

Letter from the Editor

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Abstract: This serves as the introduction to Volume 23, Number 4 (Fall 2017). This issue includes general submissions as well as reflections about teaching and learning.

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What a treat we have for you in this issue of *Reflections*! The current issue challenges the reader to consider practice on all of its levels, as well as to consider the effect of oppression and privilege on the practitioner and client. We are asked to reflect on the ways that our practice changes us, moves us along our personal and professional paths as we seek to make a difference with our clients in practice.

The challenges faced by at-risk populations on the mezzo and macro levels is discussed in “Schools Fall Short: Lack of Therapeutic Continuum of Care in Public Schools.” Here, Ms. De Vito discusses Kyle, the only sibling in a group of five who is living with his paternal grandparents. Kyle perceives himself as different from his siblings and is faced with challenges on a micro and mezzo level. Ms. De Vito is persistent in her engagement with Kyle, and it pays off. Schools are important resources for families, children, and neighborhoods. They provide needed services, a gathering place for the neighborhood, and an identity for the students and parents. However, in the United States, most public schools close for the summer. This disrupts the services for students who may be getting their only meal for the day in this place, or, as in Kyle's case, the only therapeutic intervention for his behavioral issues. The school, as a mezzo system, has a large presence in neighborhoods and can potentially influence the direction of a child's life. Ms. De Vito rightly recognizes the need for summer hours for therapeutic services, which can empower families and centers to focus on client needs rather than agency scheduling.

In “The Ripple Effect in the Expressive Therapies: A Theory of Change Explored Through Case Studies,” Ms. Gombert, Ms. Eckhaus, Ms. Kuehn, Ms. Nelson, and Ms. Lee describe the use of expressive therapies to help clients “move beyond cognitive understanding and verbal processing.” They found that the expressive arts therapies have potential to affect not only clients, but also their supportive systems. The authors describe their experiences with expressive therapies at the micro level with art and dance, and at the mezzo level with lyrics and art. Their experiences engaging clients who range from non-verbal children to adults with serious mental health diagnoses show that the flexibility and scope of this intervention is limited only by the social worker's imagination.

Ms. Turnbull shares with readers her “Reflections on Narrative Therapy,” told through the eyes of a new practitioner. She implores us to remember to notice the “sparkly moments” and the “wait-a-minute marvels” in our interventions with clients. Ms. Turnbull reminds us that therapy can be transformative for the practitioner as well as the client.

The issues of client empowerment and client-centered intervention is discussed in Dr. Estreet, Dr. Archibald, Ms. Goodman and Ms. Cudjoe's article, "Using a Client-centered Approach to Guide the Development of a Culturally-Specific Hip-Hop Intervention for African American Adolescent Substance Users." The authors describe the importance of linking micro and mezzo/macro interventions, and we are treated to a detailed framework of agency intervention to serve clients' culturally-specific needs. Utilizing a person-centered focus and a motivational interviewing framework, the authors discovered that youth were engaged and interested in treatment, but not in its current iteration. The youth were directly involved in the creation of a hip-hop intervention, and preliminary results indicate that the intervention was successful. Instead of viewing treatment as something that is "done to" youth, the authors collaboratively created an intervention program that allowed youth to be involved in their treatment. Expressive art therapies have been shown to be effective with client engagement, therapeutic relationships, and the client's own self-reflection behaviors (Eschenfelder & Gavalas, 2018).

Carvalho-Grevious and Sabbath, in their article, "Uniting Macro and Micro Practice Enhances Diversity Training," remind us that oppression affects social workers as well as clients. We must be cognizant of oppression at all system levels and be prepared to understand and intervene. Social workers often enter the field due to their own life experiences, yet we rarely acknowledge racial or ethnic oppression as one of these experiences. Oppression is often experienced as microaggression in everyday life, and lack of awareness can lead to the development of policies and programs that discriminate or provide further microaggressions. Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) described microaggression as, "the brief and common place daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (p. 273). This "death by a thousand cuts" is a significant contributor to stressors which can lead to physical, emotional, and mental health issues. In my own life as a multiracial person, I can clearly recall the first time I was asked, "What are you?" My early introduction to school was sheltered in a small, U.S. Department of Defense school located in Hanau, Germany. There, most of my classmates knew my parents, and mixed-raced children were common. During my first week in public school back in the United States I was asked, "What are you?" As if I didn't belong. As if I were an outsider. Did they not even recognize that I was a human being? Demographic forms contained neat, monoracial categories, and I was instructed to "select one." At the bottom of each monoracial category was the category I most often checked, "Other: Please describe." Within a few years I had developed coping mechanisms and perfected an answer to the question of what I was, but the memory of being labeled an "other" remains. Later, when my own children were in school, the advocacy of social workers and other groups paved the way for my children to have the option to check as many boxes as they desired to described themselves, instead of being forced to select "other" as an option. Carvalho-Gervious and Sabbath affirm that diversity training and bias must be approached at both a micro and macro level in order to be effective and reduce micro and macro bias.

Dr. Tinucci tells her unique story in "Reflections on the Impact of Privilege, Marginalization, and Story on my Social Work Practice, Research, and Pedagogy." Dr. Tinucci describes her personal journey through a childhood, which she describes as within a context of privilege, into

experiencing marginalization as an adult. Through poetry and a moving narrative, she describes her experience of feeling “different,” and she describes the microaggressions she experienced in her youth. While these microaggressions were not directed at her, they illustrate the power of language to stifle human development and self-image even when directed towards others. These microaggressions do not need to be active words; Dr. Tinucci describes the “deafening silence” surrounding discussion of the LGBTQ population in the 1980s, her awakening to privilege and class, her own coming-out process, the assumption of her personal and professional identities, and the impact on her teaching and research.

Finally, the theme of outsider continues in “Second Chances,” in which Dr. de Jong addresses the bias faced by incarcerated men and the development of alternate identities. Specifically, Dr. de Jong describes the men’s development of a professional identity as they participate in a social work course offered in the prison. Dr. de Jong favors us with his own perspective, which includes a background as a teenager in the Netherlands, a country that takes a different approach to incarceration compared to the United States. While by necessity we do not know what the future holds for the men in Dr. de Jong’s class, we get a glimpse of the hope that education and support can provide on the micro level, while gaining a clearer picture of the challenges faced on the mezzo and macro levels once these men are released from incarceration.

Mahatma Gandhi stated, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” This issue of *Reflections* is a good place to lose yourself, to consider the ways that our experiences and service changes us, and to emerge with a better understanding of how we have come into our own personal and professional identities.

References

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