# Educating Doctoral Students for Social Justice Research



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# Why This Topic Matters Now

- **Social work research has been largely ignored in the major policy debates of the past 25 years**

- **Ambiguity of profession's definition of social justice creates gap between rhetoric & practice**

- **Doctoral curricula increasingly emphasize research methods in isolation from realities**

- **SW scholarship shifted from analysis of structural sources of injustices to assessment of the interventions that address symptoms of injustice**

- **Implications for future doctoral graduates**

# Part I



# THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH IN SOCIAL WORK

# Trends in Early SW Research

- **Synthesized modernist perspective on evidence & causation with elements of corporatist philosophy**

- **Used language of science, order, & efficiency**

- **Held contradictory beliefs on inevitability of social progress & human nature**

# Recurrent Tensions

1. "Problem focus" vs. "environmental focus"

2. Scientific investigation vs. advocacy-oriented research

3. Research on structural conditions vs. research on effectiveness of interventions

# Research by the COS

- **From environmental approach (Warner, 1894) to "intervention research" (Richmond, 1917, 1922)**

- **Focused on role of morals & culture in shaping individual behavior, not social conditions**

- **In 1920s: Child Guidance Movement infused psychodynamic theory into studies (e.g., delinquency prevention project).**

# Research by Settlement Movement

- **Focused on underlying causes of poverty**

- **Combined emphasis on explanation & prediction w/corporate focus on efficiency**

- **Used research to produce policies and programs to manage rapid change in an orderly manner (Ex: research on housing)**

# Robert Hunter (*Poverty*, 1904)



MR. ROBERT HUNTER
Author of 'Socialists at Work'
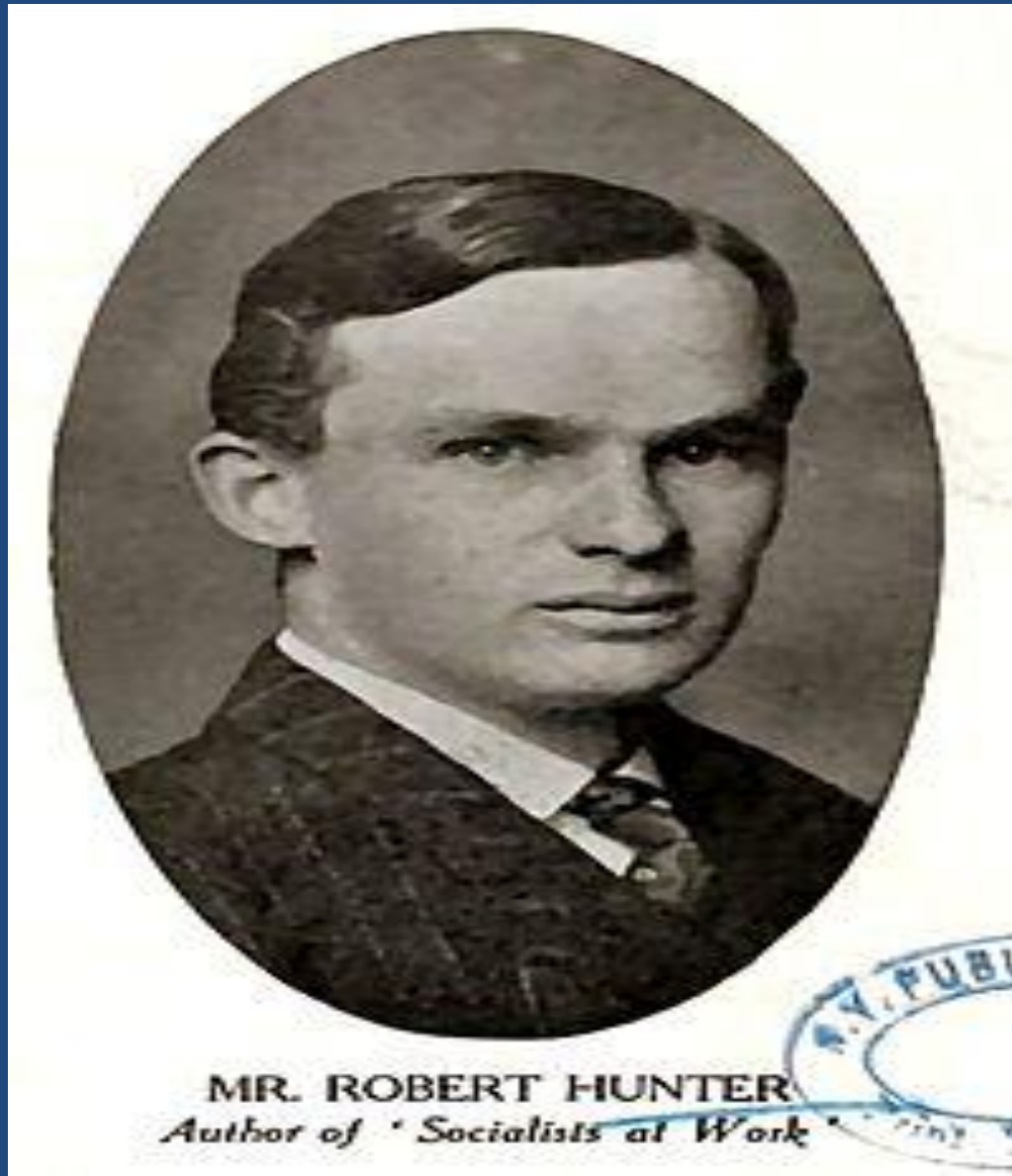
# Research on Immigrant Workers
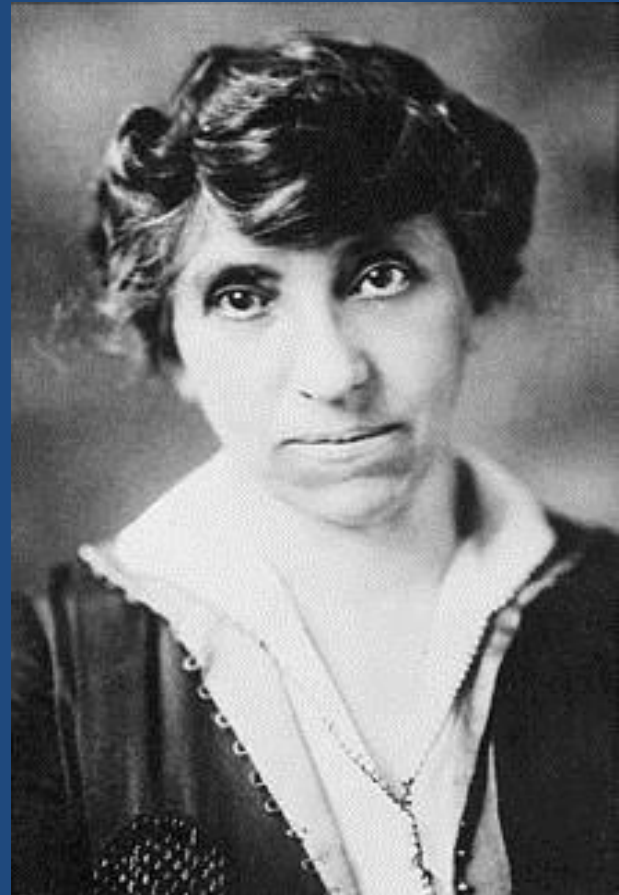
**Josephine Goldmark**

**Mary van Kleeck**

# Research on Juvenile Delinquency & Housing by Edith & Grace Abbott
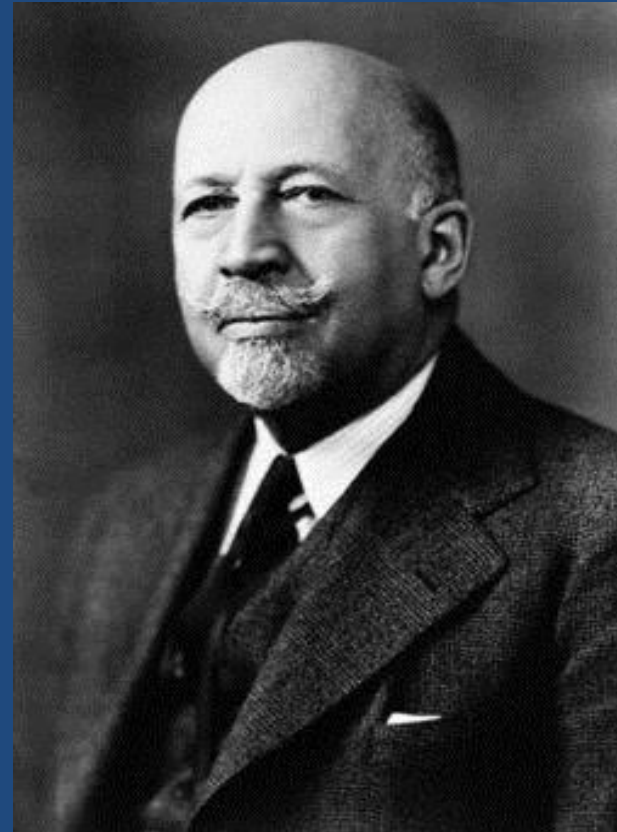
# Research on Children's Health

**Sophinisba Breckinridge**          **Julia Lathrop**

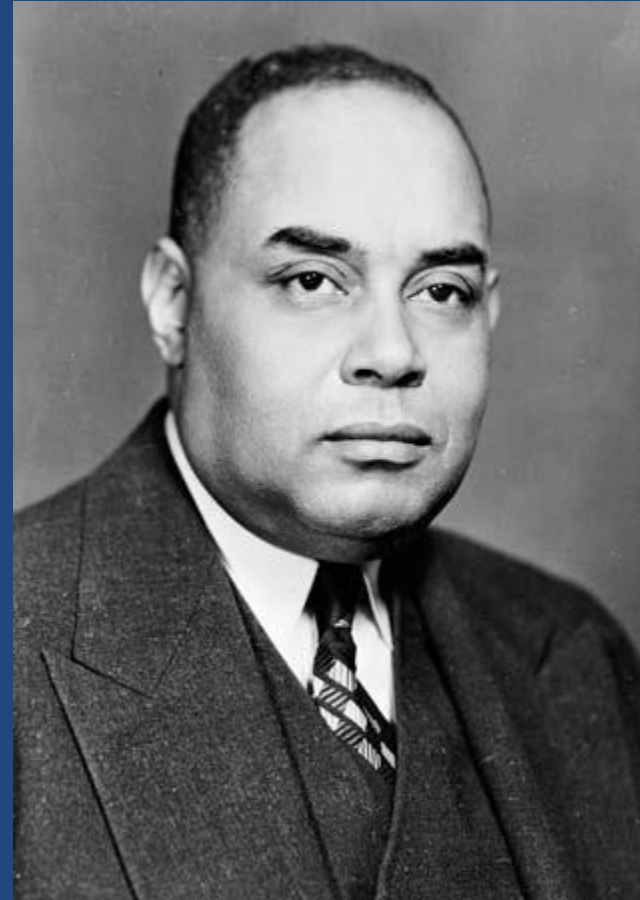# Ethnographic & Investigative Research by African Americans

**Ida Wells-Barnett**

**W.E.B. DuBois**

# Studies on Effects of Racism

**George E. Haynes**          **Chandler Owen**

# Split in Goals of SW Research During 1920s

## Health & Welfare Councils:

-- Community integration

-- Focus on individual/family problems

-- Assimilation of immigrants

## Community-Oriented Researchers:

-- Create industrial democracy

-- Enhance civic participation

-- Investigate impact of unemployment

## African Americans:

-- Bring problems into mainstream of social concern

# Why the Shift Away from Social Justice Research?

- **WWI's impact on idea of progress & reason**

- **Professionalizing impulse & status aspirations**

- **Fear of alienating elite sponsors**

- **Use of scientific research to establish professional control of diverse populations**

# SW Research During the Great Depression

1. <u>Universities & Public Welfare Departments</u>:

- Increased use of sophisticated statistics
- Use of new qualitative methods, e.g., ethnography
- Use of innovative forms of dissemination
- Development of alternative policy solutions

2. <u>In Private Family Service Agencies</u>:

- Focus on inter-generational family conflict
- Emphasized primacy of Individual/family relations

*All largely overlooked conditions
of women & racial minorities*

# By the Late 1930s:

**"Research in social work is inquiry into the <u>techniques used by social workers</u> in meeting certain human problems, whether these be individual or community-wide" –**

[Helen R. Jeter, *Social Work Year Book 1937*]

**(emphasis added)**

# Impact of World War II on Research

- **Focus on effects of war on individuals & families**

- **McCarthyism led to more conservative view of relationship between research & social change**

- **Shift from social/community issues to problems of service effectiveness and family conditions**

- **Greater emphasis on quantitative methodology**

# Consequence

**"By the end of the 1940s, the connection between research and social policy had largely disappeared"**
**(Austin, 1986)**

# Revival of Social Justice Research During the 1960s & 1970s
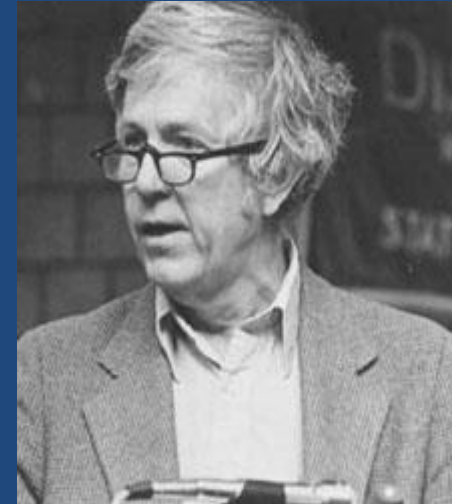
# Resurgent Conservatism:1980s & Beyond

- **Impact of NIH funding & critique of SW research**

- **Response by SW field (IASWR, SSWR)**

- **Growing influence of neoliberalism & biomedical model of research**

## Consequences:

1. **Emphasis on methodology, esp. quantitative**

2. **Heightened specialization of research field & more narrowly focused investigations**

3. **Growing role of intervention research & evidence-based practice**

# Summary: Impact of Social Justice Research by Social Workers

- Pioneered new forms of research

- Drew attention to issues affecting excluded & marginalized populations

- Established new view of problem causation

- Created knowledge base for SW profession

- Enhanced SW's professional status

- Influenced social policy through 1970s

# Lessons from the Past for Today

- **Importance of epistemological Issues**

- **The role of power in research**

- **Advantages of "mixed methods" approach**

- **Impact of professionalization on research**

# Part II



# SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH TODAY

# Social Justice Research Is

- "Research from, by, and with the margins"

- "Marginalization" = A "context in which those who routinely experience inequality, injustice, and exploitation live their lives (Brown & Strega, 2005)

# What is a Socially Just Researcher?

"Being an anti-oppressive researcher means that there is political purpose and action to your research work...one is making an explicit personal commitment to social justice [and] making explicit the political practices of creating knowledge...It is about paying attention to, and shifting, how power relations work in and through the process of doing research." –

(Potts & Brown, 2005)

# Purposes of Socially Just Research

- **Critical analysis of environmental & interpersonal factors affecting services to excluded populations.**

- **Interrogation of how societal institutions construct & reproduce conceptions of "truth"**

- **Examination of ideas that shape research methods & their impact on the world <u>NOT</u> on the relative value of quantitative or qualitative research**

# Two Prerequisites for Socially Just Research

"(1) A scientific community must produce relevant information through a rational deliberative process and (2) Groups affected by findings must be aware of and able to use the information."

(Clark & Hollander, 2005)

# Assumptions About Knowledge

- **Different forms of knowledge have equal value:**

  **-- Theoretical (hypothesis verification)**
  **-- Craft ("how to" or evaluative)**
  **-- Normative (value-driven)**

- **Distinguish scholarship of discovery, integration, and application**

# Criteria for Valid & Useful Knowledge

- **Knowledge incorporates the perspectives and interests of service users regarding:**

    -- Initial assumptions & research questions

    -- Methods of data collection

    -- Methods of data analysis & interpretation

    -- Conclusions & implications derived

# Why Social Justice Researchers Must Consider Perspectives of Service Users

- When it is necessary to provide a context that explains the roles of other systems in the processes and outcomes of research;

- When other systems possess power that has been a source of oppression of service users;

- When the views held by individuals in other systems help to explain the views & experiences of service users.

# Social Justice Research & Epistemology

- **Ask**: Do research methods reflect cultural biases, structural inequities, or unquestioned and potentially false underlying assumptions?

- **Example**: Questionnaires or other instruments that are translated into another language or used in a dramatically different cultural context

- **Implication**: Debating the use of qualitative or quantitative measures may pay insufficient attention to how service users perceive their realities

# Debating Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methodology is a False Issue

## Real Issues:

1. Establishing relationship with subjects
2. Applying cultural consciousness & reflexivity
3. Allowing groups studied to have a voice

### Social Justice Advantages of "Mixed Methods"

Some aspects of the views & experiences of people are identified through quantitative methods while the personal meaning of these findings is discovered thru qualitative methods.

# Social Justice Research & EBP

- **Issue is <u>NOT</u> over the importance of evidence, but how evidence is defined, interpreted, & applied**

## Key Issues:

1. What constitutes evidence? Who decides?

2. What should be the role of "practice wisdom"?

3. How can we avoid negating the power of service users in the selection & evaluation of evidence?

4. How can we factor in diversity issues in selecting & evaluating evidence?

# One Alternative: Participatory Action Research

- <u>Goal</u>: "To resist the intellectual colonialism of Western social research into the 3rd world development process" (Gouin, et al, 2011)

- <u>Goal</u>: Production & ownership of knowledge by oppressed groups to enable them to define their own realities & mobilize for action by making stakeholders full partners in all phases of research

# Part III: Social Justice Research in PhD Education

# PhD Students & Social Justice

- **Study found that students combine liberal, conservative, & neoliberal ideas (Hudson, 2016)**

- **Ambiguity reflected in their views of nature & purpose of research & implications for practice**

- **Association between students' satisfaction with their education & extent to which programs integrated social justice concepts (Shapiro, 2017)**

- **In institutions with very high research activity, students interested in social justice less satisfied**

- **Concerns re depth, theory, translation of research**

# PhD Faculty & Social Justice

- **Believe social justice is central but define it vaguely – often combining distributive, relational, & individual justice concepts**

- **Emphasize conduct of research more than theories of justice or purposes of research**

- **Equate social justice with "politics," which is antithetical to rigorous, unbiased research**

- **Define social justice research as (1) studying justice-related topics to effect change; OR (2) Making research process non-exploitative.**

**(Longres & Scanlon, 2001)**

# PhD Programs & Social Justice

- **Dominant justice paradigm used derived from Rawls**
- **Growing influence of neoliberal ideas**
- **Shift in focus of research from change to adaptation**
- **GADE 2013 guidelines recognize connection between research & social justice <u>BUT</u>**
- **References to social justice in program documents are diverse & ambiguous**
- **"Successful" research is defined narrowly by field**
- **Guidelines do <u>not</u> discuss how to prepare students for careers of social justice infused scholarship**

# Persistent Challenges

- **Tension between goals/values of research universities & social justice values of social work**

- **Diverse views of interdisciplinary faculty**

- **Contradiction between creation of successful research agenda & promotion of social justice**

- **Risk of compromising truth in pursuit of policy and social change**

- **Risk of sacrificing quality in pursuit of more socially just forms of research**

# Part IV: What is to be Done?

# Some General Suggestions

- **Critique existing theoretical paradigms & research methodologies, including the process of defining, creating, & assessing evidence**

- **Encourage student scholarship on root causes of systemic issues rather than their symptoms**

- **Change criteria for evaluation of research quality**

- **Address fundamental Q's re epistemology & forms of knowledge development & transmission**

- **Increase content on ideology, political-economy impact of professionalism & especially history**

# Correct Ahistorical Perspectives
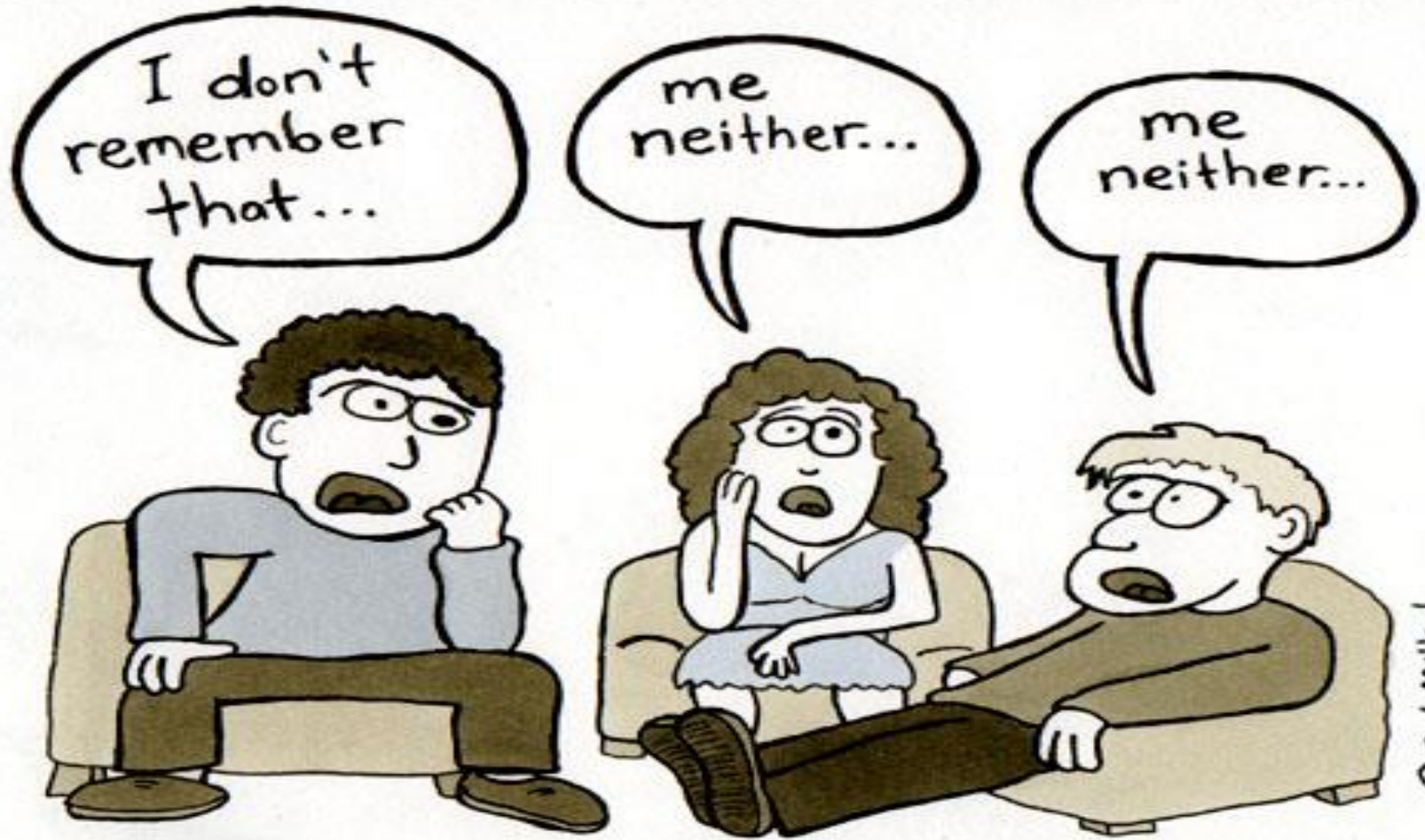
# Why History Matters

# Implications for Teaching

- <u>In Classes</u>: Demonstrate & apply critical inquiry into uses/misuses of research methods & components of socially just methodology

- <u>In Documents</u>: Clarify program's theoretical orientation

- <u>Goal</u>: Make sure students understand the social justice implications and issues that exist in all stages of research

# Learning Objectives for Students

1. Recognize the socio-political context of research
2. Maintain a community-based orientation
3. Be aware of contingencies affecting practice
4. Adapt research instruments to culture studied
5. Be flexible about researchers' roles
6. Be aware how participants cope w/oppression
7. Be sensitive to cultural norms of participants & take extra steps to protect them from harm
8. Regularly consult codes of ethics for guidance

# How to Infuse Social Justice into the Doctoral Curriculum

1. Build awareness of why this is important
2. Evaluate current curriculum & climate
3. Explore possible steps to improve
4. Get buy-in from major constituencies
5. Make desired changes
6. Evaluate impact
7. Renew commitment to change
8. Expand commitment to change

(Modified from Shapiro, et al, 2015)

# Specific Steps (Hudson, et al, 2014)

1. Create a <u>formal structure</u> to develop ideas & discuss how they can be infused into program

2. Cultivate working knowledge among faculty & students of major theories of social justice & their implications for research & scholarship

3. Develop capacity to assess how SW research can have an impact on communities & policies

4. Apply ongoing critical inquiry into uses & misuses of research methods & goals

5. Incorporate diverse social justice theories & research approaches into curriculum

# Part V: Conclusion - What Social Justice Research Can Do

# Expand the Subjects of Inquiry

# Disseminate New Information

# Importance of Dissemination

- Beyond publishing in "high impact" journals

- Research becomes a catalyst of change & an arena of social struggle

- Forge strong partnerships with service consumers, constituents, & community agencies to effect change through research

# Educate & Empower the Public

# Democratize the Research Process

**Incorporate perspectives/interests of service users:**

- Choosing issues worthy of study

- Assessing measures & measurement tools used

- Examining data collection for potential biases

- Deciding who will have access to the data

- Determining how to analyze & interpret data

- Assessing consequences if consumers' responses reflect negatively on service providers

- Analyzing how responses will affect future services

# Interpret Old Data in New Ways

# Importance of Data Analysis

1. "Facts do not speak for themselves but are at the mercy of whoever chooses to give them meaning" (Montague, 1964)

2. The data we do <u>not</u> have & the questions we do <u>not</u> ask deprive various publics of relevant life-giving and life-saving information" (Clark & Hollander, 2005)

- Thus, because data are filtered through the minds of each person examining the data -- A social justice perspective considers the cultural context & power relationships at the time data were collected, analyzed, & reviewed

# Use New Forms of Communication

# Communicating Socially Just Research

- **Q's re Dissemination: To whom & in what format?**

- **Encourage students to translate research into forms that enhance its transformative potential & increase social work's participation in critical social discourse about current policy issues**

- **Implications for "Grand Challenges" Initiative**

# Promote New Values & Norms

# Address Power Relationships

- **Make overt how power relations permeate the construction and legitimation of knowledge**

- **Researchers have power to do this by virtue of their knowledge, organizational sanction, & linkage to a university**

- **We can protect research subjects who may fear that their responses will cause them harm even if investigators pledge confidentiality**

- **To do this: It is important to acknowledge researcher's social location & political commitments**

# Create a New Vocabulary



Language is the Key

# By Doing So … We Can

- **Clarify the meaning of social justice in the 21$^{st}$ C**
- **Realign the profession's goals with its mission**
- **Challenge societal assumptions about issues**
- **Be more open to alternative conceptual frameworks, policies, programs, & theories**
- **Form new alliances with clients & potential allies to pursue social justice goals**
- **Redefine the meaning of social welfare & the concept of service to meet 21$^{st}$ century realities**

# Mentor the Next Generation

# Why This Matters

- **Unless students develop a clearer, more in-depth understanding of social justice, they may become scholars who inadvertently perpetuate injustices**

- **If we believe in SW's mission, we need to create transformational scholars, teachers, and leaders**

- **Given current political environment & CSWE guidelines, PhD grads who receive an education emphasizing social justice will be better able to conduct socially just research, and become more effective teachers & service providers.**

Final Thoughts

"Exclusively maintaining a sole focus on strong science can become a sophisticated oppressive tool for scientific imperialism ... [However] ...delivering strong science by listening to ... [people's] voices ... and sharing their struggles constitutes a *bona fide* strategy to help them increase their quality of life." – Bauman, et al, 2011

# For Discussion

1. How should we define social justice in SW educ?

2. Which research topics, questions, theories, and methods should be used?

3. How should we prioritize research questions and hypotheses to promote a social justice agenda?

4. How can we infuse social justice into education w/o jeopardizing goals of objectivity & truth?

5. What are the most effective ways to disseminate social justice-oriented research?

# For Discussion (cont'd)

6. How can we resolve the tensions between the goals & values of research universities & the social justice values of social work?

7. How can we integrate the diverse views of social justice in interdisciplinary faculties?

8. How can PhD students develop successful careers and still engage in social justice research?

9. How can we maintain high quality in more socially just forms of research?

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