

Critical Intersectionality and Social Work Practice Mini-course, SEED week, CILC, 2016

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In this mini-course, we will provide an overview of a critical intersectional framework developed by the UM-SSW Critical Intersectionality Learning Community and provide opportunities for students to apply 7 sets of capacities in different aspects of social work practice (with examples, critiques, and skill practice). Participants will explore positionalities in their own lives, engage in a variety of interactive activities, and work together to identify how they will continue to apply these capacities in their future SSW experiences.

Critical Intersectionality approaches draw from Critical theories which stress theorizing and acting to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982). (e.g., Frankfurt School, critical race, feminist and cultural analyses). Major emphases are on analyzing sources of power differences in society, taking action towards social, economic and cultural justice, and challenging and reshaping power inequities and the forces that sustain them. Intersectionality frameworks attend to multiple types of differences/positionalities [e.g., race, ethnicity, economic class, age, disability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression and other TLGBQQI issues] and how these interact. Positionalities include social locations (structural), social categories (symbolic and cultural), social processes (day to day organization, community and group dynamics), and social identities (at self and relationship levels). How we experience our identities, privilege and oppression are influenced by positionality combinations and contexts. Combining these approaches helps to make sense of complex human conditions and especially how to address patterns of oppression and privilege that deeply affect human opportunities and barriers, well-being, and health.

Objectives

- Participants will learn definitions of concepts related to critical intersectionality and steps and processes for praxis and critical consciousness, demonstrated in a brief analysis of the impacts of privilege and oppression in their own lives.
- Participants will apply principles of critical intersectionality in analysis of group activities and in different relationships in their lives, examining sources of conflict and potentials for collaboration.
- Participants will practice application of critical contextual thinking and action planning in a practice example. They will schematize key elements and steps, collectively, with an individual analysis of their contributions and learning.

Specifically we will

- identify seven sets of capacities for just practice, with examples,
- engage in processes for praxis and critical consciousness development,
- stress the importance of conflict and sources of conflict and potentials for collaboration,
- and articulate and practice principles for critical contextual thinking and action planning.

Significance

Justice is more than the absence or reduction of injustice, and the pathways and challenges to justice vary for those with different mixes of positionalities and in different contexts. Intersectionality dimensions are associated with systems of power, as well as complex social structures, systems of meanings, interactive processes, and internalized identities. Practitioners must navigate their own backgrounds, understand how others view them, and work with people similar to and different from them, in a variety of contexts. They must also learn to use analytic frameworks that can illuminate interlocking systems of privilege and oppression, in order to identify social justice goals and barriers to these for different mixes of positionalities and contexts. Thus, working for justice, and practicing socially just processes requires a) the ability of members of different groups to understand and navigate their own lives and environments, and b) human service workers, educators and others to work more effectively with these issues. This mini-course will introduce participants to frameworks and skills and develop goals to continue learning about power, systems of meaning, relationships, and identities in their social work education.

Course Design

The instructors represent multiple positionalities among us, and will work as a team in implementing the course. The course will be very interactive, using multiple methods, including individual, small group, and entire class activities, a trip to the UM Museum of Art, and a series of generative, reflective assignments. A major emphasis will be on individual self-exploration, interacting with diverse classmates, introducing and developing 7 sets of knowledge and skill areas.

Course Philosophy and Responsibilities

We are endeavoring to enact the principles, knowledge, and skills encompassed within critical intersectionality frameworks. We draw on principles of adult learning, in which it is important to identify what you already know and bring to a new learning environment, so you can contribute your life experiences to the learning effort as a whole, and because old learning and approaches frequently have to be modified to incorporate new knowledge and approaches.

“Epistemological curiosity,” from Freire, refers to eager exploration of knowledge about our worlds, theorizing about justice issues and a vision for positive changes, causes and possible solutions to problems, and interacting with diverse others towards these goals. It especially requires reflecting on ourselves in interaction with others, and as we engage in change activities together.

Resource materials

- Kimberlé Crenshaw Discusses 'Intersectional Feminism'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROwquxC_Gxc
- Arao, B & Clemens, K. (2013) From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. From *The Art of Effective Facilitation*, Stylas Publishing, 135-150.

Optional:

<http://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2014/04/kimberl-crenshaw-intersectionality-i-wanted-come-everyday-metaphor-anyone-could>

Assignments

Generative/Reflective Assignments for Mini-course

A. Participation. This includes

- being present and active on both days of the mini-course,
- completing the pre-class questionnaire, readings, and video, and
- engaging in some regular “journaling”, to capture your “take-aways,” reactions, questions, and application to yourself and social work after each session of the mini-course. We will give you a few minutes at the end of many sessions to capture your ideas. The instructors will not collect and review these, unless you ask for feedback. They are for your own use, and also to get you used to leaving some space for reflecting on and naming your learning and reactions.

B. Draft your **philosophy statement** as a practitioner, in whatever methods and fields you are considering, and more broadly in social work and related to your other interests and skills. You will do an initial draft of this between Tuesday night and Thursday morning. The initial draft is due by Thursday morning at the beginning of class. Please bring four paper copies of your initial draft with you to the Thursday mini-course session, and post one on the Canvas site to receive feedback later from course faculty. If you want to revise your philosophy statement and submit a second draft for more feedback, you can do so, but this is not a mandatory requirement. If you choose to submit a second draft, please submit it by Wednesday, September 7 by 11:59pm on Canvas.

- C. Third, within a couple of days after the course is over, write a **letter to yourself** that captures inspirations, regrets, future goals and aspirations (for the Fall and past that time), building on what you have learned in this mini-course. We will give you an envelope in which you should put this letter, addressed to yourself, and sealed. This letter is due Thursday, September 8 by 8pm and must be submitted to Beth Glover Reed's office door pocket, Office # 3736.
- D. Fourth, after the course is over, produce **a short analytic reflective paper**, about a) what you learned in the mini-course—about yourself, definitions of justice, mechanisms of privilege and oppression, about critical intersectionality, social work, different modes of teaching and learning, being a social work student, b) new questions and issues, any worries, and c) how you went about writing the letter to yourself and learned in the process, and d) anything else you want to include. This should be at least three and no more than four pages double-spaced with reasonable margins. This final paper is due Wednesday, September 7 by 11:59pm on Canvas.

More specific instructions

- A. **Journaling.** A way to capture your immediate perceptions and reactions, in order to hone your observation and reflection skills.

Journaling Prompt for Positionalities Exercise: Time: 10:55-11:00am on Tuesday

(Working on building skills in the capacity of critical awareness, use of self, and strengthening strategies for resilience and generativity)

- What did you learn from this exercise?
- Were any signs particularly difficult to stand by, or signs that stirred up particularly intense feelings? Were there any signs that stirred up warm or positive feelings?
- What did you notice about the groups of people who you stood with--were there major or significant differences within the group, despite gathering under the same sign?
- Were there any classmates who you noticed that you never stood with? Were there some classmates who you noticed that you stood with frequently? How might that influence your collaborations with these classmates when working for social change?

Journaling Prompts for Classroom Vignettes: Time: 2:55-3:00pm on Tuesday

(Working on building skills in the capacity of conflict, dialogue, and community)

- What did you learn about how you can handle conflicts in the upcoming term based on these vignettes?
- What types and sources of conflicts were represented in the vignettes?
- How did your initial responses from when you read the vignette change after your small group discussion, and from the large report out?
- Thinking about your own positionalities and social locations, both visible and invisible, and their intersections, how might these influence your responses to the vignettes, or your responses to handling conflict in the classroom during the upcoming semester?

Journaling prompts for the generative interviewing: Time: 4:00-4:05pm on Tuesday

(Working on building skills in the capacity of taking actions towards Social Justice Vision)

- What did you uncover about your vision for working towards social justice and social change?
- How can you take action towards your vision this upcoming semester?

Journaling about UMMA visit and social justice capacities: Time: 11:30-11:40 on Thursday

(Working on critical contextual thinking, working with others, critical consciousness, and actions toward social justice)

- What did you think were the most important observations or conversations from this experience?
- Did viewing the art make you feel differently about justice and critical intersectionality? If so, how?
- How did the creative art activities at UMMA change your viewpoints (if at all) for working for social justice?
- What did you learn through these art activities at UMMA about your own social locations?

Journaling about practice examples: Time: 2:40-2:45 on Thursday

(Working on critical contextual thinking, working with others, critical consciousness, and actions toward social justice)

- What are the positionalities and intersectionalities represented in these scenarios?
- How did people's positionalities influence their practice goals?
- How do people navigate their own professional roles and responsibilities?
- How do people work together to form a decision?

B. Philosophy Statement

- Should be one page single-spaced (although you may want to attach other notes towards a philosophy statement, as long as they aren't too long)
- Use any style you want, but it should be accessible to the reader, and a succinct introduction to who you are (no course citations in this document)

What is a philosophy of social work?

For the purpose of this assignment, we will view this statement as representing your personal values, acquired skills, and professional goals. It demonstrates the important ideas, theories, beliefs, and assumptions that underlie your professional behaviors, it identifies the skill and competencies you have acquired thus far, and it lays out what additional skills you would like to attain in order to achieve your desired career goals.

Most statements begin by articulating the values that underlie our work: “social justice”, “respect for humanity”, “dedication to positive social change”, “personal empowerment”, etc. Although there is no set formula for creating a statement, most authors begin with identifying these core values and then move on to brief explanations/theories and examples of how those values inform their practices, long-term vision and goals, as well as their commitment to on-going professional development. Some include basic principles or themes that underlie their practice.

Often students include one or more quotes that reflect those who inspire you, or values you live by/that guide your practice. It can be useful if you can generate a metaphor that represents some primary way that you conceptualize yourself.

Usually a philosophy statement includes a little past, present, and future—what led you to where you are, started you on this path, what you are concentrating on/skills accomplishments/principles from your education, and where you are heading.

Getting Started:

Please address the following questions in developing your philosophy statement:

1. What brought you to the field of social work? Why did you choose this profession?
2. What are your sources of inspiration—people, art, written materials, life experiences?
3. What have you learned in thinking about or doing social work that has excited, empowered, and/or moved you in some way? Have there been any particular topics, incidents, assignments, and applied experiences etc., that have had an impact on you? If so, what was the experience and why did it affect you? What did you learn about yourself from the experience?
4. What specific theories inform your practice?
5. What specific skills would you like to acquire in the immediate future?
6. Conclude with a few ‘next steps’ for your professional development/or your aspirations for your career.
7. Is there a metaphor that reflects your general approach to your work?

Generative Interviewing Guidelines

Purposes:

- to identify areas of strength in your previous experiences;
- to help you articulate and organize areas of tacit and embodied knowledge
- to uncover the principles and practices that have guided (influenced/underlined) your work and to begin to understand how these same principles and practices can guide and influence your academic goals and experiences
- to surface joy and rejuvenate the experienced practitioner—remind you why you started doing this work in the first place.

These processes are crucial to students' sense of themselves as innovators, change agents, leaders.

Methods

- The interviewer prompts and asks questions of the interviewee and the reflector provides insights into the experiences of the interviewee in terms of deeper meaning, values, and strengths inherent in the interviewee's stories.
- Useful to use *appreciative inquiry* methods in this interviewing, by asking questions that will uncover and reframe responses to emphasize strengths, accomplishments and how challenges have been addressed.
- The interviewer should write the person's words down to help to capture thoughts.
- Reflect ideas back using different words to help the person find better/more words
- Look for themes, deeper meanings, the music behind the words
- What forms of power do you hear either emerging in, or still hidden behind, the stories

Frequently generative interviewing ends with devising a metaphor for one's approach to social work or their particular practice area. These metaphors can serve as strong visual representations of your style to include in your philosophy statements. We will use generative processes to begin to develop metaphors in future sessions.

What three things should the world know about this person? If you were to think of this person as a character in a book, or a great myth, what would the character be like? What roles and attributes would they have?

C. Letter to yourself

One of the seven capacities of Critical Intersectionality is to, "locate and analyze our social categories (positionalities), deepen critical consciousness, [and to] stay whole & engaged (integrating social/political dimensions with individual experience)," (Reed, Yoshihama, Peet, and Alvarez, 2012). Throughout the course, you have had multiple opportunities to engage in learning and discussion surrounding the complexity of Critical Intersectionality. To carry forward what you have learned, this assignment asks you to write a letter to your future self.

Ideas for the letter:

- Reflect on what you learned about yourself in this course.
- Reflect on Critical Intersectionality and its role in your social work practice.
- Describe goals and aspirations for yourself in applying Critical Intersectionality in your education and practice.

- Describe goals and aspirations for yourself in community building.
- Challenge yourself to integrate Critical Intersectionality into your life and learning.
- Outline reminders to your future self about what your main takeaways were from this course and what you hope to embody and/or remember.
- Consider how Critical Intersectionality is a part of your vision for social justice?

IMPORTANT NOTE: The ideas are just suggestions, not required.

This assignment precedes and will help you generate content for your final reflection. It is intentionally open-ended to allow room for self-reflection and honesty. Your instructors will not be reading this letter, but you will receive credit for completion. Once you have submitted your letter, the instructors will retain it (in the unopened envelope) and subsequently return it to you later in the semester. Because we recognize that each student will be at different places in their journey of understanding Critical Intersectionality—and it’s application—we do not have strict page limits, but please try to write at least one page for this letter.

D. **General analytic reflections** on your learning and take-aways from the course, and how you will continue to learn about and apply these things in the future (at least three, no more than four pages double-spaced). See earlier description as well. This final paper is due Wednesday, September 7 by 11:59pm on Canvas.

- Revisit briefly key topics covered in the course and how we accomplished these activities, your journaling entries, your philosophy statement and letter to yourself, and how these have evolved. See course description for suggested topics for this paper.
 - Visions for social justice (goals and processes) and relevant knowledge and skills
 - Critical intersectionality concepts, boundaries, types and manifestations of power, importance of contexts
 - Assumptions, principles, skills, knowledge for your future learning and practice
 - How this class has contributed (or not) to your goals for future development and progress towards these. Implications for how you will approach your work as a student.
- Describe briefly one or two accomplishments/learnings from this course and any regrets
- How will you continue learning in the future
- Anything else important for you to convey about your experience, development, etc in relation to the course...

Assignment Time Table

Assignment	Due Date
Participation (journaling in class, survey, attendance)	each class
Initial Draft of Philosophy Statement	Beginning of Thursday class (9/1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring 4 paper copies to class

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post 1 draft on Canvas
Second Draft of Philosophy Statement (optional)	Wednesday, September 7 (11:59pm) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post on Canvas
Letter to Yourself	Thursday, September 8 (8pm) must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit to Beth Glover Reed's door pocket, Office # 3736
Short analytic reflective paper	Wednesday, September 7 (11:59pm) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post on Canvas

Schedule

Tuesday: August 30

10:30 to noon: Introduction to the course and each other, multiple choices activity and overview of praxis, 5 minutes of journaling and written reactions to social justice.

12 to 1—Working lunch. Engage in praxis: “Unpack” previous activity, what did you notice, differences and similarities, tensions and convergences. Implications for climate building for rest of the session, for yourself, for class as a whole.

1 to 2: What is Critical Intersectionality—key components, elements, who you are.

2 to 3: Power and Differences in the Classroom

2:55: [5 minutes of journaling]

3 to 3:10: BREAK

3:10 to 4:00: Exploring oneself through generative interviewing. Critical consciousness, skills in critical awareness and interaction, ideas for philosophy statement

4:00: 5 minutes of journaling

4:05: Debrief the day. What worked, gripes and concerns. Navigating power and differences.

4: 20: Preparation for Thurs. Develop first draft of philosophy statement. Begin thinking about letter to yourself. Reminder to convene at 8:45am on Thursday to walk over to UMMA.

Thursday, September 1

8:45: Gather at McGregor Commons

9:00: Arrive in activity room, UMMA, for orientation and overview. Divide into groups, with guidelines

9:30: Begin cycles. Three of them, ending at 11:30

11:30 to 11:40: Journaling

Walk back to SSWB classroom to return by 11:45 for working lunch

11:45: Working lunch. In small groups from earlier—identify major insights, questions. Write on newsprint, and then share—similarities, differences, take-aways—using 7 capacities framework

12:50 to 2:40: Application of critical intersectionality capacities in practice examples

2:40 to 2:45: Journaling

2:45: to 3:00: BREAK

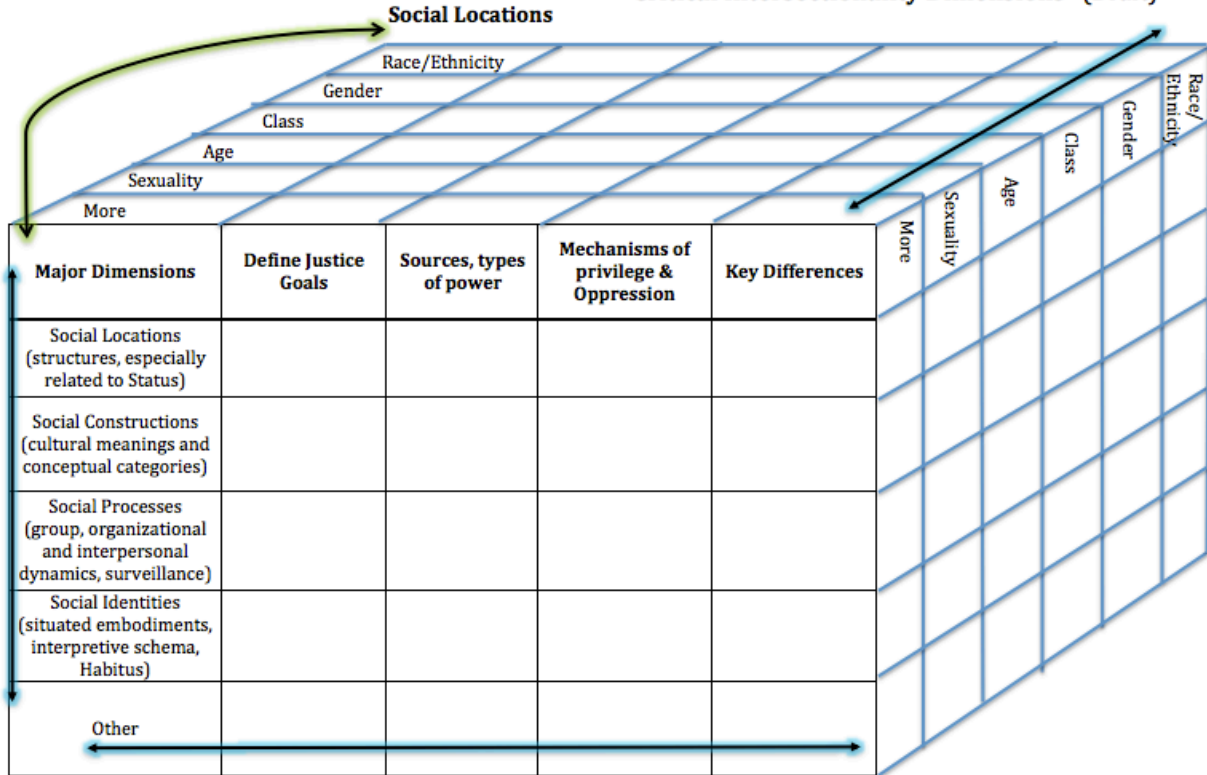
3:00: Giving and receiving feedback on initial philosophy statement (in trios)

3:45: Assessing our journey—a kind of group participatory reflection and analysis—generate material, and discuss

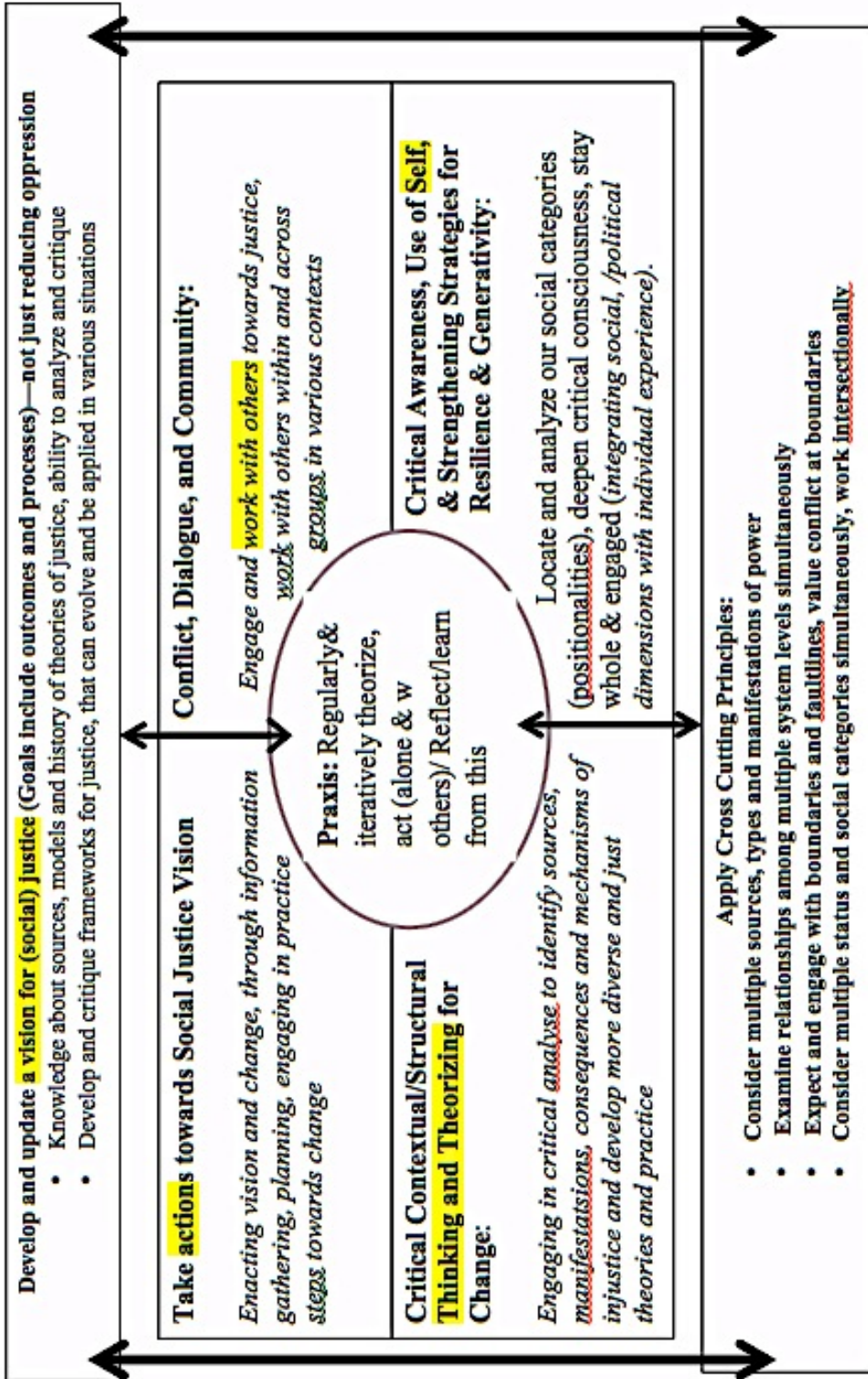
4:15: Next steps and celebrations

4:30: Final collective reception

Critical Intersectionality Dimensions (Draft)



Social Justice Capacities and Skills



<p>Critical Contextual Thinking: Identify the sources, manifestations, consequences, and mechanisms of injustice and to recognize and develop more diverse and just theories and practices (<i>engaging in critical analyses</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze types, levels, and sources of power in practice contexts, theories and actions. 2. Identify how inequities are manifested, maintained and reinforced in social systems, theories, processes, and social work practice of different types and levels. 3. Recognize the impacts of privilege and inequities on various levels of social ecology (individuals, family, organizations, community, society). 4. Value and use multiple ways of knowing and constructing knowledge. 5. Understand how individual, family, group, community, organizational, national/citizenship history/culture. 	<p>Actions towards Social Justice Vision (<i>enacting vision and change</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adapt social justice vision for specific practice contexts. 2. Identify and implement steps towards social justice in specific practice contexts [practice methods and areas, including making linkages across practice levels and methods]. 3. Use processes that promote social justice, including those that resist and reduce disempowering and marginalizing dynamics (e.g., use accessible language, attend to power and marginalizing dynamics in groups & organizations, value diverse leadership/participation styles). 4. Build on positive sources of power to envision and work towards social justice; work to reduce disempowerment. 5. Build on indigenous knowledge/experiences of individuals, groups and communities in practice and evaluation.
<p>Critical Awareness, Use of Self, & Strengthening Strategies for Resilience & Generativity: Understand (locate and analyze our social categories (positionalities), deepen critical consciousness, stay whole and engaged (<i>integrating social/political dimensions with individual experience</i>).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognize one's own positionalities on multiple dimensions, including nationality/citizenship (the relative power of the nation) and other insider/outsider statuses. 2. Recognize how these intersect with each other and change in interactions with others and in different contexts. 3. Learn from those with different voices, values, and experiences, including different ways of knowing. 4. Demonstrate knowledge and skills for intersectional humility; [be able to suspend one's own assumptions and perspectives in order to understand/recognize alternative world views]. 5. Use skills in a) maintaining and strengthening one's own social support and self-care, b) finding joy and meaning in one's practice. 6. Cultivate and use a "critical third eye" (ability to observe and evaluate one's own actions and their consequences). 	<p>Conflict, Dialogue, and Community: Allow us to recognize and honor differences and engage and work with others towards social justice goals (<i>working with others for justice</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate intersectional humility in communication and interactions with others. 2. Assess the advantages and disadvantages of working collaboratively within and/or across groups (defined by positionality and stigmatized status) and act accordingly. 3. Initiate and promote dialogue/alliances/and collaboration with others where/when appropriate <u>within and across</u> groups and boundaries. 4. Use conflict and negotiation skills towards social justice goals. 5. Incorporate insights from those with insider and outsider statuses into social justice planning and actions. 6. Foster environments and processes that are supportive and generative among those working for justice.

