Essay #2 – Social Justice Plan

Mallory Dudley

Western Washington University

HSP 455 Diversity & Social Justice

The term social justice can have many different meanings, contexts, and uses within how one can be an advocate for social justice. Understanding the context of social justice and the need for advocates is the first step to staying engaged within the issues of our country and in our local communities. There are many levels students can engage in social justice topics within public schools and colleges, and how they incorporate the learning as engagement in discussions (Tinkler, et al, 2015). However, what is beyond education is activism and change. Change to our social structures, institutions, and systems of power that have oppressed marginalized populations in our country. We are finally at a time in our Nation’s history that more and more people are educated, aware, and questioning these forms of oppression that have silenced the public voice. If we engage people in social justice and social inequalities, we can challenge the systems of power and hopefully advocate for political, social, and economic changes in the United States.

Acknowledging privilege for those that have privileged identities is the first step to make changes. As privilege is often associated with power, these are the views and perspectives that carry influence over larger decisions in our country. For example, in our personal lives, if white people listen more to poor people of color, who do not have as much of a political or social voice, they are more likely to influence changes in our attitudes and beliefs towards those marginalized populations. Often times for white women, we are quick to point out our oppression as women, automatically blame white men, and not take responsibility for ways in which we are privileged as a white individual (Kimmel & Ferber, 2014). It becomes a distraction from the actual conversation of race, institutional racism that white women (and men) are not affected by, and by acknowledging the ways we actually benefit from being white. As a society, if we can learn how to have difficult conversations about race, more people can learn to be advocates and seek their own education on these issues. Social justice should be incorporated within our lifestyles and not be a separate subject that is only discussed within these contexts.

Within our personal lives, there are many different levels of engagement one can have when talking about social justice, diversity, and institutional oppression. Within my conversations with others, specifically those who are not engaged in Human Services related education, there is a level of disconnect within the knowledge and a lack of passion for these topics. When we talk about being a social justice advocate, often times this means having dialogue and educating others about these topics. It is incredibly important as to how we approach these topics and bring up difficult conversations in public social situations or private discussions with friends and family. Because of having different experiences and understandings than others, it is very important as to how social justice topics are brought up. Some of my conversations felt very forced and disengaging at first, however it did bring up questions and concerns from the other end. Words and actions can carry great influence when these issues and perspectives are new to people. Personal experience and “exposure” to diversity can also carry an impact in whether the person has experience to relate to the topic itself (Tinkler, et al, 2015). If people are aware, affected by, or living amongst diversity issues, they are more likely to be passionate and knowledgeable in these conversations.

My dialogues with others who have not been a part of Human Services have very different understandings to little understanding of the subjects. Although we might have similar political views, the conversation was not as in depth as I would have liked it to be. I struggle to find ways to engage when others are not at the same level of engagement. My conversation with one friend involved me talking about our institutions of power and how to stay engaged with social justice. She did not connect with this subject based on personal experience or knowledge and I ended up doing most of the talking. I do not find that to be productive when I sum up my knowledge in a brief social justice conversation. This person has not received the same type of education, however I do know that we both learned something about one another. Education on social justice is a long process when considering the history of our country, understanding our institutions, positions of power, political action, and how to have any influence in the whole process. It is going to take time, but our future social justice actions have to start with conversation.

Although we cannot predict what will happen in our country politically, economically, and socially, there are many actions we can take to educate the public, and educate those who subconsciously marginalize others by remaining neutral or portraying forms of ignorance. My social justice plan is to take a path of more resistance, by questioning the defensiveness of white people, and actively listen to others’ experiences, especially those who suffer from marginalization. I could have many years of research and knowledge but will never have the same expertise as those who experience marginalization firsthand. As a member of dominant white culture, I can work as an ally to dismantle forms of oppression that I benefit from (Rothenberg & Mayhew, 2014). I want to engage in conversations daily about social issues, and to take any opportunities to challenge social situations that have been socially constructed to marginalize certain cultures and ethnic minorities.

On an active scale of being a social justice advocate, I want to work within the field of Human Services or social work. Although social work itself is working within a larger system, there are ways to stay engaged to be advocates for our clients within the larger societal issues at hand. Personally, I am particularly interested in a field in criminal justice, and can somehow cater my career to advocate for those in the criminal justice system, and find more than just legal possibilities for them. Within this work, having knowledge of the legal system and judicial processes will benefit in knowing how to be an advocate. However, within this field there are many people who become jaded with the system and do not necessarily take a social justice standpoint within their work. Working for this system might also lead to expansion or improvement of a system that we are altogether trying to dismantle. While I want to improve these existing systems for those who are stuck in the legal process, it is also a system that should altogether be highly reduced or broken down. As certain things became criminalized in the twentieth century, there became a higher demand for prisons and law enforcement. Now we need to work to decriminalize these actions that affect poor minorities, and hopefully create less of a demand for Human Services and legal work. However this would altogether lead to a large scale of involvement in the political process in our country to have any influence on these systems.

Although social justice can be a chance to educate, there can be larger processes that can be fought within our institutions. As a long-term goal, I want to learn how to incorporate advocacy work in the political system. Realistically I want to take part in social movements, be an active part of the political and presidential process, and write letters to legislature. I will actively try to learn more about the United States Congress, legislature, and local governors that turn our bills into laws. As an active community member and voter, I want to learn how to take part within the decisions that are made in our country and local community. This could include lobbying, forms of protest, leading community meetings, or educating my own community of friends and family. This can encourage others to get involved as well as learn about the bigger issues at hand.

As a society, we sign into social contracts without knowing or agreeing to do so. As active, voting citizens, we pick our legislature and Congress; we pick our presidents, and others who make the decisions for our country. There is a lot that happens in our government that the public deserves the right to know, and more importantly understand. There might be difficult jargon, complicated processes, and bills that are difficult to read. This keeps the public from staying engaged in our political process and how to affect change on a higher level. As a citizen, I want to do more work as a social justice advocate daily in my personal life, in my career, and as a U.S. citizen. We can have influence over these decisions; introduce ideas with realistic possibilities for our next generation, to captivate what an equitable and socially just society might look like. There is still a lot to learn, and a lot of unknown tests lying ahead that will determine where we are as a society. We do not know what a truly socially just society or country looks like, but as we continue to educate others and engage in learning, we can learn to collaborate with an open mind, open ears, and a compassionate heart.

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