable the collective genius of rebellion, survival, abolition, and radical futurity” (Wilson & Sonenstein, 2020).

Social Work Curricula and Classroom as a Space For “r/evolution”

The classroom can serve as a powerful site for cultivating transformational resistance (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2016). For social work educators, this means designing pedagogy that not only transfers knowledge but also nurtures critical consciousness, community accountability, and the courage to challenge oppressive structures. To do this effectively, classroom tools and activities must be grounded in critical theories and frameworks. Theories are interconnected concepts that explain or predict phenomena (Kivunja, 2018), while frameworks bring together multiple theories to guide implementation, analysis, and translation of findings in a study (Kivunja, 2018).

Social work, though a multidisciplinary profession, has historically relied on theories and frameworks rooted in psychology and psychotherapy (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2007; Herz & Johansson, 2012), with limited engagement in theories that center race, feminism, disablism, and other critical perspectives (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2007; Hiranandani, 2019). As a result, social work education continues to reproduce problematic binary, stereotypical, and reductionist approaches to marginalized and exploited communities (Constance-Huggins, 2019; Dominelli, 2018). To address this predicament, a pedagogical commitment to guiding social work students to disrupt these patterns by equipping future social workers with the critical tools to both understand and transform the conditions that perpetuate injustice must be made. Students must first understand how those problems are produced systemically rather than solely at the level of individuals. Critical pedagogy should therefore be treated as central to social work education, normalizing approaches that cultivate critical consciousness and engage the work of Black and Brown scholars and other critical traditions to prepare students for transformative and justice-centered practice. A potential theoretical framework that can assist social work educators is the use of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Transformational Resistance

Transformational resistance is a theoretical framework rooted in CRT and Latina/e/o/x CRT (LatCrit) that explains how Chicana/o/x students navigate and resist systems of oppression in educational settings (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). It asserts that educational settings are not neutral, and that institutional structures influence how students of color experience racialization in academic contexts. The framework challenges the false dichotomy that reduces student resistance to either misbehavior devoid of critical awareness or passive acceptance of oppressive conditions. Instead, transformational resistance recognizes that students can simultaneously develop a critical analysis of social conditions and channel that analysis into collective action for justice.

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) postulate four categorizations of student resistance to help capture the diverse experiences of Chicana/o/x students: reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformational resistance. These categories are mapped along two intersecting axes: motivation to enact social justice on the horizontal and critique of social oppression on the vertical. Reactionary behavior is characterized by students lacking both motivation for social justice and critique of oppression. Self-defeating resistance involves some critique of oppression but no motivation to act for justice. Conformist resistance presents itself when students are motivated by social justice ideals but lack a critique of oppressive systems. Finally, transformational resistance emerges when students both critically interrogate these systems and are motivated to dismantle and transform them. Our work draws on this framework to examine how social work educators can intentionally cultivate transformational resistance. In our classrooms, we employ tools and activities informed by critical theories to help students deepen their critiques of structural oppression while building the skills, confidence, and collaborative capacity to act for systemic change.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate, through our own voices and experiences as critical scholars and educators, specific tools and activities shaped by critical theories and frameworks that we have implemented in the classroom. Our goal is not to offer direct counter-policies to anti-ADEI legislation or rhetoric; rather, we understand political maneuvers as symptomatic of settler-colonial and carceral regimes that have long structured social work and U.S. institutions more broadly. Anti-ADEI initiatives, while intensifying the pressure and restrictions on liberatory and transformative pedagogies, are not new phenomena; they are extensions of the same historical project of white supremacy and state control that has always shaped the United States, now rendered more visible and overt in form. Our aim, therefore, is to offer counter-narratives that expose and resist these logics, while also illuminating the everyday practices of survival, refusal, and collective imagination that abolition makes possible. Following Dylan Rodríguez's argument (Wilson & Sonenstein, 2020), we position these stories as abolitionist acts. They do not respond to anti-DEI pressures through reformist proposals but through practices of truth-telling and relational resistance that remind us that this has always been the country we live within: a state organized through white supremacy and racial capitalism. What has changed is not the structure, but its visibility. By centering these narratives, we invite readers to understand abolition not as reaction or reform, but as an ongoing, imaginative practice of world-building against the enduring violence of the state. By treating social work classrooms as spaces of "r/evolution," we can continue to resist both the persistence of fascism and the rise of anti-ADEI rhetoric and policies.

METHODS

This paper employs a counter-narrative autoethnographic approach, grounded in critical qualitative inquiry, to examine how social work educators engage moments of resistance in the classroom as opportunities for transformation. Each author offers a personal counter-narrative that examines either the design and enactment of critical pedagogical practices or classroom encounters in which student resistance was met not with suppression or avoidance, but through a critical pedagogy aimed at cultivating transformational resistance. That is, resistance informed by an awareness of structural oppression and a commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Methodological Approach: Counter-Narrative Autoethnography

Counter-narrative autoethnography merges the self-reflective methodology of autoethnography with CRT's tradition of counter-storytelling. Autoethnography, a qualitative research method combining elements of autobiography and ethnography, situates the researcher's lived experience within broader cultural, political, and institutional contexts (Ellis et al., 2010). The researcher is both the participant and analyst, using personal narratives as the analytic lens for understanding power, identity, and social structures. Unlike positivist approaches that privilege distance, neutrality, and objectivity, autoethnography favors relationality, reflexivity, and emotional truth (Witkin, 2014). This lens allows social work scholars to expose and challenge dominant paradigms while advancing more justice-oriented approaches to education and practice. Examples of application in social work include facilitating critical reflection in practice (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010), disrupting hegemony in doctoral training (Oswald et al., 2022), resisting neoliberalism in the profession (Kramer et al., 2023), decentering whiteness in curricula (Odera et al., 2021), and fostering socially just, collaborative learning (MacPhee & Wilson Norrad, 2022).

Counter-narratives, as conceptualized by Solórzano & Yosso (2002) and Bernal (1998), emerged from CRT and challenge dominant ideologies embedded in what they call "majoritarian stories" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). These dominant narratives often normalize whiteness, meritocracy, and deficit framings of marginalized communities, thereby sustaining understandings and behavioral norms that reinforce dominant power structures (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017). Similarly, recent anti-DEI efforts frame critical inquiry as ideological or divisive, re-centering dominant norms of "neutrality" and further marginalizing communities whose histories, experiences, and knowledges are already devalued within academic and institutional contexts (Conyers & Wright Fields, 2025; Joseph-McCatty et al., 2025). In contrast, counter-narratives center the lived and embodied knowledge of historically oppressed groups, functioning both as acts of resistance and as sites of critical knowledge production that interrupt the carceral logics that seek to silence, contain, or discipline knowledge within the academy (Ben-Moshe, 2018).

Bringing these traditions together, counter-narrative autoethnography serves as both a method of inquiry and a form of intervention, allowing for a fuller accounting of the emotional labor, ethical tensions, and critical reflections involved in teaching toward justice (Ender, 2021; Rodriguez, 2022). It enables educators, particularly those from marginalized or multiple situated identities, to theorize from lived experience, challenge dominant norms in academia, and reframe the classroom as a contested space where meaning, power, and resistance are actively negotiated. Our collective approach extends beyond individual self-reflection to a process of shared theorizing through storytelling, vulnerability, and care (Ben-Moshe, 2018; Love, 2019). By naming and theorizing these moments, we contribute to scholarship that frames critical pedagogy not as a fixed set of

strategies but as a dynamic, relational, and justice-oriented praxis (Fernández-Balboa, 1998; McLaren et al., 2004).

Application in This Study

In this manuscript, each author constructed an autoethnographic counter-narrative in response to the following reflective prompts:

1. A specific example or ongoing issues they have witnessed in the classroom or the educational curriculum in which students are exhibiting reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, or conformist resistance.
2. The instructor's interpretation of that moment and the ways they have responded through specific tools or activities they have used, guided by critical theories or frameworks, to address this concern and shift students toward transformational resistance.

Our collaborative process began with a series of virtual meetings focused on conceptual discussions of transformational resistance. We explored how this construct can manifest in our classrooms, shared pedagogical examples, and engaged in collective meaning-making about resistance as a generative force. As our dialogue deepened, we examined the critical theories informing our teaching, including anticolonial and Freirean pedagogies. We reflected on how our individual lived experiences and intersectional identities shape our theoretical orientations and how these frameworks translate into social work practice, particularly in fostering relational accountability, critical consciousness, and justice-oriented engagement.

Following these discussions, each author drafted an individual counter-narrative and contributed it to a shared document for collective reflection. We read one another's narratives and provided written feedback, offering clarifying questions, highlighting points of resonance, and suggesting ways to strengthen the connection between experience and theory. We then met virtually to identify emerging common threads while honoring the distinctiveness of each narrative. This analysis continued through ongoing email communication, as each narrative evolved through cycles of feedback, reflection, and revision. A final virtual meeting was dedicated to collective synthesis, during which we revisited our guiding frameworks and articulated how our narratives together illustrate the transformative possibilities of engaging resistance in social work education.

Through this iterative and relational process, we engaged in what Adams and colleagues (2015) describe as dialogic meaning-making, treating the narratives as both data and theory. Rather than applying formal coding, we reflected collectively on how each narrative generated insight into the possibilities and tensions of teaching toward justice. We intentionally retained each author's voice to preserve the specificity of positionality and context, while also tracing points of convergence in our pedagogical strategies. Our analytic discussions were grounded in reflexivity and mutual accountability, emphasizing relational understanding over consensus. In this sense, analysis was less about categorizing data and more about co-constructing through dialogue, critical questioning, and shared vulnerability (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020; Chang, 2016).

Grounded in situated knowledge, this approach recognizes that pedagogy is deeply shaped by social location, institutional context, and historical forces (M. C. Wright et al., 2004). While we did not seek generalizability, we aimed to facilitate transferability by making our process transparent and by describing how our experiences and strategies may resonate with other educators or be adapted to their own settings (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). Transferability is, therefore, possible where educators can apply lessons from these counter-narratives, find resonance through shared

experiences, or adapt the tools rooted in critical frameworks to understand and respond to resistance in their classrooms.

The narratives that follow are presented as both personal accounts and pedagogical analyses. Each counter-narrative stands on its own, reflecting the author's situated experience, yet together they reveal intersecting themes of resistance, care, and transformation within critical social work education. The presentation of these narratives follows formats established in the extant literature (Berrett-Abebe et al., 2023; Ender, 2021), in which individuals narrate their experiences in their own voices, critically examine their social locations, and reveal the biases and worldviews that shape their perspectives, thereby centering themselves as marginalized scholars and educators. To support connections between theory and practice, Table 1 summarizes the theoretical frameworks drawn upon by each author, including key definitions, foundational scholarship, and adaptable pedagogical strategies.

Statement of Positionality

The authors acknowledge that our social identities and locations influence our lived experiences and inform our practice as co-educators and co-learners with our students. We are a group consisting of diverse identities and locations by race, class, gender, sex, (dis)ability, and sexuality; situated differently in relation to citizenship, migration, and settler colonialism; and occupying professional roles as Assistant Professors, PhD candidates, and clinicians. Many of us are first-generation college or graduate students and come from non-Eurocentric and non-western cultural traditions, which further shape our perspectives, commitments, and ways of knowing.

While we name multiple identity categories, we recognize that identities do not operate in isolation. Rather, they are intersectional, shaped by and through their relationships to structures of power, historical processes, and shifting sociopolitical contexts (Crenshaw, 1989). Their salience emerges not from any single dimension, but from the ways they interact and are made meaningful within systems of privilege and oppression. Our teaching experience spans social work, public health, and ethnic studies at the high school through the doctoral level. Within the frame of standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1998, 2004), we reject the notion that our identities can be essentialized as homogenous; rather, they are fluid, shifting, and in production as impacted by material structures—reflecting that of the concept of positionality (Alcoff, 2006; Alcoff & Mohanty, 2006; Tien, 2019). Despite these differences, we are united by our struggle for equity and justice.

Our roles as co-educators and co-learners is not to impose our worldviews and experiences onto our students, but to introduce a broad range of critical topics, theories, and frameworks to scaffold their learning. Within the classroom, we seek to co-create knowledge with students while recognizing that power can never be fully equalized. As instructors, we hold institutional authority and the responsibility to guide dialogue and hold space for the emotional dimensions of learning. However, rather than exercising control, we approach authority as relational, reflexive, and accountable. Grounded in an ethic of care rather than discipline, we treat discomfort not as disruption but as an opening for transformation. This practice aligns with abolitionist pedagogies that reimagine the educator's role as one of stewardship and collective care (Love, 2019), echoing hooks' (1994) call for teaching rooted in love and liberation and Freire's (1970) vision of education as a dialogic process through which teachers and students become co-learners in the pursuit of freedom. We aim to build skills, foster critical thinking, and support agency in connecting information with lived experiences and social locations. In this way, we harness our positionalities

Table 1. Theoretical Frameworks, Descriptions, and Examples of Pedagogical Strategies

Theory/Framework	Key Papers	Brief Description	Examples of Pedagogical Strategies
Transformative Racial Equity Framework (TREF; Sireen)	Collective for Research and Policy et al., (2020)	The Transformative Racial Equity Framework (TREF) is a multi-theoretical model developed by the Transdisciplinary Resistance Collective to examine how structural racism shapes health inequities. Drawing from critical race theory, racialized organization theory, resistance theory, and ecological systems thinking, TREF highlights how racism operates across ideological, institutional, organizational, and interpersonal levels. Unlike traditional frameworks, TREF emphasizes both oppression and resistance, recognizing the agency of marginalized communities to challenge and transform harmful systems. It serves as a tool for research, policy, and practice aimed at dismantling structural racism and advancing health equity.	Guide students through TREF mapping of how harm operates across systems (e.g., racialized discipline, housing instability, child welfare). Use critical reflection circles to interrogate personal biases in interpreting client behavior. Support students in reframing “symptoms” as protective responses and co-develop care plans that connect clients to community-led spaces and justice-oriented resources.
Intersectionality (Fatima)	Collins (2000); Crenshaw (1989, 1991);	Intersectionality is a Black feminist theoretical framework developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how multiple forms of oppression—such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism—intersect to shape individuals’ lived experiences in complex and compounding ways. Originally grounded in legal analysis, intersectionality has since	Embed Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects where students investigate structural harms in their field sites. Require intersectional analysis in identifying how multiple systems compound marginalization. Use accountability practices in class (challenge with care, set boundaries around emotional

		evolved into a critical lens for understanding how power operates across structural, political, and representational domains. Key constructs include simultaneity (oppressions are not additive but experienced concurrently), relationality (how social identities are co-constituted), and structural embeddedness (how institutions reproduce inequality). In my teaching, I use intersectionality to help students critically analyze how identity, power, and systems of oppression interact—particularly in casework, policy analysis, and organizational dynamics. Students are encouraged to map identity and power not just in clients, but in themselves, their placements, and in the social work profession more broadly, fostering a deeper, justice-oriented praxis.	labor) to foster authentic dialogue and solidarity-based solutions.
Crip Emotional Intelligence (Jackie)	Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018)	Epistemology grounded in the embodied knowledge disabled, sick, Mad, Deaf, and neurodivergent people develop in response to inaccessible worlds. Emphasizes mutual trust and collective care while resisting normative, ableist understandings that frame disabled people as lacking or in need of fixing. Frames disabled skills and ways of knowing as vital to collective survival and liberation.	Facilitate co-created discussions mapping how identity-based oppression and access shape understandings of care. Guide students to interrogate dominant narratives around care and examine who is denied access to rest, [self] care, and more. Develop class norms centered on mutual support and vulnerability, allowing pedagogy to emerge from shared experiences and collective inquiry.

Critical Consciousness (Dale)	Freire (1970)	Critical consciousness or <i>conscientização</i> refers to the process by which those who are oppressed can develop a sociopolitical analysis of their condition tied to structural oppression and the ability to challenge and transform these structures. According to Freire, there are three levels of critical consciousness. In <i>semi-intransitive consciousness</i> , the individual is only aware of the problems within their proximal sphere; their goal is to survive. In <i>transitive consciousness</i> , the individual has a simplified understanding of their sociopolitical environment and resorts to individualized solutions rather than systemic change. In <i>critical transitivity</i> , the individual has a comprehensive understanding of their sociopolitical environment through theory and evidence and participates in critical dialogue and action.	Design assignments that require students to identify systems of oppression influencing a health or mental health condition, moving beyond individual blame. Facilitate connections between systemic analysis and personal/community experiences (e.g., environmental racism, healthcare inequities).
Anticolonial/anti-imperialist pedagogy (Ana)	Grande (2015); Mignolo (2009); Smith (2021);	Seeks to dismantle the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism in education by challenging Eurocentric knowledge systems, hierarchical power relations, and the devaluation of Indigenous and non-Western ways of knowing. This pedagogy insists that education is not neutral; rather, it is shaped by histories of conquest, racial capitalism, and cultural domination. Key concepts include <i>epistemic disobedience</i> (rejecting the supremacy of Western knowledge); <i>relational accountability</i>	Critically annotate and rename dominant models (e.g., EBP triad); integrate community-defined evidence; encourage students to cite elders, family, or cultural practitioners as valid sources.

		(centering community and land-based knowledge); and <i>liberatory praxis</i> (learning as a process of collective resistance and world-making).	
Community Responsive Pedagogy (Joanna)	Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade (2021)	Community Responsive Pedagogy aims to support the wellness of students by focusing on three domains of practice: a) relationships, or building meaningful connections with students and the learning community as a foundation for mutual investment and solidarity; b) relevance, or prioritizing curricula that is deeply resonant, representative of, and embedded with the classroom community; and c) responsibility, or responding to the needs and well-being of the classroom community as well as the ongoing sociopolitical environment.	Build classroom community through authenticity, humility, and reciprocity. Center curricula on students' lived experiences. Respond to current sociopolitical events (e.g., ICE raids) by facilitating ethical reflection using the NASW Code of Ethics. Encourage student-led development of community safety and care strategies.
Critical Reflexivity (Sarah)	Ide & Beddoe (2024)	Ongoing self-examination of positionality, assumptions, and power in relation to others. Tenets include positionality awareness, humility, acknowledgment of bias, and reflexive accountability.	Begin with instructor positionality modeling; have students write and discuss identity maps. Embed reflexivity throughout the semester in assignments and discussions. Pair with decolonizing methodologies (e.g., community-based participatory research) to reimagine knowledge production as collaborative and justice-oriented.

to leverage systemic, structural, and material change, aligning social work practice with the mission, vision, and values the profession claims to uphold.

We have personal and professional experiences with structural oppression, including racism, [cishetero]sexism, ableism, classism, and other forms of discriminatory policies and practices across institutions and settings. Our efforts to dismantle oppression, including navigating hostile environments, reporting harm, and engaging in advocacy, are part of our daily survival and resistance in institutions not built for us. People often assume that social work is a unified field working toward justice at every social level, but this assumption erases the deep fractures, contractions, and unequal burdens that exist within it. For many minoritized faculty and students, the labor of transformational resistance is both deeply political and personal. These practices emerge from necessity and reflect a lived and enacted abolitionist ethic that challenges research, teaching, and institutional culture centered in whiteness, [cishetero]patriarchy, and ableism. When this labor is carried out in isolation, invisibilized, or disproportionately placed on those most impacted by oppression, it deepens existing harms. Only through collective engagement and solidarity can the profession begin to truly embody the values and ethics it espouses.

COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Reframing Clinical Practice Through the Transformative Racial Equity Framework (Sireen)

In my teaching and clinical training with MSW students, I use the Transformative Racial Equity Framework (TREF) as a theoretical and pedagogical tool to challenge dominant paradigms in mental health education (Collective For Research And Policy et al., 2020). Grounded in abolitionist and anti-carceral logics, TREF extends Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) by centering racism, structural violence, and resistance as foundational to understanding lived experiences. While Bronfenbrenner mapped nested systems of influence, TREF intervenes to show how power, race, gender, sexuality, and historical context shape ideologies, institutions, organizations, and relationships. It rejects neutrality, calling for a structural, racialized, and political analysis of clinical outcomes.

TREF supports students in rethinking behavioral health symptoms often labeled as depression, anxiety, or trauma by grounding them in structural violence and structural trauma. Structural trauma refers to the cumulative and embodied impact of systemic oppression, including racial capitalism, anti-Blackness, institutional abandonment, and carceral systems. These symptoms are not just intrapsychic disorders but patterned responses to conditions that surveil, punish, and marginalize. In my direct practice class, students use TREF to map how these systems interact to produce and reinforce harm. When discussing a young client presenting with depressive symptoms, students explore how those symptoms can reflect the internalization of policing and surveillance. They examine how constant monitoring, criminalization, and institutional control shape feelings of powerlessness, exhaustion, and internalized self-blame. Students connect the young client's experiences to education systems that rely on exclusionary discipline and to carceral symptoms that punish rather than support. When discussing a client experiencing anxiety, they link those symptoms to housing systems structured by racialized disinvestment and displacement, identifying how the client's experience with instability and the threat of eviction create chronic fear and hypervigilance. Students also consider how trauma responses emerge through child welfare systems that remove Black and Brown young people under the guise of protection and through narratives that criminalize

queer and trans young people. Through this mapping process, students begin to understand behaviors and emotions not as individual dysfunctions but as embodied responses to structural harm and as acts of resistance to systems that were never built for their safety or liberation.

Students deepen this analysis through critical reflection circles, a practice grounded in Paulo Freire's theory of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). These circles are not about clinical correction but invite reflection on how students/clients are shaped by systems of power and how their own clinical practices may reproduce or resist those systems. The process begins with a case example or an observation from their practicum. Students first map the client's symptoms onto possible structural conditions using the TREF framework. Once individual mappings are shared, the class gathers in small circles to reflect together on what emerges. In dialogue, students connect their own mappings, identify points of agreement or tension, and consider what new questions arise for practice. As part of this process, students also identify where they are located within the very systems that shape their clients' experiences, reflecting on how both their identities and professional roles influence the way they may clinically interpret and respond to clients. I ask them to consider these questions because I do the same in my own practice and teaching, continually examining how my positionality shapes what I notice, how I interpret, and what I center in my analysis. The circle concludes with each student articulating how their clinical interpretation shifts when they view symptoms through structural trauma rather than individual pathology. Within this structure, students are prompted to ask themselves: What ideologies are shaping how I read this client's behavior? How might I be misdiagnosing pain rooted in structural trauma? What systems have shaped my lens? What assumptions or emotions surface in my interpretation? What does care rooted in justice require?

In reflecting on a specific example, one MSW student initially described a Black young man's disengagement in therapy as defiance and depressive withdrawal. Through TREF mapping and guided reflection, she revisited details from his own accounts. He had spoken about being stopped by security in the hallways, which reflected how carceral logics shape school environments for Black boys. He described skipping school after repeated homophobic bullying, which pointed to how education systems fail to protect queer youth and instead normalize hostile peer cultures. He also mentioned his family's long history of child welfare surveillance, which revealed how welfare systems disproportionately target and destabilize Black families. At first, she had seen these disclosures as background information that explained his lack of engagement. In the circle, she was asked to connect symptoms to systems and to question her initial assumptions. This helped her see that his disengagement was not simply avoidance or withdrawal but a strategy he used to protect himself in environments where he was constantly monitored, punished, and unsafe.

The MSW student realized that what she had labeled as resistance to therapy and withdrawal was not depression but a learned strategy he used to protect himself from systems that had failed him as well as protect himself from people and harmful experiences. She became more intentional in her questions and assessments, asking him what safety looked like in school, at home, and in therapy. She slowed down her assumptions about progress and centered his pace rather than the timelines set by the agency. Through this shift, she built a relationship that gained his trust and supported him in showing up when he could. She trained herself to become the kind of therapist who offers care rooted in justice. Rather than relying on individual treatment alone, she proposed a plan that connected him to youth-led spaces and affirming resources. When reporting back, the student shared that the young man began attending sessions more consistently and was more open in naming what safety meant for him. She reflected that reframing his symptoms through a structural

lens not only changed her own practice but also made space for him to feel affirmed and supported in ways he had not experienced in prior therapeutic settings.

TREF invites students to step into their roles as co-strugglers and organizers within broader movements for justice. This model cultivates clinicians who understand that therapy is not neutral and that care can reproduce or resist oppression. Embedding TREF into clinical education prepares students to pair structural analysis with collective action, shifting their work from individualized service provision toward building liberatory systems of care beyond punishment, surveillance, and containment.

Intersectionality and Participatory Action Research: Toward Praxis-Oriented Pedagogy in Social Work Education (Fatima)

My teaching is grounded in intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), which examines how overlapping systems of oppression including racism, sexism, classism, and ableism interact to shape individuals' lived experiences and outcomes. This framework enables me to support students in analyzing how social location, power, and systemic inequity are embedded not only in policy and institutions but also in everyday interactions and organizational structures. Rooted in this approach, I design my classroom as a liberatory space where students explore the interconnectedness of identities and structures, critically interrogate dominant narratives, and engage in reflexive justice-centered learning. I enact this pedagogical framework primarily in my Human Behavior and Social Environment MSW course, that examines the multidimensional influences that shape human development and behavior. The course introduces students to major theoretical paradigms and conceptual frameworks that social workers use to understand individuals, groups, and communities, with particular emphasis on diversity, social justice, and the dynamic interaction between people and their environments. This course serves as a critical laboratory for justice-centered praxis, bringing together students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and lived experiences to collectively engage in transformative inquiry. A central method I employ to operationalize this framework is Participatory Action Research (PAR), which invites students to examine social problems through community-engaged, praxis-oriented inquiry (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Through this method, students are encouraged to center the voices and knowledge of those most impacted, apply intersectionality theory to identify how multiple systems of oppression intersect and compound experiences of marginalization, and imagine actionable change rooted in solidarity and accountability.

My commitment to thorough preparation for critical practice and research is grounded in accountability and care. Central to this approach is my invitation for students to hold me and classmates accountable with care—to challenge perspectives, question frameworks, and engage in the difficult work of mutual accountability. This manifested powerfully during a discussion of carceral systems when a student who had disclosed their family's incarceration experience gently interrupted my analysis to note that my language, though academically precise, felt clinically detached from the lived realities we were theorizing. Their intervention, offered with both vulnerability and intellectual rigor, redirected our collective attention to the embodied stakes of our scholarly work. Rather than treating this as a therapeutic disclosure, we reframed it as critical pedagogy; the student was holding the class accountable to the ethical imperative of grounded scholarship. This moment exemplified how accountability with care operates not as conflict avoidance but as intellectual deepening, where challenging dominant frameworks, even the

instructor's, becomes an essential practice of knowledge co-creation. It demonstrated that creating space for students to name when academic discourse becomes extractive or abstracted is itself a rigorous pedagogical commitment, one that transforms potential rupture into epistemological growth. This practice requires clear boundaries around emotional labor and self-responsibility.

While I encourage critical engagement and feedback, I emphasize that the classroom is not a therapeutic space, and it is not the responsibility of instructors or peers to manage individual trauma responses or provide healing for personal wounds. Instead, I model and expect that we each engage in our own inner work to understand our emotional responses, examine our triggers, and take responsibility for our own journeys. I model this practice through transparent metacognitive narration of my own process. For instance, during a session on structural violence, when a student's comment about "deserving victims" activated an emotional response in another student, I paused to name what was happening in the room: "I notice there are strong reactions to this framing. Let's each take a moment to discern—are we engaging the argument's ideological implications, or are we in our own stories right now?" This intervention created space for the student who was activated to step back and then re-engage the comment analytically rather than reactively. I then invited students to notice their own responses, not to share trauma narratives, but to observe where their emotional data might signal epistemological friction worth examining. This modeling created conditions for students to practice similar discernment.

This pedagogical approach recognizes that effective social work practice requires practitioners who can navigate complexity with both analytical rigor and emotional intelligence. In my Research Methods course, when we analyze the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, I pair legislative critique with structured self-reflection because students cannot fully grasp how punitive policy operates without examining their own internalized narratives about poverty and deservingness. Students engage in reflection processes that examine not only external systems of oppression but also their own positionality, assumptions, and the ways their personal histories inform their professional practice. For example, after analyzing welfare reform's racist and gendered architecture, I invite students to respond to prompts such as: "How has your social location shaped your understanding of who 'deserves' state support?" or "Describe a time when your assumptions about someone accessing public benefits were challenged—what did you learn?" One student's response illuminated precisely why this method matters. She wrote about growing up hearing family members disparage "welfare queens," then working at a food bank where she met a mother juggling three jobs who still couldn't afford groceries. She reflected: "I realized my assumption that people on assistance weren't working hard enough was never based on evidence. It was based on stories designed to make me feel superior. Now when I analyze policy, I ask: whose story is this policy telling, and who benefits from that narrative?" Her response demonstrated the pedagogical goal: the ability to trace ideological assumptions back to their structural origins, then use that awareness to practice with greater humility and precision. This integration of self-reflection with structural critique prepares social work student scholars (as I call them) to practice with courage and deep accountability to the communities they serve, recognizing that anti-oppressive practice requires ongoing interrogation of both systems and self.

"Crip Emotional Intelligence" as a Disabled Pedagogy of Possibility (Jackie)

What I have come to recognize as pedagogy emerged not from formal frameworks or academic training, but from what Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) terms "Crip Emotional

Intelligence” (C.E.I., for brevity). C.E.I. refers to the embodied skills and science disabled people have long cultivated in response to a world neither built for nor designed with our needs in mind. Despite initial hesitations to frame it as pedagogy, I use it to affirm disabled epistemologies as a critical foundation for teaching. C.E.I. is not just a vital source of knowledge, but a powerful reminder that disabled people are not “lacking” or in need of a cure; rather, it understands them as *more* equipped than their able-bodied counterparts for having cultivated skills in response to an inaccessible world. Like many liberatory traditions, C.E.I. recognizes that our strength lies in truly seeing one another, and that support and community are not foreclosed to us because we are sick, disabled, Mad, Deaf, or neurodivergent.

This is the ethic I bring into my classroom, and one that shapes how I facilitate my undergraduate course *Love and Relationships*. During the semester, a student presented on self-love/self-care for an interview assignment where students draw on community knowledge to explore their “biggest question” on love and relationships. Their presentation sparked a lively conversation that revealed a collective struggle: many students found it difficult to prioritize themselves, and those who did described their efforts as constantly undermined by internal and external pressures from school and daily life. As we delved deeper, we discussed how intersecting dimensions of power shaped and constrained our understandings of care; for instance, some men reflected on how internalized *machismo* and hegemonic masculinity led them to suppress their emotional needs and neglect self-care. As we mapped out these connections, we started asking: who taught us what “counts” as care, and what teaches us to place ourselves further down the list? Who can experience self-care without guilt; who can rest without being called selfish, lazy, or weak? If rest is bound up with survival (as we eventually came to name), what does it mean to be denied it? What kind of world does that create, and what would it take to unmake it?

The conversation quickly expanded beyond what I had planned, and I set aside my lecture altogether as the presenting student’s focus on self-love and self-care became a catalyst for collective reflection, particularly among my students of color. As we sat with the questions that had surfaced, we began, together, to give language to how self-care is denied—not just through systemic oppression or institutional neglect, but through the violences of the university itself. Through this, we were able to enter into a shared recognition of how exhaustion is produced and how these denials of rest and self-care shape our everyday lives. The space that materialized felt distinctly rare. As several students reflected that they had never been invited to name the relationship between [systemic barriers to] access and rest, I was reminded of how infrequently such spaces are made possible. For many, it was the first time a professor had invited that kind of collective vulnerability and witnessing; for me, it was a reminder of how seldom I have been offered it myself.

In the end, what emerged was a powerful shared interrogation of love, labor, and what we have been told we owe others before ourselves. C.E.I. was not a theory I imposed, but something that emerged through the questions we asked, through my students’ honesty and vulnerability, and through the space we collectively created to hold both struggle and care. Although being a disabled/chronically ill femme of color and channeling Piepzn-Samarasinha’s scholarship shaped how I facilitated, just as central was what my students already knew and offered in return: that, while care can be complicated, we can still hold space for one another even when the world does not. This, to me, is C.E.I. as a pedagogy of possibility: an invitation to (re)imagine in direct resistance to what ableism, and all other interlocking systems of oppression, claim we cannot know.

Critical Consciousness as a Tool for Health Equity (Dale)

I taught an undergraduate-level community health course at a public state university. Most of my students were first-generation, racially diverse, and from working-class and under-resourced backgrounds, positionalities that I share with my students. I designed my weekly lectures to highlight different systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, transphobia/homophobia, ableism, capitalism, colonialism) that are contributing to health issues. Additionally, students were assigned weekly prompts that required them to reflect on the assigned readings and discuss how they relate to their personal experiences. The curriculum design was intentional because I wanted to abide by Paulo Freire's stages of critical consciousness, with the goal of shifting students from semi-intransitive consciousness or transitive consciousness toward critical transitivity in my pedagogy and praxis as an educator (see Table 1). Early in the semester, I noticed in some of the students' weekly reading reflections that they were discussing chronic illnesses or diseases as part of their family or community's life trajectory—adopting a fatalistic belief about health conditions, or some were blaming people's health conditions on poor decisions made at the individual level. Reflecting on my own positionalities coming from an under-resourced and cultural background that holds this mindset, I was able to comprehend why some of the students held this perspective.

In situating these examples within Solorzano and Bernal's (2001) concept of resistance, these reflections fall within the quadrant of conformist resistance. The students acknowledged that health disparities experienced by their family members, friends, and community are unjust and can be fixed if people made better decisions. While students were aware that inequity exists, they were offering solutions that do not address the root cause of the issue at the institutional and systemic levels. Because of my positionality as an educator with training in critical theories and frameworks, I realized that I needed to modify the prompt of their final paper. In the original final paper prompt, students were required to interview a family member or friend living with a chronic illness or disease about their lived experiences. I decided to alter the prompt to encourage students to explicitly identify different systems of oppression that they have been learning throughout the semester, and how these systems may have contributed to the chronic illness or disease of their interviewee. I hoped that this instruction would help shift students toward critical consciousness or critical transitivity by demonstrating their comprehensive understanding of how systems of oppression manifest in institutions that their interviewees navigate directly or indirectly, and how it can lead to the onset or exacerbate their illnesses or diseases.

It was motivating to read the final papers of the students, which outlined how different systems of oppression contributed to poor health outcomes. One student discussed how racism in the healthcare system, with insufficient language support, deterred their interviewee who identified as an immigrant from seeking healthcare services. Another student outlined how environmental racism forced their interviewee, who identified as low-income and a person of color, to live closer to freeways and highways that exacerbated their asthma. This activity demonstrated that, by using critical consciousness as a framework, we can help students make connections between how systems of oppression influence their community's lived experiences and health outcomes.

Liberating Evidence: Anticolonial and Anti-Imperialist Pedagogies in Action (Ana)

In a Doctor of Social Work (DSW) classroom, I introduced the widely accepted Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) triad: the integration of scientific evidence, clinical expertise, and client values/preferences for making informed clinical decisions (Drisko, 2014). Most students were

unfamiliar with the model, only having encountered “evidence-based practice” as shorthand for a narrow set of manualized interventions mandated by agency policies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT; Beck, 2022). Students shared that they had at times found CBT to be ill-fitting, ineffective, or even harmful. Rather than a reflection of their clinical competence, this revealed a disconnect between dominant models and the lived realities of communities we serve.

As a second-generation Mexican scholar and practitioner trained within western scientific traditions, I entered this conversation aware of my own entanglement in the systems I sought to critique. My early training emphasized empiricism and fidelity to evidence-based models. However, I was also raised in a culture grounded in ancestral knowledge. I have long navigated the tension between both ways of knowing and learned that both can coexist in a generative relationship (see Kimmerer, 2013). Bringing this awareness into the classroom, I aimed to create a learning space where students could critically examine dominant frameworks while drawing strength from their own cultural and experiential knowledge.

This moment became a powerful entry point into anticolonial and anti-imperialist pedagogy, which challenges the epistemological dominance of western scientific frameworks and affirms knowledge rooted in land, history, relationality, and resistance (Mignolo, 2009; Smith, 2021). These approaches invite us to engage in epistemic disobedience by questioning who is authorized to produce knowledge, whose truths are amplified, and whose are silenced. Evidence is reclaimed as contextual, relational, and accountable to the communities it serves. In our DSW classroom, this meant confronting and dismantling the colonial assumptions embedded in social work’s evidence-based paradigms.

I asked students: “Why might CBT fail, even when applied with skill? What social, historical, and cultural forces shape how it is received or rejected in practice?” One student commented that the individualized modality “has the person viewing themselves as the problem, instead of the oppressive systems in place,” and shared an example in which she determined that CBT was not the appropriate intervention for a young girl who was afraid of her parents being deported. As we continued to explore these questions, the classroom shifted. Students deconstructed mainstream interventions, examining who is included and who is erased in the research upheld as “evidence.” We discussed how Eurocentric values of objectivity and systematization have shaped EBP decision-making to privilege peer-reviewed, scientific journals above other ways of knowing (Drisko, 2014). From there, we turned back to the EBP triad and engaged in critical annotation, reimagining each component through the lens of community-defined evidence (Martinez et al., 2010). Scientific evidence expanded into ecologies of knowledge: oral traditions, testimonios, and ceremony. Clinical expertise became relational accountability, grounded not in licensure alone but in ethical commitments to community. Client values transformed into collective sovereignty: the right of communities to define what healing looks like on their own terms. To reinforce this reconceptualization, I introduced Joseph Gone’s (2010) work on integrating tribal healing practices into mental health care, and Goodkind and colleagues’ (2012) intervention with refugee and immigrant communities, built not around DSM diagnoses but around collective advocacy and cultural learning. These examples showed that starting from client values does not weaken an intervention but strengthens its cultural and political legitimacy.

Students especially connected with the Refugee and Immigrant Well-Being Project example (Goodkind et al., 2012, 2025). Several students who were first- or second-generation immigrants expressed gratitude for the recognition of migration-related trauma and the multi-level intervention design. They emphasized how mental health care must account for structural realities such as

housing, unemployment, and safety, with one remarking that “engaging people’s experiences of inequality is vital to transforming communities and policies.” The students were connecting theory to lived experience, recognizing that interventions rooted in community partnership not only affirm cultural identity and agency but also reimagine healing as an act of resistance and collective transformation.

By interrogating the colonial underpinnings of EBP, envisioning alternatives grounded in community knowledge, and generating strategies for action, they were not only resisting dominant frameworks but actively reimagining them in service of justice and liberation. I continue to reflect on how anti-colonial pedagogy can be transformative for first- and second-generation immigrants, who often embody the tensions between dominant narratives and ancestral knowledge, making their experiences vital sites of decolonial learning and transformation. We left the classroom with more than theoretical insight, carrying forward a shared commitment to redesign social work practice alongside our communities.

Creating the Classrooms of Care to Support Transformational Resistance (Joanna)

The slowness of chicks emerging from their shells tempts one to intervene, yet this will facilitate the chick’s death, rather than its emergence from the egg (L. Nieto, personal communication, May 21, 2016). It is in the breaking out that the chick grows into their new state of being. This axiom guides my teaching praxis—I do not open the metaphorical shell for students but instead work to create conditions under which growth is possible. I utilize the community responsive pedagogy (CRP; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021) in the social work classroom, which focuses on three domains: a) relationships, or building meaningful connections with students and the learning community as a foundation for mutual investment and solidarity; b) relevance, or prioritizing curricula that is deeply resonant, representative of, and embedded with the classroom community; and c) responsibility, or responding to the needs and well-being of the classroom community as well as the ongoing sociopolitical environment. Using the CRP is enhanced by my use of positionalities as a lens for my teaching praxis by both considering the positionalities of my students to inform adjustments made to curricula and content and through my awareness and use of my own positionalities from the role of educator. For example, as a multiracial queer MotherScholar, I am sensitized to the needs and concerns of folks with similar lived experiences of marginalization.

The domains of relationships, relevance, and responsibility further respond to the call for social work to enact decarceral and abolitionist education and practice because they create space for care, justice, and community safety. Enacting the domain of relationships in the classroom by modeling authenticity, accountability, and humility contributes to creating a community of care wherein our individual and collective well-being may be honored. Emphasizing relevance by centering curricula on the lived experience of those in the classroom lends support to the students as emerging leaders in their communities and provides examples and resources toward developing community-led solutions. Taking responsibility for the classroom community, I aim to remain abreast of current events and adjust course content to respond to the evolving circumstances within which we are all living.

Taken together, these strategies help me to move away from cultures of surveillance and control and move toward building learning communities that are directly applicable to the various experiences and contexts students bring into the classroom. Most recently, students have needed to process their role concerning community members at risk of deportation and U.S. Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids. For example, one student discussed the risk faced by their direct community members, and another debriefed their concern about additional fear exhibited by newcomer clients at their practicum site. As emerging social workers, they have had to evaluate their own ethics and circumstances, including that of their families, and decide what level of action they are able and willing to take, if any. My role has been to present students with the NASW code of ethics for consideration during their engagement with curricula, practica, and current events. This relates to CRP's responsibility by inviting students to take on the profession's responsibility, making the code of ethics tangibly relevant to their lives and practice. Students have responded by having a lively discussion, debating, for example, the application of the social justice mandate. Using the CRP invites students to deepen engagement with the profession while considering their communities and goals for their practice.

Making myself available to form relationships of respect and reciprocity with diverse students, centering relevance for the various individuals in my classrooms, and taking responsibility for their emerging needs creates the circumstances within which students can wrestle with the complex concerns social work is faced with. My work also develops intracommunity relationships and ultimately a group synergy within which we can hold difficult conversations. For example, in responding to the February 2024 news of Nex Benedict's death (Edmonds & Hassan, 2024), a non-binary youth who was targeted by bullies, I facilitated a reflection where students spoke about how they, their families, and communities endured anti-trans violence. Some students left the room during this vulnerable discussion, and I followed up with each of them to affirm their decision to take care of themselves, hear their feedback, and offer support and resources. I address current events in the classroom to ensure the course remains relevant to students' lives and the communities they inhabit. Such topics affect students' learning, engagement with content, and capacity to be present in class. While some students expressed that they had wanted a break from that news, their comfort in stepping out of class and voicing feedback to me in the moment demonstrated the trust I had built with them over the term. With CRP I remain adaptive, sensitive, and engaged with the needs of my students, the classroom community, and the sociopolitical environments in which we live.

Critical Reflexivity (Sarah)

Across all courses I teach, I intentionally embed critical reflexive practice (Cunliffe, 2004, 2016). Students continually examine how the intersectionality of their own social identities, lived experiences, and positionalities contributes to experiences of privilege, oppression, and discrimination. They are asked to critically reflect on how their identities shape their interpretations of course content, their understanding of social work, and their own worldviews. This is not a one-time in-class activity, but an iterative process that deepens over time.

To guide MSW students through the process of critical reflexivity (Ide & Beddoe, 2024), across research, human behavior in the social environment, and policy courses, we begin by discussing the intersection of social identities, starting with myself as an example. Students then reflect on aspects of their own identities and how these intersect to influence their experiences and perspectives. Then, students engage in peer conversations. Consistently, students share deep reflections about their identities and experiences; however, many initially do not conceptualize how these factors influence their engagement with course content. They often view social work education as static, rather than as a co-created learning space shaped by their active participation. For example, one student initially

described expecting the MSW program to function like technical training, “being taught” fixed protocols and procedures. Over time, they began to recognize how their assumptions about the field and learning shaped their engagement with materials, and eventually reframed social work education as an evolving, co-constructed process of professional and personal growth. Another student entered the MSW program viewing it as a pathway to clinical licensure. Through reflection, they understood it as an entry point into lifelong learning and multiple professional trajectories. These reflections illustrate how critical reflexivity helps students understand themselves not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in shaping their education and professional identities.

In research courses specifically, we engage in ongoing discussions about how positionality influences the kinds of questions we ask, the methods we view as credible, the communities we work with and how we engage them, and how knowledge is constructed and shared. By making these dynamics explicit, students begin to dismantle beliefs that research is an objective, value-neutral process. These ongoing discussions enable students to understand that research is subjective and shaped by power, perspective, and purpose. One first-year MSW student described how hearing me speak about my awareness of my own identity prompted her to reconsider how she approached conducting research at a domestic violence shelter serving primarily low-income, high school-educated women of color. She reflected on ways her financial and academic privilege, together with her position as an ethnic minority who is white-passing, inform and shape the research dynamic. She noted that this kind of reflexive awareness had not been addressed in prior undergraduate research courses, underscoring how transformative such discussions can be. Similarly, my own positionality influenced how I engaged with and interpreted students’ experiences. With this student, in particular, I share many social identities, including as a Latina with financial stability and educational privilege who is frequently perceived as racially ambiguous. These reflections underscore how critical reflexive practice among students, and my interpretations of their experiences, embody the core principles of transformational resistance.

Critical reflexivity itself reflects the tenets of the transformational resistance framework by inviting students to critically examine their own social positions, views, and relationship to power. This self-examination is an essential step in developing a meaningful critique of systemic oppression. Moreover, critical reflexivity challenges students to examine their role in oppressive systems, and to imagine how they might transform them. Practiced consistently, reflexivity fosters students’ critical consciousness and can inspire a deeper commitment to social justice.

DISCUSSION

This manuscript demonstrates that cultivating transformational resistance in social work education is both possible and necessary. Drawing from counter-narrative autoethnography, each author’s account illustrates how pedagogical approaches grounded in critical theories can shift students toward transformational resistance: the convergence of deep critique of systemic oppression with an active commitment to dismantle it. We reject the myth of the classroom as a neutral space, reimagining it instead as a living, contested terrain where histories of colonization, racial capitalism, ableism, and [cishetero]patriarchal structures are confronted. Within this terrain, students and educators work together to cultivate critical consciousness, collective agency, and liberatory possibilities for ourselves and the communities we serve. In these collective acts of learning and

unlearning, the classroom then becomes a microcosm of transformative, abolitionist possibility, where freedom is not theorized at a distance but rehearsed in relationship with our students.

To illustrate such, we provide a critical reflection of our accounts. First, we show the centrality of grounding pedagogy in critical theories and frameworks, such as TREF, critical consciousness, and intersectionality, as essential guide maps for helping students interrogate how structural conditions shape experiences at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. By linking personal narratives, mapping exercises, and critical prompts to systemic analysis, we equip students not only to critique social oppression but also to locate it and themselves within specific systems that sustain inequity. This is imperative in transformational resistance, to transpose the blame from individuals to institutions and systems that are reinforcing these conditions.

Second, these narratives highlight the role of praxis in bridging theory and action. Following bell hooks' (1994) conception of *theory as liberatory practice*, we understand theory not as an abstract exercise, but as something lived, felt, and used as a tool for justice. When lived experience of theorizing is tied to self-recovery and collective liberation, there is no gap between theory and practice. Classroom tools and activities, such as reflection circles, TREF mapping, and critical reflexivity, materialize abstract theory into concrete practice, enabling students to identify oppression in real contexts, and, in some cases, take immediate action. Sireen's student used TREF to critically reflect on an LGBTQ+ client's experiences, which helped avoid misdiagnosing protective withdrawal as pathology and instead recognize it as a response to structural harm. This analysis then informed a justice-oriented care plan that connected the client with affirming organizations and resources. As hooks reminds us, theory fulfills its liberatory potential only when directed toward this end, when it dares to name pain from the location of struggle, and when it is crafted to heal, transform, and mobilize. This is the work of our classrooms: to generate theory in dialogue with lived experience, to equip students with the critical frameworks and practical skills to enact transformational resistance, and to link that resistance to tangible social change. We argue that such acts of linking theory to action reified in critical inquiry, solidarity, and justice-oriented work should be the expectations in social work education. Through these approaches, students can positively impact the communities they belong to and work with, developing critical civic praxis that help them radically transform their neighborhoods and communities because they are able to understand how their own lived experiences are shaped by the institutions and systems that they live and engage with (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

Third, we underscore the relational nature of transformational resistance. As illustrated in Sarah's counter-narrative, students use critical reflexive practice in all of their courses to help students develop critical intra-relationships with themselves by identifying their positionalities and how it may influence their understanding of the information they consume, how they show up and are perceived in their practice as social workers, and develop reflexivity to modify their mentality and behavior to lessen harm, but instead, promote equity and justice. Furthermore, Joanna's use of CRP demonstrates a pedagogy that is flexible and responsive, attuned to the dynamic nature of the classroom, the sociopolitical climate, and student experience. Whether this means reshaping an assignment in response to current events or adapting content to address students' fears about ICE raids, we refuse static, one-size-fits-all teaching. The classroom is a living community built on mutual respect, personal and collective accountability, and ongoing critical reflection where educators and students learn and act together as co-learners and co-doers.

Fourth, our narratives point to the necessity of engaged and accountable critique in advancing liberatory pedagogy. Following bell hooks' (1994) example of engaging Freire's (2000) work—

embracing its transformative potential while critiquing its neglect of [Black] feminist thought—we recognize the importance of interrogating our own frameworks and practices. This includes integrating approaches commonly employed in social work education, such as Fatima’s use of intersectionality, with often-sidelined approaches such as Jackie’s use of C.E.I. While intersectionality has broadened discussions of multiplicative (Hancock, 2007) marginalization, its use in social work often fails to (a) explicitly address intersections with disability, e.g. the frequent erasure of Audre Lorde’s (1997) experiences of disability and illness, and (b) interrogate how everyday practices, such as professors choosing not to mask or prohibiting student laptop use, perpetuate and legitimize ableist exclusion. When paired together, these frameworks reveal more than the need for intersectionality to account for ableism; they underscore our belief that interrogating the limitations of critical theory opens space for collective growth, wherein knowledge is shared and best cultivated when in dialogue with one another. By recognizing the historical and structural entanglements of oppression and state control, we can understand accessibility for sick, Mad, Deaf, neurodivergent, and disabled people as tied to dismantling all systems of domination.

The theories, pedagogical approaches, and social actions we apply reflect our own social positions and values, and we bring our full selves as scholars, community members, caregivers, and advocates into the classroom. This alignment enables us to teach from a place of relational accountability, grounded in the communities we serve and in solidarity with our students. Central to this work is our role as transformational mentors and role models. As Solórzano and Bernal (2001) describe, transformational role models are visible members of one’s own racial, ethnic, or gender group who actively demonstrate a commitment to social justice, while transformational mentors go further by sharing their experiences and expertise to guide the development of others. In our classrooms, this means modeling the critical inquiry, solidarity, and justice-oriented action we ask of students, affirming that they, too, belong in spaces historically not built for them and can use their education in service of liberation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

This paper offers tools and activities that social work educators can adapt in their classrooms to move students towards transformational resistance. While not all students may reach this stage, exposure to critical theories, frameworks, and justice-oriented practices can lay essential groundwork. Furthermore, the tools and activities discussed here are not meant as direct or prescriptive interventions, but as transformative practices that take shape through relationship, reflection, and collective struggle. Their implication for social work lies in reframing education itself as a site of world-building, one where students and educators enact the everyday work of dismantling the carceral logics that normalize surveillance and compliance as care and safety, choosing instead to build toward community and collective liberation. In this way, we align with abolitionist praxis that refuses reformist adaptation to violent systems and instead seeks to reimagine and rebuild the very spaces in which we learn and unlearn.

We are teaching and practicing in a moment of profound chaos, uncertainty, and political retrenchment, where anti-ADEI efforts and structural violence threaten hard-fought gains. In this climate, the principles of our profession must remain anchored in a deep, unwavering commitment to racial justice, equity, and collective liberation. Social work needs to be more intentional in the content that we teach in our classrooms that is aligned with the social work competencies, specifically Competency #3 that explicitly requires the teaching and practice of ADEI. Critical

theories and frameworks exist within and outside of our academic field; it is imperative that we are deliberate in seeking this information and integrating it in our pedagogy and praxis. In this sense, we return to our radically reimagined understandings of ADEI. Our work as educators is not simply to prepare students to enter the profession, but to cultivate practitioners who can critically interrogate the systems they are entering, recognize their complicity, and engage in transformative action to dismantle oppression. Transformational resistance is not an endpoint but a praxis, a continual process of reflection, action, and solidarity. By integrating critical theories and pedagogies into our teaching, we can help students reimagine and enact social work that is rooted not in compliance with the status quo, but in the pursuit of liberation. Echoing Assata Shakur's words, social work needs a r/evolution—and the classroom is one of the most vital places to begin.

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