

R.I.S.E.: An Intercampus Collaboration and Strategies to Re-Imagine Social Work Education

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Abstract: During the summer of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and national protests in response to police brutality and institutional racism created intense feelings of anger, pain, and isolation. With the effects manifesting in our classrooms, we realized the need to re-establish connection and community. This paper is our story about how faculty and students from two schools of social work in southern California built an intercampus collaboration—R.I.S.E. (Re-Imagining Social Work Education)—to address the seen and felt gaps in current social work education model. We share strategies, activities, and an analysis of reflective conversations about our experience which revealed four thematic categories: (1) connection led to community-building, (2) acknowledgement led to healing, (3) critical consciousness led to empowerment and accountability, and (4) taking action led to tools for change. Our findings support the importance of intercampus collective actions to make multi-level systematic changes in social work education.

Keywords: critical consciousness, accountability, empowerment, pedagogy, social work

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. (Roy, 2020, para. 46)

Introduction

The year 2020 brought the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic, massive protests in response to systemic racism manifested by police violence and murder, and highly polarizing and tense electoral campaigns. It was a time, as the great novelist and political activist Arundhati Roy (2020) described so vividly, where “the tragedy [was] immediate, real, epic and unfolding before our eyes” (para. 8). As social work educators and students, what unfolded in our classrooms was a shared and overwhelming sense of grief and loss, disconnection, and isolation. Though we were grateful for the technological advancements allowing a rapid shift to online classroom settings, the abrupt transition accompanied by the ongoing chaos caused significant distress within the personal, professional, and political domains of our lives. We further felt constrained by pressures to maintain some sort of normalcy and to conform to the rigid expectations of course competencies, assignments, and grades. Within the context of chaos and tragedy, such academic expectations seemed much less important and relevant. For us, what seemed most pressing were the very real threats impacting our personal and relational safety, health, and well-being. Thus, we relied on classroom time to prioritize and process our frustrations, anxieties, anger, and growing disillusionment with institutions and cultural norms that lacked the necessary critical leadership, analysis, and language to help.

On a weekly basis, we looked to one another for support in trying to make sense of what we were experiencing. We also turned to our sages for guidance and hope. One particular sage was Arundhati Roy (2020), whose deft analysis of the pandemic provided the contextual social-political-historical factors and power dynamics simultaneously interacting to cause great devastation and inequity. Roy (2020) pointed out that despite the harrowing conditions, the pandemic could be imagined as a portal to a new world, offering us choices for how we would like to move forward. Her words reminded us that even in the most challenging of times, there was still hope through action, meaning-making, and finding purpose.

It was in this spirit of searching for a portal to a new world of hope that we—two social work educators and ten MSW students from two accredited social work programs in southern California—came together to create a space for intercampus collaborative dialogue we named R.I.S.E. (Re-Imagining Social Work Education). R.I.S.E. began in Fall semester 2020 and concluded in Spring semester 2022. During that time, our goal was to address the real-time impacts of the pandemic on our well-being, to build our critical consciousness about critiques of social work education, and finally to learn alternative ideas for transforming curriculum to address institutionalized oppression more effectively. In this paper, we tell our story of creating R.I.S.E. and discuss how this effort can support continued calls for challenging current social work education models while advancing the profession.

R.I.S.E. Collective

Though not all members of R.I.S.E. participated in the writing of this paper, we would first like to acknowledge their contributions, creativity, and leadership in helping to establish R.I.S.E. The authors in this paper are José (MSW educator), Marissa (MSW educator), Melissa (MSW alum), and Angelica (MSW alum). Melissa and Angelica were alumni at the time of this writing and thus share their experiences in R.I.S.E. from their perspective as students. To begin, we offer a brief statement of positionality, to introduce ourselves to readers, and to share how we became involved in R.I.S.E.:

José, MSW Educator

I identify as a cisgender, heterosexual, male, multi-ethnic person of color (Mexican/Filipino/Italian/enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz), upper-middle income, hearing, temporarily able-bodied, US citizen with advanced educational degrees. I am in my 14th year as a faculty in the department of social work. My interest in seeking out others to dialogue and collaborate with stemmed from many conversations I had in the classroom. Following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Rayshard Brooks, students consistently expressed feelings of sadness, anger, outrage, and disbelief at what we were collectively witnessing. Our class discussions offered us an opportunity to reconsider and re-evaluate so-called foundational theories in social work, such as person-in-environment, systems theory, and other long-held perspectives in human behavior and social developmental courses. What became glaringly and painfully clear was that these theories did not contain the language or analysis to help us account for the brutality of white supremacy, nor the effects of capitalism, genocide, enslavement, and cis-hetero-patriarchal norms. In other words, the gaps in

our curriculum caused frustration—as well as a positive energy that drew the class to seek other theories and communities to better prepare us. I began to reach out to colleagues and was fortunate to connect with Marissa, who was also experiencing something similar. From here, we decided to bring our students together into dialogue.

Marissa, MSW Educator

As a female-identifying, cisgender, bicultural Latinx faculty in a school of social work, I was fortunate to have conversations over the past 11 years in academia where students would bring forward concerns and frustrations in their learning experiences and struggled in their identities as social workers. With current events as they were (between community protests combating the ever-present systematic racism of the US, discourse on police brutality ignited by the murder of George Floyd, and simultaneous management of the practical and emotional effects of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic), students talked pointedly about the conflicts they felt between the academic side of social work and their real-life professional practice. Specifically, students called out the inadequacy of the acknowledgment and action of social work as a profession in correcting the historical experiences of oppression among the populations and communities it proposed to serve. In sharing these conversations with students and with colleagues, I was able to connect with others to create collaborative spaces for inter-campus dialogues and actions to address the growing gap in our education models. This was guided by the desire to positively impact responses to the racial and social injustices being fought in real time and unpack how to move forward within social work education as my part of that system.

Melissa, MSW Alum

I identify as a cisgender hetero female, first-generation educated Xicana, hearing and temporarily able-bodied. During the initial assembly of the R.I.S.E. collective, I found myself in need of community and connection. Desperate for a space to discuss and process the recent racial and social injustice occurrences, I eagerly sought room to make sense of the violent images, stories, and personal accounts broadcast in the media. As a part-time student, I felt compelled to compartmentalize my feelings and reactions. Despite the anger, frustration, and anguish building inside me and many of my peers, the educational institution was not equipped to address the societal complexities we were all witnessing. The spaces I typically engaged in didn't know how to hold space for collective healing to begin. The social work department attempted to acknowledge the tragedies, but many communications lacked depth, materializing as performative. I received an invitation from José to join a community with fellow MSW candidates and educators in conversation about what was missing and left out from the social work field academia. Coming together outside the traditional classroom, we birthed a space that honored the human experience and needs for connection we had all been seeking. This experience grounded my understanding of the disconnect between higher education textbook knowledge and community-based relational, intuitive, experiential learning.

Angelica, MSW Alum

I identify as a cisgender, first-generation Mexican-American, Latina, MSW alum. I was fortunate enough to get to know my colleagues through my participation in a social work student organization. What started off as a conversation—discussing the feelings and thoughts towards the events taking place at the time (global pandemic, killings, and protests)—led to the development of a space where students like myself could share how all of these events impacted our education and views of the world, and educators were open to hearing us. We wanted a space where we could openly discuss how we wanted our respective programs to give us more, more than just writing papers or reading books and articles, and be given the opportunity to learn how we can apply what we learn to our lives and profession. I became intrigued learning about what it means to be disruptive—challenging and decolonizing social work practices and engaging in meaningful discussions with students and educators. I am grateful for the learning experience and hearing our guest speakers share their story and how they have become organizers in their professions and community.

An Intercampus Collective Response: The Formation of R.I.S.E.

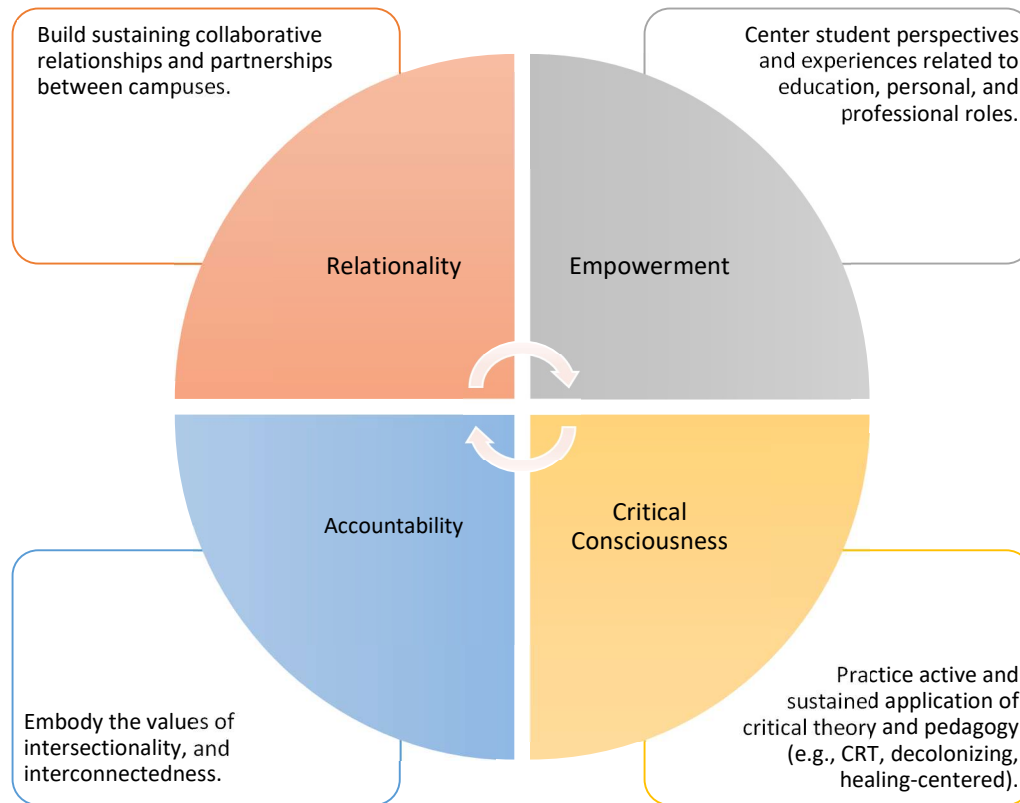
From the outset, we were intentional in creating a space to support sharing stories of personal and professional struggles—as well as individual desires for community-building and change—to directly address the many challenges facing our communities and society in general. Further, following the lead of generations of community and education activists who called for a radical transformation in education, our collective began to earnestly question and interrogate social work curriculum, theories, clinical strategies, and policy practices as part of the regular discussions and plans for action. From these powerful conversations, our collective formed a shared purpose—namely, to re-imagine social work education. In other words, through our dialogue we felt empowered to R.I.S.E. As a collective, R.I.S.E. reflected a commitment towards finding ways to shape the future of social work education by disrupting systems of oppression and eradicating white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy from social work curriculum. We further created the following mission statement to anchor our work:

R.I.S.E. is an intercampus collective of MSW students invested in shaping the transformative future of social work education. Working together to disrupt systems of oppression and build bridges toward liberation through the integration of an intersectional lens that invokes critical consciousness and transformational community healing by eradicating white supremacy, capitalism, and cis-hetero patriarchy from the social work curriculum and practices.

Rooted in an iterative process of community-building and organizing, and guided by an intersectionality analysis, our approach included relationship-focused efforts that centered members' perspectives and experiences. As our collective continued to meet, we developed a framework to shape our conversations and activities. Specifically, we focused on our relationships (e.g., taking care of ourselves and one another through partnerships between campuses); empowerment (e.g., centering student experiences in and out of the classroom); critical consciousness (e.g., learning to apply the tenets of critical theories and pedagogies); and

accountability (e.g., applying intersectionality and maintaining awareness of our interconnectedness; see Figure 1).

Figure 1



Through this framework we were able to generate options for community-based actions that supported learning and healing using education and community connections to ground critically conscious practices. Platforms were created where healing and repair could be openly processed and informed. R.I.S.E. designed, organized, and facilitated four intercampus events which invited practitioners who focused work on liberatory and anti-racist models of social work and emphasized social justice through an anti-oppressive lens. Events were held via Zoom and attended by faculty and students across schools of social work in southern California. Intercampus events held over a two-year period focused on two main topics: supporting community organization (e.g., intercampus dialogue, student-led state-wide collaborative initiatives) and critical examinations of social work education (e.g., review of current models, innovations, and alternatives).

R.I.S.E. students created a logo (see Figure 2) that we used as a symbol to represent our collective—and that we hoped would encourage and inspire others to get involved. We used the logo on our outreach materials to promote the events we hosted.

Figure 2



Method and Analysis

In this section we describe our method of analysis based on reflective conversations we had at the conclusion of R.I.S.E. Our conversations occurred over a two-month period with iterative communication on decisions relating to relevant focus of the review and themes. These personal accounts on the experience with R.I.S.E. allowed us to think critically and consider our feelings at the outset as well as our action steps and processes toward facilitating intercampus events. Given the reflective structure of our writing using personal accounts of our work post the experience with R.I.S.E., our project did not meet the requirement of Institutional Review Board approval. All information shared in the paper is identifiable, and we did not collect data outside of the personal narratives presented.

We selected a reflexive analysis of our conversation using three phases: preliminary, thematic, and interpretation (Durdella, 2018). José and Marissa separately reviewed and analyzed conversations, then afterwards met to discuss findings during each phase. The preliminary phase consisted of reviewing for a primary overt phrasing around the group's activities and aims that included repeated words, ideas, and feelings to generate a list of themes. During this phase the most prominent expression was how joining R.I.S.E. served as a meaningful way to build community, especially during a time of immense disconnection and isolation. Coming together to form a collective helped to address feelings of grief and uncertainty and simultaneously generated a sense of hope for proceeding within the social work classroom and profession. Following the preliminary narrative review phase, José and Marissa shifted to a more systematic

thematic phase of analysis in which patterns illustrative of the overall R.I.S.E. experience were identified. We created the following four thematic categories:

1. Creating connection led to community-building.
2. Acknowledgement led to healing.
3. Critical consciousness led to empowerment and accountability.
4. Taking action led to creating tools to make change.

In our final phase of analysis, José and Marissa debriefed to create consistent interpretations of each theme to support connective threads of the reflective narratives collected on the R.I.S.E. experience. Finally, José and Marissa shared descriptions of the thematic analysis with Melissa and Angelica for review. Melissa and Angelica reviewed and offered feedback, which José and Marissa integrated.

Based on our collective analysis, the primary narrative that emerged suggested that building connections between students and faculty for the purpose of acknowledging pain and anger contributed toward community-building, healing, and empowerment among R.I.S.E. members. Further, once a connection was established, members identified an increase in their critical consciousness related to efforts toward making social work education accountable and responsive to realities of the moment. Our interpretation aligns with a science-based understanding of how healing from trauma and oppression occurs, specifically that healing is not done in isolation but rather in community (Pica-Smith & Scannell, 2020). The following section highlights each of the four themes, including excerpts from our reflective conversations.

Creating Connection Led to Community-Building

The theme of creating connection was centralized on the concept of both alumni and faculty seeking connection as a commonality and expressed personal and functional need.

Melissa: I felt a disconnect having to compartmentalize the anger, rage and heartache I was experiencing from my role as a student to continue on as if nothing had changed.

On a personal level, the we talked about this emotional power of the collective as a way to build identity in a time when many in the group expressed a sense of loss: loss due to the pandemic and frustration around the lack of response by their academic institutions on the killing of George Floyd, subsequent socio-political movements across the country, and the perpetual racism and oppression students felt themselves within the social work educational, work, and community contexts.

Melissa: My idealist soul was feeling crushed, depleted, and hopeless. I knew that while what I was feeling was new to me, I was not alone in feeling lost. I joined R.I.S.E. in an effort to find and build community. What I found was a space to sort and make sense of my grief.

José: While we were certainly disappointed, angry, and frustrated by what we view as a social work education and educators protecting the status quo, we also realized that the current moment opened the door of new critical consciousness.

From a functional perspective the collective experience brought forth the need for community-building with ties to empowerment and feeling seen in a moment where their educational institutions were not providing that base. Central also were discussions of the need to feel acknowledged and guidance on how social work educational settings could and should support students with real life connections to the learning environment.

Angelica: My experience of organizing with other students around the mission of R.I.S.E. was impactful. Throughout my time with R.I.S.E. I was able to develop meaningful relationships with other peers and faculty. It was rewarding to see students coming together who shared a common view and wanted to learn how they could become involved and develop skills to support them in their journey as social workers.

As we continued these conversations, the emphasis aligned with the need to maintain the power of connection externally to colleagues and professors within their schools of social work in order to mobilize the expressed frustrations and find a home for the internalized needs for action.

Melissa: The R.I.S.E. collective fostered a sense of safety and acceptance, which offered me ease in openly sharing my input, but it also emboldened me to speak up in other spaces.

Acknowledgement Led to Healing

An important ingredient to what made R.I.S.E. successful was the intentional act of taking time to acknowledge the range of feelings we expressed. All of us described how we were impacted emotionally, physically, spiritually, and cognitively in trying to deal with a myriad of concerns. Angelica and José summarized what many of us experienced:

Angelica: There was so much chaos from experiencing a pandemic, social injustices, navigating online school, and personal issues.

José: While the election of Donald Trump in 2016 brought exposure to the foundations of what settler colonialism thrives on, it was the onset and chaos of the pandemic, the continued and highly visible police brutality waged on Black and Brown people, occurring within one of the most hostile, mean, and divisive elections in recent history, which contributed to my difficulty maintaining a sense of hopefulness about our future.

While living within this chaos left us in a state of overwhelm about our present and future, what also emerged was a growing recognition that social work education was disconnected from the reality of the moment. Melissa articulated what she observed that resulted in a questioning of the curriculum:

Melissa: As a student, the demands of academia remained the same in spite of all the civil unrest, and social and health disparities amplified by the global pandemic ... This separation felt unnatural and unrealistic. I understood that what was taking place in the outside world was directly connected to the field of social work, so why weren't we talking about it more explicitly?

It was vitally important to address our personal needs by ensuring that everyone felt seen and heard. Our action focused on taking care of ourselves through taking care of others.

José: Our meetings often felt like spaces for venting, receiving validation and acknowledgement, while understanding that things could be different; we also spent time building relationships, sharing about our experiences in social work openly, honestly, and sincerely. We worked well together, creating roles, sharing responsibilities, and always encouraging one another in supportive ways.

In finding ways to take care of one another, we created a space of healing where we learned to deal with our feelings of overwhelm. Some of the ways we accomplished a caring space were encouraging direct and honest communication, reminding ourselves of how learning from others keeps us humble, staying open to learning, and avoiding the dangers of single-storying¹ (Adichie, 2009) people's experiences. Further we applied a practice of expressing and normalizing vulnerability through example, which helped us learn to be comfortable with struggling in front of others. For José and Marissa, we were aware of the power and privilege we held as educators, and thus we made a clear effort to share openly and sincerely. We realized that students may not have felt comfortable sharing in front of us if we were not also willing to join the conversations in an authentic way. In effect, as educators our action was to counter perfectionism, and other dominant norms that define outward expressions of emotion and struggle as weakness and lack of professionalism. Angelica noted the effect this had on her.

Angelica: I felt welcomed and heard by faculty who were interested in wanting to hear how we as students want change in the curriculum to make us better practitioners ... R.I.S.E. gave a safe space for students to share their thoughts on the education they were receiving.

In turn, the commitment to sharing openly and with care inspired us each to want to contribute more towards the efforts to make a healing space. Addressing this functional need through validation and acknowledgement allowed us to honor student experiences throughout. Acknowledgement of distress allowed for meaningful discussions to begin re-imagining social work education.

Marissa: Those conversations lead us to see a need for meaningful conversations between faculty, students and practicing social workers around how gaps that existed in moving through the status quo of social work programs and curriculums we were delivering in the

¹ Described in Adichie's (2009) TED Talk, this refers to allowing a stereotype or "single story" (such as one encounter or societal, collective idea of an "other") to shape one's opinion of a person or group of people.

classroom and the world outside the classroom ... where our students were struggling and demanding answers that social work as a profession was not prepared to answer.

Finally, Melissa pointed out how through this process of acknowledgement, healing was possible, which breathed life and purpose into the R.I.S.E. mission statement.

Melissa: Coming together with my peers and being encouraged and supported by our professors helped me recognize the power and significance my voice has in a space. Working in a collaborative effort meant that all of our voices mattered and gave our mission life through action.

Critical Consciousness Led to Empowerment and Accountability

Having established a space rooted in care, encouragement, acknowledgement, and healing, we were able to simultaneously expand our critical consciousness about histories and current issues of systemic oppressive dynamics within social work education. Angelica called attention to the power of an intercampus collective discussion in widening her perspective of social work.

Angelica: I believed I knew so much about social work when I entered my program back in 2019, but when I became a part of R.I.S.E., I realized that the profession itself needs support in dismantling the systems of oppression it's rooted in.

Examples of a shift in critical consciousness emerged as members introduced language and analysis informed by critical race theory (CRT; Crenshaw et al., 1996), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), feminists, and LGBTQIA+ activists and organizers; there was an explicit and intentional effort to center the experiences of people of color, their histories of resistance, as well as the generational effects of oppression that they have endured. R.I.S.E. members were clear that in order to deal with the current issues of violence, it was important to have a language and analysis that accurately described things.

Melissa: Openly naming the root causes of the social injustices society faces allowed us to envision a path to repair the harm done by white supremacy, capitalism, and cis-hetero patriarchy.

Learning from others helped ignite a process of re-thinking and unlearning about the dominant narratives within social work education that promote more siloed learning and less mutuality in practice. However, the process toward developing a critical consciousness is challenging because it requires a willingness to interrogate what may have been considered normative while maintaining an openness to accepting new ideas. In this case, being in a collective with a shared purpose allowed members to lean into the struggle of unlearning.

Marissa: There was a need to recognize and struggle in a very open way and state that there may not be immediate answers but that there was a space to dialogue and be ok with the struggle as part of the commitment to activism and social change.

Struggling with a purpose within an affirming space allowed members to realize they were not alone in their thinking, and that others had similar questions.

Marissa: I was fortunate to find an outlet for the ideas and questions running through my head and that was conversations with a social work educator colleague who also was asking similar questions of the social work education system we were both operating in as academics and social workers.

Marissa's comment reflects a sense of empowerment through the power of collectivity. R.I.S.E. served as an essential antidote to the isolation, worry, and fear that had been building throughout the year. Melissa echoed a similar comment, noting a sense of empowerment through collective dialogue helped her feel she could influence change.

Melissa: The experience of being a part of an inter-campus collective was validating; it reaffirmed a sense of strength and power we had as a collective to influence change within the social work community.

Expanding our critical consciousness led to feelings of empowerment as well as a desire to hold ourselves accountable to the power and privilege that we held. Additionally, we felt a need to hold social work education accountable to its stated values and ethics. As we continued to meet and deepen our relationships with one another, we began to imagine ways we could take action toward accountability.

Taking Action Led to Creating Tools to Make Change

The work of R.I.S.E. served to support the realities of the student's lives and move to formulating actions to address expressed areas of change for social work curricula and professional practice guidelines. Members created tools for this effort and those that challenged the dominant narratives of the field that no longer served their truths as emerging practitioners. Tools included organizing regular meetings that prioritized open spaces for sharing and processing of emotions that ranged from frustration and gratitude. Tools also came in the form of activities that allowed for action plans informed by faculty and community experts to guide schools of social work on doing better and differently at integrating critical and anti-racist pedagogies into daily classroom activities and curriculum.

José: This was a moment to try out new ideas, to bring people together into conversation, to review our current education platforms and curriculums, and generate new ideas.

We designed, organized, and facilitated four intercampus workshops inviting social work educators, students, activists, and community organizers to share insights and strategies to re-imagine social work education. These workshops brought together students and faculty from California State University's Long Beach and Northridge campuses into dialogue, connection, and resource-sharing. The events challenged the status quo experienced in the classroom and extended the knowledge for workshop attendees, to connect ideas in more formal ways within their personal networks. For example, faculty shared having discussions in faculty meetings,

students talked about bringing the topics to student groups they participated in, and R.I.S.E. as a whole worked to outreach to other schools of social work to broaden the conversations and reach of the change process in motion.

José: I knew [cross-campus collaboration] was how to help restore hope, connection, and change especially within social work education.

Though the work was ongoing, our path reflected an experience where we felt we had gifted one another the skills of vocalizing one's lived experiences and understanding it as a crucial part of the learning process, promotion of self-advocacy and collaboration as a model for social change, and ultimately the progress one can make in shifting the status quo with those efforts.

Discussion of Findings

Based on our analysis, we learned how powerful it is to build meaningful connections between students and faculty during difficult times, which is something we believe can benefit many communities. First, coming together with the intention to openly acknowledge the various feelings of outrage, sadness, and isolation allowed for us to begin a healing process. Through our conversations, we realized that the factors that led to healing included developing our critical consciousness about the social-political-historical context. Sharing personal experiences alongside theories and actions from activists and revolutionaries gave us new language and analysis for interpretation and validation. We felt empowered to name the systems of dominance that operate within social work education. Energized through collective dialogue, we learned the importance of finding ways to get involved and be responsive to the realities of the moment.

Choosing to Walk Through It Together

As Arundhati Roy (2020) reminds us, the pandemic is a “portal,” (para. 48) an opportunity for us to shed the social work theories and practices that no longer serve us (or maybe never really served our interests to begin with). Roy (2020) challenges us to critically reflect on the dominant perspectives we have normalized while also learning to apply our imaginations to design something different. By making a choice to come together into dialogue, we were making a choice to walk through the portal together—shedding the traditional norms of power where teachers are viewed as the holders of true knowledge. R.I.S.E. became an active choice to discard those dominant beliefs of power in favor of finding commonality, validation, acknowledgment, and connection between people.

Melissa and Angelica remarked how when they were students, social work education often left them feeling in a “one down” position, noting experiences of teachers using paternalistic tones, having their ideas dismissed, and feelings minimized. Melissa and Angelica explained that R.I.S.E. gave them an empowered space to share their experiences. As faculty, José and Marissa had an opportunity to review the traditional norms and expectations prevalent in social work education. Choosing to intentionally form an intercampus relationship between students and faculty helped articulate contradictions in a social work profession that values the importance of human relationships, but that simultaneously upholds a top-down professor-over-student

hierarchy, resulting in students' feelings and experiences being dismissed. José and Marissa often debriefed separately from R.I.S.E. student members so as to assess and evaluate areas of power and privilege. José and Marissa openly shared those tensions and struggles with R.I.S.E. students, seeking out feedback as well as pointing out areas where learning and growth could occur. Ultimately, all of us felt that walking together into an intercampus journey of critical self-reflection was invaluable in establishing safety for people to share openly about their lived experiences. Our experience encourages the possibility for more social work programs to explore building and organizing intercampus experiences around solidarity movements, transformative justice, and liberation-based healing.

Implications for Social Work Education and Professional Development

Rooting our learning environments in use of trauma-informed pedagogy through healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018) supports social work education grounded in fostering student and faculty well-being and a person-centered approach to learning. This accounts for the unique lived experiences we all bring to the educational environments and communities in which we work. The question remains, though, for the academia of social work—how do we disentangle the dominant pedagogical approaches rooted in the “‘authority’ over knowledge” (Arday, 2018, p. 145) approach to higher education and hegemonic norms?

The answer lies in supporting communication and vulnerability by faculty and students alike (Pica-Smith & Scannell, 2020). Allowing for spaces to acknowledge biases along with positions of power held is key to this process. Facilitating a dynamic of learning not only in the classroom but with intercampus and community dialogues where representation of multiple narratives is possible allows for the reflection of marginalized experiences of students and communities. With this approach, educators and students create a learning community that dismantles the inherent power dynamics held within traditional educational models. Fostering such connections acknowledges the sociocultural identities and political contexts that we each uniquely exist within openly and directly (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Building in training and reinforced support for educators and students to competently talk about race and racism, to talk about the role of social work in historical experiences of oppression that impact marginalized communities, and to honestly allow for true safe spaces with students where they can express dissent in opinion without fear of educational repercussions is central to this effort (Arday, 2018; Pica-Smith & Scannell, 2020).

This work towards a healing centered learning environment can also support social work education that builds on the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2017) that requires social workers to promote dignity and self-worth while practicing social justice in and out of the classroom (Barros-Lane et al., 2021). At the center of this is the primary skill needed for all levels of social work practice: empathy. Empathy as a tool is commonly disassociated as a clinical skill faculty impress upon students in their training, but empathy as an educational practice is one that can change the dynamics of learning. It can support the essentials of critical, positive learning environments which allows for openness, flexibility, and humility without judgment (Friedman, 2022). It promotes a sense of safety for students within the immense vulnerability of the learning environment. Further, such efforts can support

persistence in the face of adversities in the change process, especially when anchored in collaborations across systems within the social work education and practice community. Fostering these connections promotes co-produced solutions across student groups, faculty, and the profession to create more sustainable and equitable change.

Conclusion

Considering how to allow for interpersonal relationships to be forged in and out the classroom can only serve to humanize us as we work together and create mutuality within social work education systems with students, university administrators, and communities in which we work (Barros-Lane et al., 2021). Future research can support a better understanding of how to formalize such educational models within higher education and more specifically social work programs. Qualitative research that delineates the intersections of the personal, professional, and political experiences of students and faculty can inform pedagogical approaches to learning that connect community and clinical practice in the classroom and practicum experiences. R.I.S.E. serves as an example of what can be learned from in that effort, where intercampus collaborations extend the strength in how the needs to reimagine social work education models are actualized in a meaningful way through connections and dialogue.

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