Introduction to Critical Training Topics Series: Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Nation

Joel Bocanegra¹

Published online: 23 August 2021

© California Association of School Psychologists 2021

Much has changed since we first conceptualized this special topic series in January 2020, and its development has largely mirrored the vast social and global upheavals that has taken place during this perilous, unprecedented time. During this time, we saw the numerous deaths of unarmed Black Americans being projected into our homes. We experienced the death of 601,124 people within the USA as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (National Center for Health Statistics, 2021). We also witnessed humanity in action, protesting police brutality, forcing social change, and helping those who had been impacted by the pandemic. This was also a time of increased isolation and mental health difficulties (Khan et al., 2020). The years of 2020 and 2021 will likely be known as constitutive years in US history, mental health, and education.

When originally conceptualizing this special topic series, we planned a one-off publication regarding critical training issues. The initial goal was simply to provide exposure to innovative perspectives regarding critical training topics that would not normally receive significant attention within school psychology journals. However, as 2020 transmuted into 2021, we experienced a flood of articles that mirrored much of the angst, tribulations, and mercurial changes impacting society and our field, and the original intention was abandoned.

Thus, this special topic edition took a life of its own. It reflects a tumultuous time, an epoch of hurting, reckoning, growth, and, hopefully, betterment. Hence, with warm regards, I present to you the first of our two-part critical training topic series: Critical Diversity Training Issues.

Furthermore, with the events that transpired during the creation of this series in mind, I personally dedicate this series to all who lost loved ones during this turbulent time, who sacrificed themselves for the betterment of others, and

to those who fought the good fight adapting at an almost weekly basis in order to achieve our ultimate mission of having a positive impact on our nation's youths. I also thank all the amazing scholars and reviewers who gave their invaluable time, especially during this unprecedented era to ensure that the good work is continued.

Introduction to Critical Training Issues Part I: Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Nation

Scholars within school psychology have been advocating for increase research into diversity topics for over 25 years (Wiese, 1992). Many of these calls have likely been brought upon by the nation's demographic changes, our profession's stated social justice strategic goal, and our need to serve all students. Recently, this call for increased research and advocacy has been magnified. However, research has largely failed to keep up with the diversity needs within the field (Graves, et al., 2020; Proctor & Romano, 2016).

In fact, Graves and colleagues (2020; in this issue) conducted a bibliometric analysis of school psychology's social justice literature across a 40-year publication time frame. They found that there was a general lack of applied research, with only three articles being coded as applied, and approximately 30% of all social justice articles being published by the same author. There also tended to be a spike in social justice publications with no articles being published from 1980 to 2008, and the most productive years in social justice-related publications being 2008 ($n = 5$) and 2020 ($n = 5$). These spikes are noteworthy since they may have mirrored the zeitgeist and interest surrounding the election of the US first Black president in 2008 and arguably the height of one of the largest social movements in US history, the Black Lives Matters movement in 2020 (Buchanan, et al., 2020). Thus, it may not represent a general trend in the literature base.

✉ Joel Bocanegra
bocajoel@isu.edu

¹ Idaho State University, Pocatello, USA

However, the importance of social justice goes beyond the direct impact that it may have upon our K-12th grade students. Taking on a social justice lens has also been heralded as a possible solution for increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the field (Pham et al., 2020). Racial and ethnically minoritized (REM) populations have been historically underrepresented within the field of school psychology (Curtis et al., 1999), and authors have advocated for taking on a social justice perspective during training in order to appropriately train future school psychologists and increase the REM representation within graduate programs and within the field (Pham et al., 2020; Proctor & Romano, 2016).

In light of the potential impact that social justice advocacy may have on the recruitment and retention of diverse graduate students, Pham and colleagues (2020; in this issue) addressed several barriers relating to the critical shortage of REM students and provided recommendations for recruitment and retention of CLD populations through a social justice framework.

However, advocacy, without cultural understanding and competency, may prove deleterious. Thus, a sizable portion of diversity-focused literature has focused on multicultural competency. Although cultural competency should be a lifelong unending endeavor, a critical point for the enculturation of this competency is during graduate training (Newell, et al., 2010). Several models have been put forward regarding multicultural competency such as the knowledge, skills, and awareness model (Sue et al., 1992) which was created within counseling psychology and later adopted across most professional psychology types. However, less is known regarding the implementation of such model within school psychology. Thus, Jones and colleague (2020; in this issue) presented findings regarding the results of a 10-week standalone graduate multicultural issue school psychology course. The authors found a significant increase in self-assessed multicultural knowledge, skills, awareness, and confidence in working with diverse populations after course completion. Thus, this study provides support for the positive impact of multicultural issue courses on cultural competency.

Similarly, the authors have also argued that a potentially beneficial avenue to increase cultural competency during training is through study abroad experiences (Irwin & Davies, 2020; Smith et al., 2014). Research has overwhelmingly found that intergroup contact can significantly decrease biases towards others and increase knowledge and understanding (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Furthermore, these benefits can generalize to other minoritized populations beyond those of initial contact (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

In this vein, Irwin and colleagues (2020; in this issue) summarized findings of a study abroad experience taken on by school psychology students. They discussed the results

of their qualitative study and implications for school psychology. The authors found that, overall, participants felt that the study abroad experience had a significant impact on their cultural competence (Irwin, et al., 2020). Unfortunately, when discussing diversity topics, researchers have generally focused on racial and ethnic minoritized populations (Miranda & Gutter, 2002; Noltemeyer et al., 2013; Wiese, 1992). Much less is known regarding LGBTQ+ and religion and spirituality as diversity topics (Graybill and Proctor, 2016; Parker et al., 2020). In fact, Parker et al., (2020; in this issue) conducted a content analysis of school psychology journals spanning 15 years and found that only 4% discussed religion and spirituality. They argued that it would be difficult to fulfill our mission regarding cultural competency and social justice if we continue to overlook the importance of religious or spiritual diversity and religious minoritized populations; thus, further research is needed in order to better guide practice.

Relatedly, language diversity and language access for English Language Learners have been a significant issue within the field of school psychology and education in general. As a result of its critical nature, numerous case and civil rights laws (e.g., Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and professional guiding documents espousing the importance of language access (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019; National Association of School Psychologists, 2015) have been forwarded. In order to increase language access and better ensure equitable service provision to linguistically minoritized populations, scholars have advocated for the increased training of bilingual school psychologists. In this issue, Harris et al. (2020) provide a review of research-based recommendations for the training of culturally competent bilingual school psychologists.

International Impact

In addition to language, racial, and ethnic diversity, an often-overlooked diversity factor is nationality. As programs attempt to diversify and have a positive impact on a global scale, it is important that we understand how to support international students within our training programs and best practice in the establishment of school psychology programs in other countries. In this vein, Yang and colleagues (2020; in this issue) conducted semi-structure interviews to better understand Asian international school psychology trainees' assets, challenges, and coping strategies. The authors identified that participants reported their diverse perspectives, commitment to social justice, and ability to diversify the workforce as some of their assets and acculturative stress, microaggressions, discrimination, and working restrictions as challenges.

Nevertheless, the benefits of school psychology should not be solely relegated to the USA, and attempts have been made to expand school psychology internationally. Fan et al., (2020; in this issue) reflected on their efforts to develop school psychology training programs in Taiwan. They delineated on the history of school-based psychological services within some Asian countries, the development of school psychology within Taiwan, and some benefits, challenges, and recommendations for future practice.

Diversity Outcome-Based Research

Multicultural evidence-based practice guidelines hold that we should take the best available evidence, our clients' individuality, and our own experiences (APA, 2006). Unfortunately, research with diverse populations is generally lacking (Newell et al., 2010). In an attempt to expand the minoritized evidence-based literature base, Krach and colleagues (2020; in this issue) investigated the efficacy of social skills computer intervention with an African American sample. The authors found some support for intervention effectiveness. The authors noted the exploratory nature of their study. They argue that much more research should be conducted with minoritized populations to better identify the effectiveness and generalizability of current and future practice.

Lastly, but of paramount importance, the USA is arguably coming to terms with the issue of police violence, especially within Black minoritized communities. Research suggests that Black Americans are three times more likely to be killed by police and five times more likely to be killed while unarmed (Bor et al., 2018). The literature on the impact of violence and police brutality on youth is vast and has generally found that such events can have significant and wide-ranging deleterious effects (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017; Lipscomb et al., 2019). Proctor et al. (2020) contend that since school psychologists are often the sole provider of mental health services for Black youth, we have an imperative to provide culturally competent services to Black youth who have been exposed to police violence. Unfortunately, school psychology may be lagging in this area and training may be inadequate or non-existent. Thus, Proctor and colleagues (2020) sought to better understand school psychologists' and school psychology students' knowledge, training, and areas of improvement for training in regard to supporting Black students exposed to police violence. The authors found that participants overwhelmingly gained knowledge regarding police violence towards Black people through local or national events; however, they reported little training or discussion regarding this topic during graduate training.

In summary, we are awakening to a new dawn. In the midst of a mercurial and turbulent time, we have come together and coalesced into a stronger more unified

profession, a profession ready to tackle any and all obstacles that an unforeseen future may hold. This special topic edition and the numerous submissions evidence the heart of our great profession, helping all youths to succeed. Our unquenching and unsatiating need to champion for the most vulnerable among us, our youth, and in turn, better our nation and the world will never be quenched. We will continue to do this through the amalgamation of unwavering humanity and educational, scientific, and psychological principals.

References

- American Psychological Association APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice. (2006). Evidence-based practice in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 61, 271–285. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.271>
- American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Race and Ethnicity Guidelines in Psychology. (2019). Race and ethnicity guidelines in psychology: Promoting responsiveness and equity. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/race-and-ethnicity-in-psychology.pdf>
- Bor, J., Venkataramani, A. S., Williams, D. R., & Tsai, A. C. (2018). Police killings and their spillover effects on the mental health of Black Americans: A population-based, quasi-experimental study. *The Lancet*, 392, 302–310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31130-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31130-9)
- Bryant-Davis, T., Adams, T., Alejandre, A., & Gray, A. A. (2017). The trauma lens of police violence against racial and ethnic minorities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73, 852–871. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12251>
- Buchanan, L., Bui, Q., & Patel, J. K. (2020). Black Lives Matter may be the largest movement in U.S. history. *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331.
- Curtis, M. J., Walker, K. J., Hunley, S. A., & Baker, A. C. (1999). Demographic characteristics and professional practices in school psychology. *School Psychology Review*, 28(1), 104–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.1999.12085951>
- Fan, C., Juang, Y., Hsing, C., Yang, & Wu, I. (2020). The development of school psychology in Taiwan: Status quo and future directions. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00324-7>
- Graves, S., Phillips, S., Johnson, K., Jones Jr., M., & Thornton, D. (2020). Pseudoscience, an emerging field, or just a framework without outcomes? A bibliometric analysis and case study. Presentation of Social Justice Research. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00310-z>
- Graybill, E. C., & Proctor, S. L. (2016). Lesbian gay, bisexual and transgender youth: Limited representation in school support personnel journals. *Journal of School Psychology*, 54, 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2015.11.001>
- Harris, B., Vega, D., Peterson, L., & Newell, K. (2020). Critical issues in the training of bilingual school psychologists. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00340-7>
- Irwin, A., Oberhelman, N., & Davies, S. (2020). Study abroad and school psychologists' perceptions of intercultural competence. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00337-2>
- Jones, J. & Lisa, L. (2020). Multicultural competency building: A multi-year study of trainee self-perceptions of cultural competence. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00339-0>

- Khan, K.S., Mamun, M.A., Griffiths, M.D., & Ullah, I. (2020). The mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across different cohorts. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00367-0>
- Krach, S., McCreery, M., Doss, K., & Highsmith, D. (2020). Can computers teach social skills to children? examining the efficacy of “The Social Express” in an African-American sample. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00270-z>
- Lipscomb, A. E., Emeka, M., Bracy, I., Stevenson, V., Lira, A., Gomez, Y. B., & Riggins, J. (2019). Black male hunting! A phenomenological study exploring the secondary impact of police induced trauma on the Black man’s psyche in the United States. *Journal of Sociology and Social Work*, 7, 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.15640/jssw.v7n1a2>
- Miranda, A. H., & Gutter, P. B. (2002). Diversity research literature in school psychology: 1990–1999. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(5), 597–604. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10051>
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2015). The provision of school psychological services to bilingual students [Position statement]. Bethesda, MD: Author.
- National Center for Health Statistics. (2021). *NVSS - Provisional death counts for COVID-19 - Executive summary*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/mortality-overview.htm>
- Newell, M. L., Nastasi, B. K., Hatzichristou, C., Jones, J. M., Schandling, G. T., Jr., & Yetter, G. (2010). Evidence on multicultural training in school psychology: Recommendations for future directions. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 25, 249–278. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021542>
- Noltemeyer, A. L., Proctor, S. L., & Dempsey, A. (2013). Race and ethnicity in school psychology publications: A content analysis and comparison to publications in related disciplines. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 17(1), 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03340994>
- Parker, J., Fulmore, K., Marano, E., Schulze, M., Anderson, J., & Manderfield, C. (2020). Religion and spirituality as diversity topics in school psychology publications: A content analysis of school psychology journals. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00271-y>
- Pettigrew, T. F., Tropp, L. R., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Recent advances in intergroup contact theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 271–280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.03.001>
- Pham, A., Lazarus, P., Costa, A., Dong, Q., & Bastian, R. (2020). Incorporating social justice advocacy and interdisciplinary collaborative training in the recruitment and retention of diverse graduate students. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00322-9>
- Proctor, S., Li, K., Chait, N., Courtney, O., Gulfaraz, S., Sang, E., Prosper, G., & Ogundiran, D. (2020). Preparation of school psychologists to support black students exposed to police violence: Insight and guidance for critical training areas. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00317-6>
- Proctor, S. L., & Romano, M. (2016). School psychology recruitment research characteristics and implications for increasing racial and ethnic diversity. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 31(3), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000154>
- Smith, M. D. M., Jennings, L., & Lakhan, S. (2014). International education and service learning: Approaches toward cultural competency and social justice. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 42(8), 1188–1214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000014557499>
- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 20(2), 64–88. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.1992.tb00563.x>
- Wiese, M. R. R. (1992). Racial/ethnic minority research in school psychology. *Psychology in the Schools*, 29(3), 267–272. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(199207\)29:3%3c267::AID-PITS2310290309%3e3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(199207)29:3%3c267::AID-PITS2310290309%3e3.0.CO;2-G)
- Yang, C., Chen, C., Chan, M., Wang, C., Luo, H., & Lin, X. (2020). Training experience in the US school psychology program: Understanding Asian international students’ assets, challenges, and coping. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00320-x>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.