

Chapter 13

Grassroots Organization and Justice Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will provide the reader with information on the importance of grassroots organization in addressing social justice issues for speech-language pathologists (SLP). The authors provide background information on the use of social media to promote social justice efforts. The chapter also identifies and discusses the development and implementation of two online platforms that have been effective in raising awareness about the importance of diversity, advocacy, and social justice issues in the field of speech-language pathology. It provides the reader with important information on the issues and problems in the field of SLP that led to the development of the two online platforms and the processes involved with developing them. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of previous and current goals and outcomes, along with future endeavors of both platforms and recommendations for others who are interested in using social media as a tool to transform professional environments to facilitate justice within the discipline and society.

INTRODUCTION

Current data from the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) shows that only 8.3% of members and affiliates identify as Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or multiracial (2020). These demographic trends reflect only a 1.4% increase over the course of a decade (ASHA, 2020). The aforementioned find-

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ings are so alarming, that they are being discussed in broader, mainstream publications. The Atlantic published an article titled “The 33 Whitest Jobs in America” (Thompson, 2013) that criticized speech-language pathology as the fourth whitest profession in the United States. They are also inconsistent with broader demographic trends for the United States indicate that minoritized race populations makeup about one-quarter of the population and are rapidly growing (Frey, 2020; US Census Bureau, 2020).

Information from the U.S. Department of Education for the 2018-19 school year, indicates that 79% of all students served by IDEA were from minoritized racial/ethnic backgrounds. By 2050, it is estimated that minoritized race people will no longer be the minority (U.S. Census, 2018). The rapidly occurring changes in the diversity of the U.S. population is presenting our field with a number of challenges. One of the primary challenges is to clarify our discipline’s role and responsibility in the development of a profession that is: 1) representative of the current and future U.S. population; 2) knowledgeable about cultural differences; and 3) culturally responsive to the needs and priorities of the individuals who receive the services of a speech-language pathologist.

The lack of diversity in the field of speech-language pathology has its consequences. For when racially underrepresented students enter clinical and academic settings, the likelihood of seeing themselves represented in their professors and classmates are slim (Battle, 1999). Adequate support for these students, given their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds, does not always take into account the financial, academic, and social factors that racially underrepresented students face when compared to their white counterparts (Saenz, Wyatt, Reinard, 1998).

Furthermore, there are studies in other fields indicating that racial minority student attrition and mental health concerns often cause these students to leave the field (Lipson et al, 2018). Given the challenges mentioned above, racially underrepresented students who train to become speech-language pathologists may lack the holistic support necessary for retention in the field of communication sciences and disorders (CSD). It also means that students may have to deal with racialized practices that create or result in unwelcoming/hostile professional environments, such as microaggressions, isolation, and/or structural barriers to career success, such as mentoring opportunities (Ginsberg, 2018). Finally, it means that there is a greater likelihood that a cultural mismatch will negatively impact service delivery to our clients, such as an exaggeration of value differences between heritage and dominant-American culture and assimilationist social environments (Wu, 2018).

There have been several initiatives developed by ASHA to help address some of these issues including the Minority Student Leadership Program and the “That’s Unheard Of” website to help students and clinicians build cultural competence. ASHA also sponsored two listening sessions on racism in July 2020, which allowed students, clinical fellows and junior faculty to share their experiences of racism within CSD programs (ASHA, 2021). However, such efforts are insufficient for addressing systemic and broad-based forms of oppression that are linked to race/ethnicity for the field of speech-language pathology. In order to facilitate change within the profession, it is crucial to implement the use of alternative strategies and approaches that do not wholly rely on the efforts of the large-governing body of the discipline.

In this chapter, the authors discuss the importance of grassroots movements and social media in raising awareness about the lack of diversity and types of systemic inequity that occur in the field of speech-language pathology (SLP). The chapter provides the reader with an overview of how the authors used social media platforms to develop a network of resources and support for speech-language pathologists of color to connect online; and to advocate for solutions to issues of diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice.

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