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AUTHOR Calderwood, Patricia  
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ABSTRACT

In a response to a call for educators to work for social justice, this paper introduces an argument for developing a novel community of practice: a trans-profession community for social justice. The paper explores some features of community, profession, and social justice work that suggest basic elements of such a professional community, including possible areas of resistance to a core orientation toward social justice within professional activity. It addresses professional education's place within this framework, including suggestions for how to support educators to enter into professional community for social justice. It finds that, together with professionals from other fields, educators can contribute and use their specialized knowledge, practices, networks, and other resources to work for social justice alongside their students, patients, and clients. (Contains 50 references, 2 figures, and 1 table.) (Author/BT)

# Toward a Professional Community for Social Justice.

Patricia Calderwood, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction

Fairfield University

Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions

ED 479 100

## Contact Information:

Patricia Calderwood

Fairfield University

Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions

North Benson Road

Fairfield, CT 06430

Phone: 203-254-4000, x. 3017 Fax: 203254-4047

[pcalderwood@fair1.fairfield.edu](mailto:pcalderwood@fair1.fairfield.edu)

## Summer contact:

Patricia Calderwood

113 E. Broad St.

Mt. Vernon, NY 10552

Phone: 914-668-3897 home fax: 914-667-4043

[pcalderwood@fair1.fairfield.edu](mailto:pcalderwood@fair1.fairfield.edu)

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### Abstract

In response to a call for educators to work for social justice, this essay introduces an argument for developing a novel community of practice: a trans- profession community for social justice. Some features of community, profession and social justice work that suggest basic elements of such a professional community are explored, including possible areas of resistance to a core orientation toward social justice within professional activity. Professional education's place within this framework , including suggestions for how to support educators to enter into professional community for social justice, is addressed.

## Toward a Professional Community for Social Justice.

### *Introduction*

These days, there is a resounding call for educators to teach and work for social justice. But as many of my students, mainly prospective or new teachers, take pains to show me, teaching for social justice is extremely challenging and sometimes professionally damaging. They find that their work is more solitary than communal. They see too little inter-profession collegiality and shared purpose, due to heavy workloads and groaning resources. Burdened by numerous mandates, they often cannot lift their eyes, attention or energy beyond their daily endeavors with students. How can we possibly ask them to change the world?

In response, I propose that we begin to develop a new notion of professional community for social justice to address this issue (this author, n.d.). In the following pages, I offer some observations on how the structural elements of community and profession, when brought together around the idea of social justice, provide a framework for this affiliation, with particular attention to professional education's place within this framework.

### *Social Justice*

Social justice works to undo socially created and maintained differences in material conditions of living, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the perpetuation of the privilege of some at the expense of others. Novak writes that "social justice is the first principle of democracy (Novak, 2000, p. 12). He explains that "... social justice is the product of the virtuous actions of many individuals" and that it requires "...inspiring, working with, and organizing others to accomplish together a work of justice" that has as its aim the good of all (Novak, 2000, p. 12). It has been defined as "the engagement with and advocacy for those in our society who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally underresourced (Frey, Barnett Pearce,

Pollock, Artz and Murphy, 1996, p. 110).” Frey and others describe what they call a sensibility toward social justice that “(1) foregrounds ethical concerns; (2) commits to structural analyses of ethical problems; (3) adopts an activist orientation; and (4) seeks identification with others (Frey and others, 1996).”

In order to promote social justice, we must act to reduce and eradicate oppression, however distant we may feel from personal culpability for its enactment. Unfortunately, the mechanisms of oppression are largely invisible, even to those of us who strive to live our lives and carry out our work ethically. We live and work, for the most part, within a context of immediacy, a context so absorbing that it is easy to be blind to how we are situated within a web of connection to countless other lives, many of which we can barely imagine. Even when we can imagine the lives of others, so much of our moral training includes the notion of free will and consequences that we are conditioned to believe that individuals and groups are the only artists of their own conditions. This simplistic idea of culpability and reward fuels relations of power that maintain social injustice (Frazer & Lacey, 1993; Harding, 1995; Nussbaum, 1999, 2001; Rawls, 1971; Solomon & Murphy, 2000; Young, 1990).

Moral community, with its core of responsibility and care among members, is central to the work of social justice. An orientation of connectedness and responsibility enriches the notions of fairness and equality, extending the baseline of ethical practice (Opatow, 1990; Smiley, 1992). Each member within moral community must be empowered; none can be marginalized or exploited, or moral community cannot thrive. It is not merely about meeting needs, but overturning injustice (Allahyari, 2000; Freire, 1998; Frey and others, 1996; Nussbaum, 1999).

### *Community*

How we understand community has changed over time, although the word's dual use as a label for some social groups and as a description of caring interdependence among group members does persist. Today many of us are in multiple communities based on shared professional identity, religious beliefs, political affiliations, and shared concerns. The possibility of community forming among people who share values, such as that of social justice, is strong. (Anderson, 1991; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton, 1985; This Author, 2000; Cohen, 1985, 1994; Frazer, 1999; Tönnies, 1988 (1887)).

The notion of community intersects with that of profession primarily through what we call communities of practice, a label for a group “ created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise (Wenger, 1998, p.45)” A community of practice includes members from novices to experts in the activities associated with the practice, an extensive formal and informal system of learning and teaching the practice, and mechanisms for the development of novices into expert practitioners, so that the practice can continue over time (Chaiklin & Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice can intersect, creating a liminal space where each participant might hold multiple roles, and where the peripheries of expertise and experience are fluid.

### *Profession*

Professions develop a specialized body of knowledge, a base of clients, a self-regulating system of accountability, and strict guidelines for professional membership. Their well-defined sets of practices are learned through systems of apprenticeship that includes several years of advanced university-based education Within the internal system of accountability, individual practitioners have considerable autonomy in their work. In addition, there is an ethical cast to

the functions of a profession that is expected to permeate every professional activity of its membership. (Callahan, 1988; Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001; Martin, 2000).

Often a profession is thought of as a calling, a vocation to which a person is drawn, in contrast to other occupations which might be chosen for more mundane reasons, such as convenience or financial security (Barber, 1963; Martin, 2000). In order for professions to be respected within society, members are expected to contribute to the general social good in both professional practice and non-professional activities. As a result, the boundaries between some aspects of the private and public spheres of a professional's life are blurred. For example, an educator is expected to be ever mindful of his or her obligation to serve as a role model for youth, and thus maintain high moral standards in his or her private life. Teachers who fracture community trust in any fashion earn deep scorn and bring great disgrace to their professions as well as themselves. Partly for this reason, a number of professions, including education, have developed extensive regulating systems and codes of professional conduct through their professional organizations or accrediting bodies.

Professional codes of ethics and responsible practice can sometimes create conflict between one's allegiance to the profession's ethical stance and more lofty one. Such conflicts of ethical responsibility place a number of burdens on the individual practitioner. For example, the individual who acts in accordance with higher ethical standards than are demanded by a profession might serve as a catalyst toward more socially just practices for her profession. Conversely, this practitioner, because she opens a profession's activities to examination, may be seen as a liability by her profession or institution, and suffer significant material and professional consequences as a result (Callahan, 1988; Martin, 2000).

It is possible for one to identify as a professional without experiencing the sense of interconnectedness and caring that mark practices of community. It is possible to meet all the expectations of one's profession without entering into community with one's fellows. Even the specialized identity of a member of a community of practice does not necessarily include the experience and commitment that is evoked by community.

Still, many professionals do enter into community, experiencing feelings of goodwill, interdependence and reciprocal obligation to each other. For some, professional community is forged in the personal relationships with like-minded colleagues with whom they have shared an intense professional experience, such as teaching poor kids, scrambling for resources, or building schools with extensive health care facilities. For those who find that a sense of professional community is forged in these ways, the pursuit of social justice moves from an abstract notion embedded in a code of ethics to actualization in every activity and decision of professional life.

#### Professional Community For Social Justice

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, in their book *Failed Revolutions: Social Reform and the Limits of Legal Imagination* (1994), analyze court cases to track the nature of resistance of normative thought with regard to transformative social actions in the United States. They identify patterns of resistance that include denial, marginalization, cooptation, and other processes that mute radical ideas and spokespersons. Such resistance has the effect of interrupting or modifying potentially transformative legal judgments so that little change takes effect.

Delgado and Stefancic note that when change does finally come about, it is often because public sentiment has moved, so that formerly radical ideas seem reasonable and just, and former norms seem unjust and in need of revision. While public battles rage around charismatic figures



and controversial laws and court decisions, there is much quiet work being done elsewhere by individuals who are doing their jobs in the most socially responsible ways they can manage. Belenky, Bond & Weinstock, in their book *The Tradition That Has No Name* examine the quiet work of grassroots organizations and community leadership (Belenky, Bond & Weinstock, 1997). Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon (2001) have conducted extensive research on what they have come to call good work – “work of excellent quality that benefits the broader society (p. XI). Gardner and his colleagues have proposed remedies to counter impediments and challenges to good work in professions. These include a critical reflection of practice that might result in a range of changes, from a revitalization of a field through expansion of its functions, reaffirmation of its core values, diversification of its membership, to the creation of new institutions. One of the key elements in these remedies is the option professionals have of taking a personal stand for good practice.

Mike Martin writes of “meaningful work” – work that is “...rich in intrinsic satisfactions from goods internal to the work (2000, p. 21).” Deeply meaningful work, for Martin, is not merely excellently performed and fairly compensated, but also has a significant ethical component that goes beyond what professions codify as ethical or responsible practice, moving toward an active social justice ideal.

However we label it, this good, meaningful work, in tandem with the more public struggles for social justice, is what leads to the enlightenment of public sentiment. There is a cumulative effect on individual and collective attitudes and beliefs that results from even subtle shifts in behavior. Social norms, and thus, social possibilities, develop as a result. In contrast to social critics who see this quiet work as ultimately supportive of the status quo of social injustice, we can see the seeds of a community for social justice.

Although professionals such as doctors, lawyers and educators generally attend to only some elements of patients', clients', or students' lives, the reality is that lives are integrated. Patients are also prisoners or victims, refugees are students, students need health care and social services, and so on. Multiple professionals may thus interact with the same individuals or groups serially or simultaneously. When professionals oriented toward social justice work together, sharing expertise and resources for the benefit of their students, clients or patients, there is the possibility for an exponential growth in the effectiveness of their professional work toward social justice. To go further, when these same professionals work alongside their students, clients and patients to undo social inequities that frame their lives, they are recentering profession and community together for social justice.

This new professional community for social justice draws on the strengths – especially the knowledge and commitment of the members- of the separate professions as it invents its identity, recognizes and utilizes its diversity, develops its norms of practice (activities, beliefs, values), and celebrates its existence. The combined attributes of profession and community can support each other well when they are purposefully oriented toward such a worthy end as social justice. The necessary cross-professional conversations and negotiations about practices, membership, ethics, values and so on will provide opportunities for this community to grow resilient as it develops and affirms new norms for professional activity (this author, 2000).

*Elements of professional community for social justice*

Although at first glance the conditions for supporting community appear to also be fundamental components of a profession, there are differences that can be substantial. One important difference is that the affective, emotional bonds that mark the social relations of community are not necessarily fundamental to a profession, although they may be present within

professional community. Elements of identity in community include shared history, common goals and cohering values; professional dispositions echo the commonality of values.

Community and profession both include systems of learning how to be competent member of the group, but community relies more upon maintaining implicit norms, while in profession, expectations for competence are mainly explicit.

Both Table 1 and Figure 1 identify important conditions of community and profession as they can be linked together for social justice. The following passages note congruencies and differences in the community and professional aspects of the professional community for social justice.

Place Table 1 here

Place Figure 1 here

### *Community-specific elements*

#### *Identification as a member of community for social justice.*

One of the considerations for locating the membership of a trans-professional community for social justice must certainly be the level of conscious commitment to acting for social justice. It would be a very small community if the requirements for membership in good standing demanded, for example, a deliberately activist orientation from every member at all times, including the early stages of membership.

Among the elements of a professional community for social justice are group and individual identity that primarily cohere around shared understandings of social justice, are dually rooted in personal beliefs and professionally specific codes of ethics, incorporate affiliations across professional boundaries, and work with, as well as for, students, patients, clients.

Identity in this community includes recognition of shared goals, including the reduction of social injustice, elimination of mechanisms of oppression, and the insuring of the continuation of the professional community for social justice.

People will enter and engage with this community in different ways, at different stages of their lives, for different reasons. Their awareness of and commitment to issues of social justice, and thus the comprehensiveness of their identification as members of this community, may change as they work with and learn from others within the community.

When professionals oriented toward social justice work together, sharing expertise and resources for the benefit of their students, clients or patients, there is the possibility for an exponential growth in the effectiveness of their professional work toward social justice. To go further, when these same professionals work alongside their students, clients and patients to undo social inequities that frame their lives, they are re-centering profession and community together for social justice.

*Accounting for difference within professional community for social justice.*

Although the collapsing of some professional borders may well result as people learn to coordinate their practices for social justice, there must be considerable attention paid to accommodating necessary differentiations in specialized professional identity, for several reasons. One is practical, as this community ideally will not be seen as threatening to existing professions, but rather serve as an example of how professions might begin to affirm social justice as a reason to practice. If existing professions are to be able to learn from and align with this community, there need to be doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, community workers for social justice who maintain good standing in their special fields. A second reason is that most professionals have invested significant resources and made substantial sacrifices to become credentialed in their professions. So, in addition to maintaining professional distinctiveness, there

needs to be accommodation of individual differences in knowledge, expertise, stance, and so on among the individual community members. Along with these investments, many professionals are justifiably proud of their professional and personal accomplishments and practices. We do well to acknowledge and honor the roads traveled to membership in our community. We are collectively enriched by the diversity of knowledge and experience we each bring to the community for social justice.

*Learning how to be a member of a professional community for social justice.*

As in all professions and communities, a system of learning and developing one's expertise in the identifying practices (including beliefs and values) needs to develop. There will be recognized experts, teachers, and mentors who can model a range of practices that support social justice. These may or may not be recognized as the leaders in their medical, legal, or other professions; some may not have an external professional identification at all. Some of these experts will have traveled a developmental path toward increasingly deliberate social justice work, and can serve as models for such development in others. In addition, persons who also hold the identity of client, patient, or student are potential experts, mentors and leaders in our community.

Some aspects of this system of learning might be formalized, as in traditional, university-based education of professionals, but much will be informally constructed (Belenky, Bond & Weinstock, 1997; Dohm & Cummings, 2002). The education of community leaders in particular includes a significant amount of informal learning.

Allowing for the possibility of personal development toward increasingly conscious social activism grounds the community as one whose central practice is social justice, rather than counseling, teaching, nursing, and so on. The coalescence of the central core value and practice-

social justice- does not require an abandonment of the identifying practices and values of the professions of social work, law, or medicine, for example, but may inspire members of these and other professions to amend practices that do not support social justice, thus delicately or radically changing those professions in multiple ways. Figure 2 illustrates some of the mechanisms of learning that mark our community for social justice: mentoring, modeling and guided practice. Required experiences within professional schooling and voluntary activities within and across professions incorporate the mechanisms of learning how to be a member of the community for social justice. For some members, there will be personal development toward the more activist end of some or all of the lines, but this is not necessarily so for every member.

An important element of learning how to be a member of the community is personal experience with social injustice. This does not mean that unless one has consciously and materially suffered, one has not experienced social injustice. Indeed, many of us have profited from the inequities of injustice. But the personal experience, be it living with or working side by side with those who have suffered, is essential. For some, it provides an electrifying jolt of awareness and empathy, and is the entrée to social justice work. For others, it is reinforcement of the resolve to work for justice.

There is an implied developmental pathway for learning how to be a competent member of professional community for social justice, as one can see in Figure 2. This developmental progression is also a snapshot of the range of conscious awareness of and commitment to social justice work among community participants. It is possible to imagine an ebb and flow of individual and group identity within community for social justice that is not only developmental, but also situational. Experts in one context may appear less so in others; individuals may abandon commitment temporarily or permanently, and so on. The mechanisms for learning

competence will shift in prominence situationally, as may any individual's capacity or disposition for practicing for social justice shift situationally.

Insert Figure 2 here.

*Celebrating a professional community for social justice.*

Rites of passage, professional meetings, awards and honors are typical opportunities for celebration of profession and of community. Inductions, graduations, and other formal ceremonies occur regularly and with planning; other ceremonies are more impromptu, arising as circumstances dictate.

Paul Loeb suggests that one way to combat the burnout, sense of failure or frustration that can sometimes afflict even the most optimistic person engaged in social justice work is to celebrate the accomplishments and small victories that otherwise might pass unnoticed in the struggle for social justice (Loeb, 1999). Although Loeb focuses on individuals, his observations about the necessity of acknowledging accomplishments ring true for those who work together in community. Even a moment's respite for solitary reflection can serve to acknowledge and honor work carried out by those with whom we are in community for social justice.

There is a deep personal center of humility that marks many members of our professional community for social justice. This humility does not take comfortably to self-aggrandizement; it can prompt reluctance for public acknowledgement, and some antipathy for the designation of honors and awards. These ends are not very important, I suspect, to many who work for social justice. Yet, because the ceremonies (whether simple, fleeting, elaborate, or extended) of recognition and gratitude can serve to renew and inspire us, and because the feelings of fellowship and celebration they evoke are appealing, it is important that the celebrations occur. In addition to the benefits to current community members, the more public ceremonies of

celebration and recognition bring the community and its work to the attention of those not yet in membership, hopefully inspiring others to join in and continue to work for social justice.

*Professional Elements*

Among the elements that mark profession are specialized practices, a base of knowledge, client base, system of learning, accountability and the development of professional dispositions.

*Practices of professional community for social justice.*

In general, professionals are expected to perform certain activities, such as prescribing medication to patients, that are limited to their specific field. Some activities overlap, as social workers, clinical psychologists and doctors all can offer psychotherapy, dentists and ophthalmologists screen for AIDS-related symptoms as part of their routine exams, teachers scrutinize students for indicators of neglect or abuse, and so on. Some activities cannot effectively be carried out without the cooperation of professionals from other fields, who coordinate their own profession-specific practices for the benefit of shared clients or patients.

Within a professional community for social justice, there will be activities, such as surgery, that are profession specific, while other activities, such as providing access to competent surgeons, will cross professional boundaries. Many of these activities, whether profession-specific or generalized, are complementary, so that, for example, the teacher and social worker together bring particular and shared expertise to bear beneficial results for their common students and clients.

Within the professional community for social justice, coordination and cooperation of practices across professions is a hallmark of professional and communal activity, especially when these activities are undertaken in solidarity with those most directly affected by injustice (Mishler & Steinitz, 2001).



*Knowledge Base within professional community for social justice.*

In addition to the profession-specific knowledge bases of the various members of this community, there are additional bases of knowledge upon which the members draw. The first is an understanding of social injustice mechanisms, including an understanding of how seemingly unrelated social injustices have common antecedents and interconnected consequences. A second is knowledge, acquired first hand or vicariously, of effective strategies for social justice work. A third source of knowledge, again acquired first-hand or vicariously, is a familiarity with existing organizations and movements that work for social justice. A fourth knowledge base is a comprehensive accounting of additional resources available for social justice work. Such bases of knowledge are in constant construction and revision, as work for social justice grows. The knowledge base for social justice work is not proprietary to members of our community for social justice, but is also largely available to those who have not yet joined the community as well.

*Client Base within professional community for social justice.*

As is true outside our community for social justice, any one student or client may receive the services of multiple professionals, who may be attending to separate concerns of the client. In contrast to the usual professional client relationship where there is not necessarily any explicit attention paid to issues of social justice, the clients' needs and concerns are related to social justice issues, and the work done together is intended to reduce social injustice.

The relationship of client and professional goes beyond the usual profession-specific contract. This relationship is based upon the understanding that professionals and clients work together as agents of social justice, with the client's immediate benefit being but one aspect of the social justice work. This requires that clients themselves are active, empowered members

within the professional community for social justice. Clients, then, can assume a number of roles within this community, and are not restricted to being recipients of services.

Within professional community for social justice, long-term, sustained partnerships, undertaken on a basis of respect and equality, in addition to other forms of advocacy, are indicators of the common goals of professional and client.

*System of Learning within professional community for social justice.*

One of the hallmarks of how professionalism is learned within the community for social justice is that the profession-specific, extensive, rigorous, formal training maintains its importance. Professional credentialing belongs within the separate domains, so that nurses and lawyers learn how to be nurses and lawyers. However, the collectivist, collaborative nature of social justice work requires that professionals learn more about each other's fields, so as to optimize their work together. Cross-education, both formal and informal, brings expertise, perspectives and standpoints from one field to another.

*Accountability within professional community for social justice.*

Accountability within this community includes the usual professional accountability to students, clients, and patients, as well as to one's professional colleagues and to one's profession. However, accountability extends beyond traditional parameters to include one's colleagues in other professions and occupations, as collaborative social justice practices open up the notion of collegiality and diminishes professional distance. The emphasis within traditional professions on accountability to society and social justice magnifies in this new professional community, as social justice goals become primary, and professional activities are opportunities to further social justice.

*Dispositions of professionals in community for social justice.*

The dispositions of professionals in community for social justice will have at least four characteristics in common, although the degree to which these characteristics are present will vary across the membership. In addition, members may discover that they personally change over time, with these characteristics becoming stronger as they engage with others in social justice work. The signature dispositions of professionals for social justice are, first, that they are ethically grounded to a degree beyond that which is expected of ordinary professionalism (Martin, 2000). A second characteristic is critical consciousness, recognizing and understanding how and why immediate and local social reality is embedded historically and globally. Activism is another marker of the disposition toward social justice, as is a collectivist orientation (Frey and others, 1996).

Resistance to Professional Community for Social Justice

As noted earlier, Frey and his colleagues write that a sensibility toward social justice begins with ethical concerns, finds the structural components of ethical problems; is activist, and connected rather than isolated (Frey and others, 1996). Developing a sensibility toward social justice can challenge, possibly daunt even many who have been scrupulous in attending to their professions' codes of ethics.

Diane Goodman (2000) writes of three powerful motivating factors that can be used to influence people from privileged groups toward activism for social justice: empathy, moral/spiritual values and self-interest. She cautions us to be wary of the possibilities, however, that these same factors, if located at the outside ends of a continuum, can interrupt the move toward social justice activism. Insufficient or overabundant empathy can prompt distancing from

others, repressive or smug morality can be used to dehumanize others, and narrowly focused self-interest can blind.

Putting ethical concerns at the heart, rather than the periphery of professional activities, may seem more natural to some professionals than to others. For example, teaching may be intrinsically satisfying because it validates feelings of efficacy and self worth, or because a teaching career provides significant chunks of time for travel, or to be with one's family.

Foregrounding ethical concerns forces professionals to question the established and emerging activities of their profession. One of the challenges of foregrounding ethical concerns is to see beyond the immediate context- to ask why, for example, so many students suffer from asthma, to wonder why asthma is on such a dramatic rise. Unpacking the larger economic, political and cultural contexts reveals that a student's asthma has come about partly as a result of years of widespread environmental pollution. Looking further, the educator sees the long, tangled history of privilege and oppression that continues to support polluted environments.

Once a professional connects the immediate context to the larger historical one, she must decide how to balance dealing with her student's symptoms and the larger, underlying social causes. An activist stance, if chosen, can divert the professional from the more commonly understood and accepted professional activities. This is a hard road to take alone, and an impossible one for many professionals to travel and still maintain good professional standing, especially if their actions cast doubt on the justness of commonly accepted professional practices. Educators for social justice will find good company with health, social service and other professionals who also find themselves on the road toward social justice.

Moving beyond a scrupulous attention to acting ethically toward acting for social justice is far more than is required of most professionals by their professional community (Martin,

2000). Typically, only a small percentage of professionals have thoroughly integrated a socially just sensibility throughout every aspect of their practices. There are numerous possible reasons for this, but I will mention just a few.

When professions develop regulating processes to monitor the activities and qualifications of their memberships, they often set baselines for acceptable practices and enforce these with vigor. When more challenging calls to support social justice appear in professional codes, they are frequently considered as goals, not requirements, and thus are less rigorously supported within the internal system of accountability. Teachers unions, according to Koppich and Kerchner (1999) can raise the bar from acceptable to socially just practices for their memberships.

A socially just sensibility changes the dynamic of power between professionals and their clients. It calls for a sense of solidarity with clients, a recognition that the professional does not hold all the cards of knowledge and power. For some, that is too humbling. For others, it creates well-founded concerns that insufficiently knowledgeable or skilled people will usurp professional activities, with possible disastrous consequences. Maintaining appropriate control of professional practices is a continuing challenge. Teachers, for example, might examine their pedagogical choices, and find them undemocratic or teacher-centered. Moving toward student-centered or democratic pedagogy changes how power is situated and used within a classroom, change that not every teacher will appreciate.

A socially just sensibility can also erode some of the boundaries between professions, calling for workers from different professions to align their practices, sometimes in quite unexpected ways. This interdependence diminishes professional competition for resources, clients, material rewards, public esteem. Maintaining appropriate and necessary boundaries will

always be at issue, even when social justice is the yardstick used to measure proprietary negotiations. Who, for example, will decide what educational opportunities ought to be available for adolescents and adults who have been incarcerated – educators, governors, social workers, lawyers?

A socially just sensibility upsets the applecart of philanthropy, charity and other benevolent acts that add to the prestige of a professional, profession or institution. Feeding the hungry, inoculating the sick, tutoring a marginally literate adult, are all worthy acts, but unless they are undertaken in tandem with social activism toward social justice, there will always be hungry, sick and illiterate individuals and groups to receive the bounty of the privileged.

#### Supporting Educators To Enter Into Professional Community For Social Justice

Many dedicated educators, separately and together, consciously work for social justice (Edelsky, 1999). Others might tentatively, and then, enthusiastically, join in if they can see space for themselves within a professional community that puts social justice at its core. They need information, opportunity to practice for social justice, opportunity to reflect on their knowledge and experience, and substantial support in order to continue to develop as educators within a professional community for social justice (Abowitz, 2001; Britzman, 2001; Broido, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Freire, 1998; Kumashiro, 2002; Guyton, 2000; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000). There are many ways to assist educators to move in this direction, but I will suggest just a few.

With regard to professional education that supports social justice, McLaren and Fischman, (1998) call for teacher education to include mentoring, involvement in local community issues (housing, employment, medical care), and antibias education. They believe

that aspiring educators should study theories of power, and make active alliances with social movements, so as to better understand the social conditions in which they and their students live and work. In short, they call for developing a critical consciousness that is activist in nature.

Studying theories of power while simultaneously engaged in endeavors with students and families can leave an indelible imprint on the professional dispositions of teachers. The more consistently such opportunities are provided across the span of professional education, the more likely it will be that teachers develop a concern for social justice that cannot be separated from any of their professional activities. At the pre-service level, where university training intersects with the client base, this calls for a new look at the purposes of fieldwork, internships and student teaching. These need to be seen as opportunities to work for social justice through teaching and not primarily or only as opportunities to try out techniques of teaching.

Faculty and education students need to consult with school-based educators, schoolchildren and their families about what schooling for social justice might accomplish. As intense pressure for certain educative practices is applied from school boards, local citizens, and governmental bodies, and as this pressure can either interfere with or facilitate the design of socially just curriculum, educators for social justice need to draw on the support afforded by a broad based community of professionals for social justice.

In addition to engaging with students and families, teachers and aspiring teachers can reach out across professional boundaries to work with other concerned professionals for social justice. In the university setting, for example, nursing and education faculty concerned with social justice can arrange opportunities for their students to address health education together, sharing information and other resources. The student nurses, teachers and faculty can work together with families and community groups to improve health in local communities. Beyond

the university, educators, community organizers, social workers, and others might work with local businesses, churches and other institutions in order to help new immigrants acculturate to local life.

It is vitally important to break the model of teacher as a solitary figure who delivers curriculum to her students (Furman, 2002). Collective endeavors that move teachers (and pre-service teachers) out beyond the classroom walls, into neighborhoods, and into connection with families and others who do good, meaningful work, may at first seem extraneous to the basic tasks a teacher must accomplish. We who are teacher educators also need to break the bonds of solitary work and see collective action for social justice as basic to our work. We need to be educators within professional community for social justice.

The intrinsic rewards of socially just practice need to be validated externally. Professional accrediting bodies, state licensing boards, and local school boards might rethink the evidence of teacher accountability for student learning to include individual and collective social outcomes along with test scores.

Such an activist stance requires the faculties of schools of education to advocate for social justice visibly. Wallace (2000), in urging faculty of graduate schools of education to deepen their commitment to multicultural education, strikes a chord that resonates with teachers across the United States, as multicultural education is a primary means through which teachers work for social justice. Wallace, however, brings this home to education faculty through a call to examine themselves and their curricula with regard to diversity and justice concerns. Faculty of schools of education have a responsibility to engage their students and graduates, teachers in local schools, families, other professionals and local community groups in ways that validate and strengthen the power of collective work. In addition, education faculty and other professional



faculty can reflect and work together to strengthen their social justice commitment and activities. Their cross-professional collaboration, particularly when it is visible to their students, can provide a powerful model for how a cross-professional community for social justice might work.

In conclusion, the emergence of a broad-based professional community for social justice offers educators extensive opportunities to effectively act for social justice. Together with professionals from other fields, educators can contribute and use their specialized knowledge, practices, networks, and other resources to work for social justice alongside their students, patients, and clients.

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Table 1. Elements Of A Professional Community For Social Justice

**Community elements**

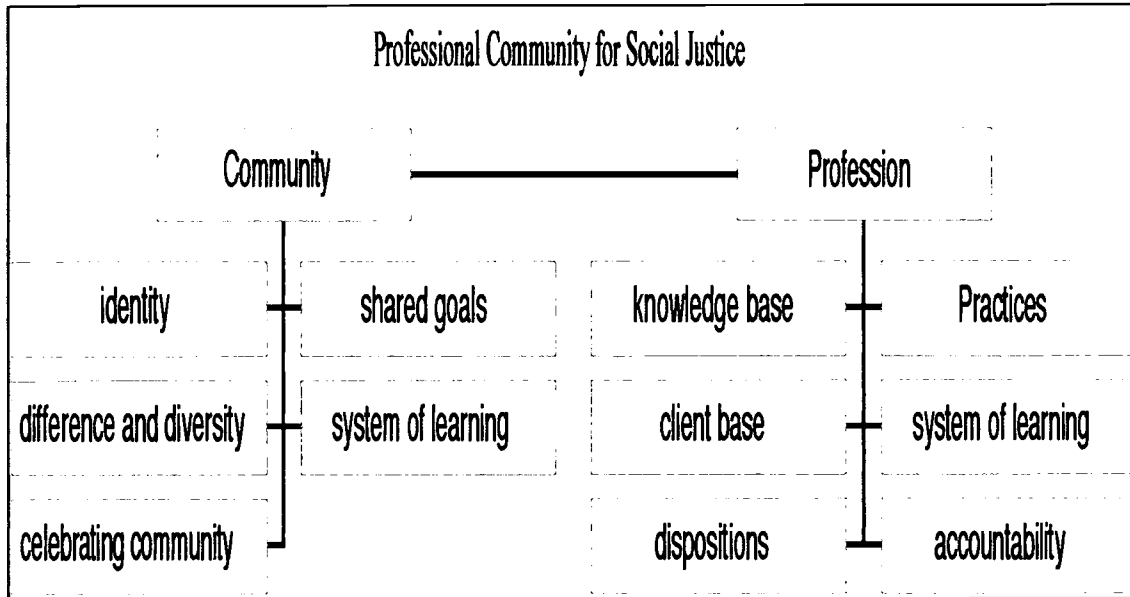
1. Group identity:
  - a. primarily cohering around shared understandings of social justice
  - b. dually rooted in personal beliefs and professionally specific codes of ethics
  - c. affiliations across professional boundaries
  - d. works with, as well as for, students, patients, clients.
  - e. shared goals: to reduce social injustice, eliminate mechanisms of oppression, and insure the continuation of the professional community for social justice
2. Accounting for internal diversity and difference:
  - a. accommodating individual differences in knowledge, expertise, standpoint, etc.
  - b. differentiating specialized professional identification
  - c. collapsing some professional borders
3. System of learning
  - a. traditional professional apprenticeship
  - b. cross-professional learning
  - c. informal learning
  - d. mentoring
  - e. personal experience with injustice
4. Celebrating the community
  - a. rites of passage (initiations, graduations, accreditations)
  - b. professional meetings
  - c. awards, honors

**Professional elements**

1. Practices:
  - a. profession specific
  - b. cross-profession
  - c. socially just
  - d. coordination and cooperation across professions
1. Knowledge Base
  - a. organizations or movements concerned with social justice
  - b. social injustice mechanisms

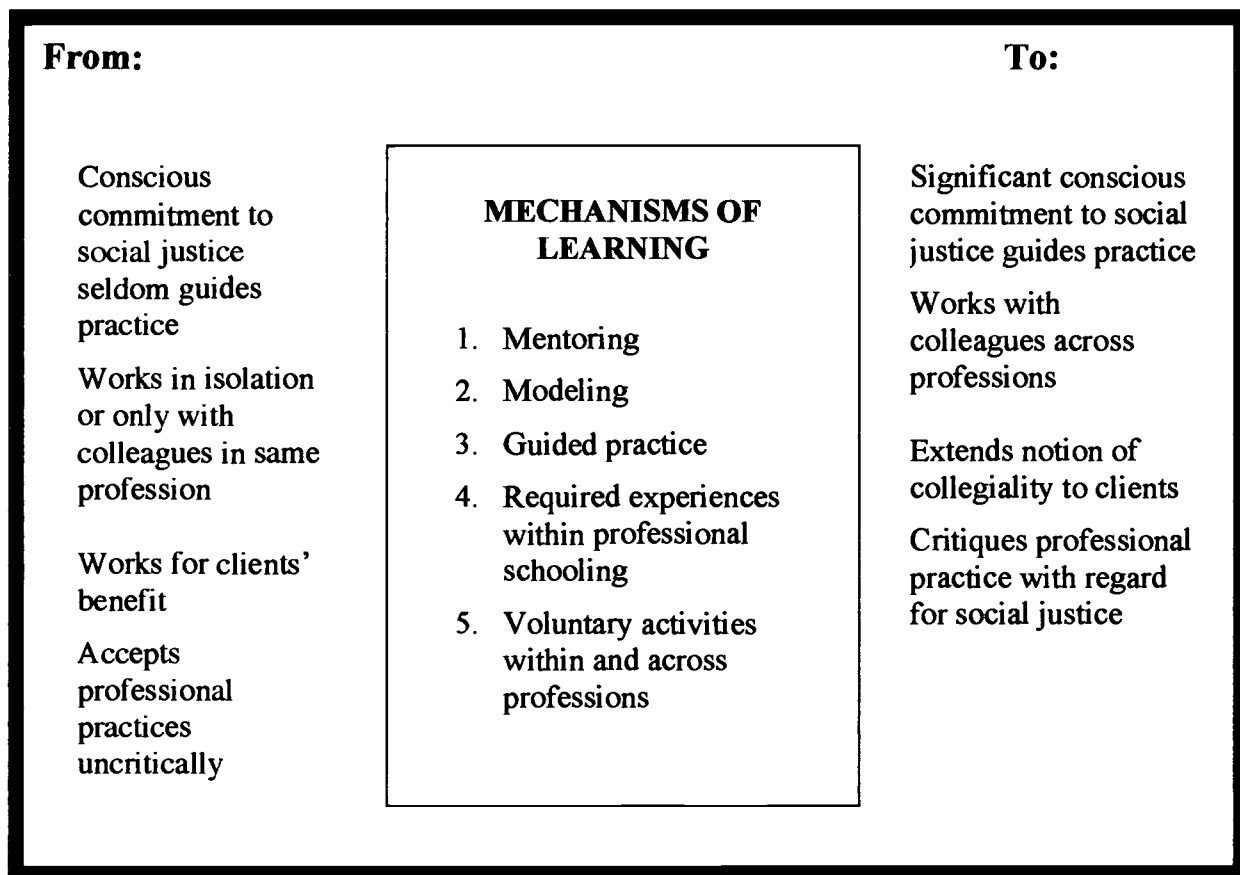
- c. effective strategies for social justice work
  - d. resources available
2. Client base:
- a. profession specific
  - b. generalized beyond traditional profession specific parameter
  - c. empowered
3. System of learning
- a. profession specific: extensive, formal, rigorous
  - b. generalized beyond traditional profession specific parameters in shared arenas for practice
  - c. profession- specific and cross-profession mentoring
4. Accountability
- a. to students, patients, clients
  - b. to professional accreditation bodies
  - c. to colleagues within and across professions
  - d. to society
  - e. to social justice
5. Dispositions
- a. ethically grounded
  - b. critically conscious
  - c. activist
  - d. collectivist

Figure 1. Structural Elements of Professional Community for Social Justice



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FIGURE 2. LEARNING HOW TO BE A MEMBER OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.





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