

Preparing social workers for ecosocial work practice and community building

By: [Meredith Powers](#), [Cathryne Schmitz](#), and Micalagh Beckwith Moritz

Meredith Powers, Cathryne Schmitz & Micalagh Beckwith Moritz (2019) Preparing social workers for ecosocial work practice and community building, *Journal of Community Practice*, 27:3-4, 446-459, DOI: [10.1080/10705422.2019.1657217](https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2019.1657217)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Community Practice* on 20 August 2019, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/10705422.2019.1657217>

*****© 2019 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Taylor & Francis. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. *****

Abstract:

In the context of the global ecological crisis, the profession of social work is increasingly shifting to embrace an ecosocial lens, recognizing the centrality of the ecological environment for human existence and the inextricable linkages of wellbeing for people and planet. Social work educators are contributing to this shift as leaders in the transformation of their home institutions and communities. We present examples within two models of education for ecosocial work, the infusion model and the integration model. Exemplars are based on the authors' expertise and contributions to ecosocial work education, community building, and ecosocial change, both locally and globally.

Keywords: Ecosocial | ecosocial work practice | ecological justice | social work education | interdisciplinary education | community building

Article:

Evidence has established the fact of climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018). The rapidity of the change has precipitated the global ecological crisis, which has led to a necessary response to mitigate and adapt to changes that support the earth and all the species that live here (Orr, 2016; Romm, 2016; Wallace-Wells, 2019). Individuals, governments, and organizations are taking action across the globe with a renewed sense of urgency. This action is seen on multiple fronts from the 2018 Special Report created by the IPCC, the annual United Nations Climate Summits, the 2019 report by the United States (US) National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) documenting the accelerated pace of climate change (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2019), and the increase in declarations of *climate emergency* by many cities and nations (Climate Emergency Declaration, n.d.).

The impact of climate change is dire for humans; as much of the earth becomes uninhabitable this century, life will become more precarious with increasing conflict over decreasing resources (Wallace-Wells, 2019). The consequences for humans, other species, and the earth itself is wide ranging and inclusive of mass migration, extinction of species, overpopulation, environmental racism, environmental injustice, lack of arable land, displacement due to ecological degradation, growing inequality, and increasing violent conflict over resources (Mason & Rigg, 2019; Powers, Schmitz, Nsonwu, & Mathew, 2018; Sloan, Joyner, Stakeman, & Schmitz, 2018; Sloan & Schmitz, 2019). The social, political, and economic human systems in which we work are dependent on the ecological environment (Schmitz, Matyók, James, & Sloan, 2013).

Social workers are increasingly recognizing the ecological crisis and becoming actively involved with responses, locally and globally (Besthorn, 2002; Jones, 2010; Jones, Powers, & Truell, 2018; Powers & Rinkel, 2018). Central to this professional response is the shift to embrace an ecosocial lens, or eco-centric paradigm, which recognizes the centrality of the ecological environment for human existence and the inextricable linkages of wellbeing for people and planet (Boetto, 2017; Powers & Rinkel, 2018). Ecosocial work *is* social work that has embraced this paradigmatic shift, from an anthropocentric focus to an eco-centric focus (Boetto, 2017). Thus, ecosocial work is not a niche for social work research and practice, rather a framework in which all social workers can operate (Powers & Rinkel, 2018). Ecosocial work honors an expanded understanding of person in environment, recognizing that the physical, ecological environment has major social impacts on communities, individuals, and families in those communities (Boetto, 2017; Powers, 2016).

Social work educators contribute to the profession's embrace of this paradigmatic shift by transforming their home institutions and communities through implicit (e.g., relationships, communication, normative practices) and explicit (e.g., policies, course curriculum) implementation of an ecosocial framework (Schmitz, Powers, Nesmith, & Forbes, 2017). Education for ecosocial work has been operationalized in two models, the *transformative approach* of infusing the ecosocial framework as the base for social work education and the integrating model for embedding, wherever possible, ecosocial concepts and materials into an existing curriculum which maintains its' anthropocentric framework (Boetto, 2017; Jones, 2018). Each model is explicated further in the sections below. Examples are presented for each model based on the authors' knowledge, experiences, and contributions to ecosocial work education, community building, and ecological change, both locally and globally. As background context, we first offer a brief exploration of what community means from an ecosocial lens and how transformational change has occurred through this lens in the example of the 'Green Belt Movement' (Maathai, 2003). This discussion further sets the stage for the urgency of preparing social workers for ecosocial work practice and community building as they join as leaders in addressing the ecological crisis.

Community and community building through the ecosocial lens

Making peace with the earth we make the world a place where we can be one with nature. We create and sustain environments where we can come back to ourselves, where we can return home, stand on solid ground, and be a true witness. (hooks, 2009, p. 120)

In this quote, bell hooks captures the strength of the connection to the earth at the personal, local, and communal level. This link highlights the ecosocial understanding of community as connection. Community and environmental sustainability depend on respect for and maintenance of the Earth's ecosystems, for the wellbeing of all life, including current and future generations.

Community, when engaging processes for bringing people together, holds the capacity to embrace growth. This “potential for change is often found in the common need for the development, access to, and control of local resources” (Sloan et al., 2018, p. 128). Often, for transformation to occur, it must be disruptive to power, as seen in the Green Belt Movement (Maathai, 2003). The Greenbelt Movement offers an exemplar of bringing the women of the community together around the need to rebuild the ecology and, with it, the relationships that enhance the empowerment of community (Maathai, 2006). The ecosocial lens is highlighted as the women come together, locally, around the very concrete task of germinating and planting trees (Maathai, 2006; Merton & Dater, 2008). Maathai, as a change leader, understood the need to build a movement through relationship. And, because she also understood the interconnection of marginalization, violence, and structural oppression, she spearheaded the process of empowering the community to learn and engage in political, economic, community, and civic change (Maathai, 2006; Merton & Dater, 2008; Sloan & Schmitz, 2019).

Maathai (2003) and hooks (2009) both bring forward the significance of connection to the land and to each other, which provides a place of belonging, a community (Block, 2009). It is through the development of collaborations that the capacity is created for rebuilding and supporting the development of local resources (Sloan et al., 2018). Climate change and environmental degradation impact the community beyond the personal to the communal. The need, therefore, exists to “move from the micro to the mega, building relationships, and community” (Sloan et al., p. 133). Communities have resources for healing that provide a framework for creating social, economic, political, and environmental change (Gamble, 2013; Gamble & Weil, 2010). According to Gamble and Weil (2010, p. 122), “neighborhood and community organizing takes place when people have face-to-face contact with each other, allowing them to feel connected to a place.” The negative impacts and injustices related to climate change can be minimized when communities become sites for transformational action and change (McMichael, 2017; Powers et al., 2018). Collaborative community projects interconnect people creating possibilities for collective action in support of sustainable change (Orr, 2004) as a base for ecosocial practice.

The history of social work's commitment to community building and advocacy positions the profession as a leader in organizing for transformational change across disciplines. In times of high ecological and political risk, there is heavy responsibility calling for ecosocial work embedded in community. Never has there been a clearer link across human vulnerability, community risk, and the potential for resilience through ecosocial work and community building.

Education for ecosocial work practice

Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own – indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. (Taking Root, n.d.)

This quote by Wangari Maathai, incites us not only to action, but also to education that embraces the ecosocial lens. Social work educators are being challenged to transform our implicit and explicit curriculum to meet the need to educate the next generation for ecosocial justice (Bay, 2013; Hayward, Miller, & Shaw, 2012; Jones, 2010, 2018; Schmitz et al., 2017). Such education for ecosocial work is being operationalized in two models: (1) *transformative approach* of infusing an ecosocial lens across all aspects of the curriculum, and (2) embedding or integrating ecosocial concepts within existing social work curriculum (which is still situated in an anthropocentric lens) (Boetto, 2017; Jones, 2018). Both approaches are necessary to further ecosocial work education, and the integrating model may eventually lead to the infusion model. While we consider the first model of infusing a total shift to an ecosocial lens for a school's entire curriculum as ideal, we acknowledge this is not always possible.

Here, we present several examples, within these two models, to inspire other social work academics and students to initiate ecosocial education at their institutions and/or to elaborate the ongoing discussion at professional conferences and in the current literature. The complexity of living and practicing within the rapid pace of climate change encompasses a sense of urgency for ecosocial learning. As a community, the university campus becomes a site to explore and remediate environmental degradation, foster learning, and build leadership capacity (Whiteman & Powers, 2012). Our examples are based on practice experience as educators. They illuminate possible ways for engaging in multidisciplinary, multi-level curriculum, and university-based models for ecosocial work education.

Infusing a transformative approach to ecosocial work education

At the University of South Carolina College of Social Work (U of SC COSW), Powers (author 1) utilized the transformation approach to infusing the ecosocial framework (Boetto, 2017; Jones, 2018), in both implicit and explicit curriculum, across the policies, practices, and pedagogy of the College of Social Work (U of SC CoSW, 2014). This was made possible by supportive leadership within the College of Social Work and the university's campus-wide sustainability program, in which Powers was a doctoral student leader. As an ecosocial work educator, practitioner, and doctoral student leader, Powers cultivated these relationships creating formal and informal collaborations within the College and across campus with the university's sustainability staff and faculty, and the *Green Office* initiative.

Powers began by meeting with the Dean of the College, then working with students, faculty, and staff of the College to meet the standards of the university's *Green Office* initiative run by the sustainability program. This initiative also awarded Powers a small, internal grant to support the College's modifications and the establishment of new policies and practices needed to meet the *Green Office* standards (e.g., purchasing and placing recycling bins in each office; creating a policy for ordering supplies for events from local, sustainable vendors; posting sustainability tips in classrooms; and creating instructional materials such as videos). We began by coordinating campus recycling services and streamlining waste management within the College's offices and classrooms. In addition, we made multiple presentations for audiences of faculty, staff, students, and field instructors; we sent emails with information (i.e., green office tips, ways to consider ecosocial aspects in field settings, ways to embed ecosocial content into existing courses), and

even created and disseminated a YouTube video, featuring Powers and the Dean of the College of Social Work (U of SC CoSW, 2013). Additionally, a series of workshops was developed and offered by Powers and other social workers for Continuing Education to community social workers, faculty, and students. Topics included: Roles for Social Workers in the Ecological Crisis, Putting the Environment in Person-and-Environment, Using Nature in Practice: Interventions using Wilderness Therapy, and Responsible Consumerism: Being Mindful of Social and Ecological Justice.

In addition, an *ecosocial tool kit* was also developed by Powers to engage interest in the community of educators within the College (including faculty, adjunct faculty, and field supervisors). This ecosocial tool kit consisted of a cover letter explaining the aim of the College of Social Work to shift to an ecosocial paradigm in all implicit and explicit curricula, offered key scholarly articles as examples, along with a list of other potential resources that could be useful. Individuals were invited to meet with Powers, for support as they shifted their paradigms to embrace an ecosocial lens, and as they infused it into their courses and field settings. Modifications sometimes included embedding or integrating ecosocial content, but this was always part of the larger transformative approach of infusing the ecosocial lens throughout the class/field setting, along with the entire College. Examples of this infusion (and integration) include, changing language in the course content description to reflect ecosocial values rather than anthropocentric values, adjusting assignments such as *client assessments* to include how the physical (i.e., built and natural) environments impact clients *and* how clients impact the environment (both positively and negatively). Readings that include ecosocial content were added and class lectures were adjusted to include ecosocial work content (e.g., when discussing food security, include community gardening programs; when discussing therapeutic interventions, include eco-therapy).

All of these efforts by Powers were focused on transforming the College of Social Work with the ecosocial lens, rather than merely adding ecosocial content as an additional learning competency for their already robust curricular goals. Each aspect of this transformation to the ecosocial lens was based on building community, first, within the College of Social Work uniting to earn the *Green Office* certification, infusing an ecosocial lens into the curriculum, and seeing themselves as part of the campus wide sustainability initiative; and, ultimately, strengthening the relationships between planet and people as they began to consider, through the ecosocial lens, their positive connections with nature, the potential for ecosocial healing, and their negative impacts on the ecological crisis and related injustices.

Integrating ecosocial concepts in social work education

Alternatively, some social work programs may not be ready to fully embrace the ecosocial lens and infuse it across the implicit and explicit curriculum. Though, support from leaders in traditional organizational structures helps tremendously in creating ecosocial transformation, individual faculty and/or student leaders have also been successful in initiating such changes, particularly higher education (Powers, 2016; Whiteman & Powers, 2012). Some social work educators are, thusly, approaching their programs through an integration model where ecosocial concepts are embedded, wherever possible, within the existing curriculum (Jones, 2018). For example, modifying existing courses to integrate environmental concerns or developing discrete

courses focused on environmental justice, sustainability, and environmental oppression to add on to the existing curriculum (often as electives). In these courses, inter-and trans-disciplinary learning opportunities are also being created, making use of applied, community-based learning approaches, and global opportunities to recontextualize the ecological environment and locate social work opportunities within it.

Interdisciplinary course on environmental justice

The ecological crisis is multi-dimensional and global in its complexity (Schmitz et al., 2013). Addressing these concerns cuts across the natural and social sciences; the work in the natural sciences is more developed and focused than in the social sciences, but change cannot occur without addressing the human systems. The intimacy of the reliance of humans on the land and all ecology requires engaging students in interdisciplinary education in order to prepare them for practice in complex community and advocacy contexts.

One such course in this integration model was developed and implemented by Schmitz (author 2). It has been running at a mid-sized public university for eight years and has been further developed by both Powers and Schmitz during this time. A number of lessons were learned when trying to integrate this course into the social work curriculum. Of major significance was the title of the course. The course was not a draw for social science students until the title was changed to *Environmental Justice*. Students did not understand labels such as *green social work* or *sustainability*, which were interpreted as having a focus on business; but, they were drawn to the justice aspect of the revised title. While the course is taught through an ecosocial lens and from a broader *ecological justice* focus, the title remains more narrowly *environmental justice* as an easier entre into the typical students' current anthropocentric mindset. This focus has attracted graduate and undergraduate social work students along with students from other disciplines in the social, natural, and biological sciences, creating a rich, interdisciplinary learning environment.

Interestingly, some of the students entered the course not even knowing that there is an ecological crisis and without awareness of any potential solutions (e.g., corporate responsibility, reducing consumption patterns and waste streams, recycling), while other students came with a great deal of knowledge and experience. This student-body composition has proven fruitful with students learning not only from the instructor, but also from other students with varied educational and experiential backgrounds. Those with more knowledge became peer-educators, while also adding to their skills and knowledge. Course content in lectures, discussions, readings, and assignments cuts across disciplines and were designed to engage the broad range of experience and knowledge. Thus, the course falls in line with Education for Sustainability as the entire interdisciplinary course infuses the ecosocial lens (Jones, 2018).

Additionally, by exposing the students to these topics, especially those learning about them for the first time, they were able to realize that they may have been operating in an anthropocentric paradigm, and were exposed to the ecosocial lens, allowing them the opportunity to make their own paradigmatic shift, and/or changes in values and behavior changes that may impact their personal and professional lives (Jones, 2018). Introductory content was available for those students who needed this, and additional content allowed for greater exploration of topics for

those more advanced. Additional support and resources were offered by the instructors, as needed, for either type of student. For example, students unfamiliar or less familiar to environmental issues were exposed to introductory topics such as local campus and municipal recycling information. While, some more advanced students in this course were invited to deepen their knowledge and expertise by coauthoring papers with Powers and Schmitz on topics they studied during their enrollment.

The course begins with exposure to the ecosocial lens and the complexity of the ecological crisis from climate change, to habitat loss and ecological degradation, specifically noting how these have the most destructive effect on vulnerable communities. Human political, economic, and social systems are increasingly destructive of local ecologies and wildlife, resulting in increasing conflict. Issues of environmental justice are quickly linked to social, political, and economic justice (see Schmitz et al., 2013 for further detail). Attention is paid to indigenous rights, decolonization, and environmental racism, along with the role of local voices in developing resilient community systems. Students learn about response systems across the globe such as ecosocial work with renewable energy in European countries or the use of herbal plants for medicinal purposes in Central America (Powers & Rinkel, 2018). As noted in the section above, Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement (see Maathai, 2003; Merton & Dater, 2008) provide a strong example of change which connects environmental action to ecological change, community building, social and political oppression, and empowerment through civic engagement (Sloan & Schmitz, 2019).

Students learn multiple methods for engaging change that includes the link between individual empowerment and community building, critical education as a tool for change, the key role of relationship development, and the significance of change at the local level with the potential to shape political processes from this vantage point. Students are embedded in interdisciplinary teams that are engaged in exploring the ecological crisis and related issues of justice and potential ecosocial solutions. These teams, with support of the instructor, educate themselves on these issues, and then are responsible for educating the class; this way they all become teachers, as well as learners.

The context for ecosocial work is global, but systems of change are embedded in the local. Students in this course explore ways the natural environment is healing and engage with experiential educational opportunities within the context of community (i.e., campus community and beyond). For example, they volunteer with community agencies to investigate industrial and technical responses such as recycling, alternative energy, water rights, the risks of fracking and mountaintop removal, community gardening, tiny houses, animal assisted therapy, and habitat preservation. They learn and apply community building and advocacy skills in these community contexts.

Global education

As the world is becoming increasingly globalized, it is imperative that the field of social work increases its global focus (Mapp, 2008). Global learning can be integrated into campus curriculum at the local level. The global can be brought to life through the use of web-based

exchanges and speakers, video exemplars, student projects and presentations, and experiential activities designed to expose students to the natural environment.

Students learn on multiple levels through global learning opportunities that expand their exposure to new regions, cultures, worldviews, and possibilities. Students might go for study abroad and incidentally learn about environmental concerns, solutions, and sustainability. They can learn through exposure to local responses to environmental pollution, recycling and reuse programs, and the use of trash to create a sustainable energy source. Not every student or curriculum, however, has the resources to take advantage of study abroad courses. There is value in global study abroad education for students; there is also value in learning from these programs to identify components that can be reproduced closer to home.

The Beckwith Moritz (author 3) offers here her experience as a social work educator in an intensive immersion curriculum offered in the Central American country of Belize. Some of the lessons learned in this example are related to the global component while others relate to ecological learning, local systems, and the role of community in resilience. This example falls within the integration model, as it is marketed as courses added on as electives or may count as core course requirements at a student's home institution, but does not itself offer full degree programs. However, the entire immersion curriculum once in Belize is within the infusion model (Boetto, 2017; Jones, 2018) as the campus itself and the curriculum, both implicit and explicit, are completely infused with the ecosocial lens.

The program in Belize (see website- <http://www.creationcsp.org>) has partnerships with multiple universities, individual professors, and organization, offering learning opportunities on multiple levels. The community where this program is located has rich ecological and cultural diversity, local involvement to support student learning, and an interdisciplinary teaching team and student body. It is an interdisciplinary curriculum, drawing faculty and students across disciplines, including social work. Belize is sparsely populated (around 330,000) and has the largest expanse of preserved land in Central America. It is a known destination for ecotourism due to its high levels of biodiversity; and the 17-acre, sustainable campus includes hiking trails and river access, providing students with experiential learning opportunities promoting eco literacy and a broad array of environmental education.

The program's partnership with many colleges, professors, and organizations, allows students to learn holistically, gaining an ecosocial perspective and understanding of their part in the interdisciplinary responses to the global ecological crisis. The pedagogy of the program involves an emphasis on experiential learning, exposing students to issues of justice (particularly ecological) through field trips paired with lectures, discussions, and critical reflection. Topics such as sustainable living, safety, cultural inclusion, and community involvement are embedded along with coursework on ecology, sustainability, and diversity. Each course is interdisciplinary as it elicits the perspectives of students who are from many different cultures and academic disciplines. While most courses are offered on the Belize campus, experiential learning is embedded through the incorporation of local excursions and speakers. Students learn firsthand about the impact of climate change on local farmers and ecosystems by visiting farms; they examine water quality in local streams to understand how runoff affects water sources, and therefore, nearby village communities and other habitats and species. They also spend time in a

pristine rainforest, an ecosystem that includes rare birds, snakes, and plants, contributing to a greater understanding of the need to preserve forests and species. Marine Ecology is also offered. Each course and the campus itself provides students with visible connections to the ways humans contribute to conservation and destruction.

Meals on campus come from local food sources: the campus garden, the town market, a neighborhood dairy farm, and a women's cooperative that provides chicken for consumption. Through these practices, students learn to cook and eat locally and more sustainably—transferable skills that can be taken back to their home countries. They experience the importance of minimizing waste and observe the environmental impact of individual and organizational choices. They see the need for advocacy and change on both micro and macro levels. Throughout their entire program, they are immersed in the significance of culture and respect for the local the ecosocial perspective and the need to center ecological and social justice. Exposure to other community players including local farms, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and tourist offices also expands their learning.

Each of these components and opportunities could be adopted and/or modified for replication in non-study abroad contexts within local university communities. This exemplar of the Belize program, as an interesting combination of both the integration and infusion models, highlights components that enrich ecosocial learning – learning embedded in nature, connection to the land, community building among students, lessons from the local community, cross disciplinary learning, and connection to the wildlife and the loss of flora and fauna.

Discussion and conclusion

The ecological crisis is negatively reshaping the planet and increasing the threat for all forms of life inhabiting it. The impact of ecological destruction is inextricably linked to social, political, and economic injustices (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018). The daily lives of the individuals, families, organizations, and communities that social workers strive to serve are increasingly disrupted and strained as the devastating changes are coming faster than anticipated. This heightens the risks for the communities we serve, making it an urgent matter to promote ecosocial work within the profession at large and within our formal educational systems.

Formal educational structures, such as universities, can support integrated learning that incorporates implicit and explicit processes of knowledge development on campus and within the broader community (Whiteman & Powers, 2012). It is vital that social work faculty and students are a part of such learning processes, experiencing and understanding our relationships with each other and the natural world. Educational programs can increase global knowledge, embed interdisciplinary learning, highlight the ecosocial connections, and promote community as a site for practice in complex contexts. The complexity of the intersecting issues of the ecological crisis highlights the importance of multi-dimensional education. Environmental learning is not an isolated experience; it is intertwined with learning about social, political, and economic oppression. This learning includes exploring and disrupting implicit biases that support colonial practices and systemic oppression.

The two models, the infusion of a transformative ecosocial approach and the integration of ecosocial content (Boetto, 2017; Jones, 2018), both offer ways to operationalize changes to our social work pedagogical approaches. This paper further elaborated this discussion by offering exemplars for both models. Concrete approaches are suggested such as dedicated, interdisciplinary courses, study abroad experiences, and efforts to infuse an ecosocial lens across the curriculum. Experiential, classroom-based, local and global opportunities offered a wide range of contexts for tackling the complexity of the ecological crisis. The authors have found these models to be useful in transforming their home institutions and successful in expanding student knowledge about ecosocial work.

While the examples presented successes, more adjustments could be made to augment the impact. For instance, in the example of the infusion model in the College of Social Work, continual efforts are required to infuse the ecosocial lens as new leaders, faculty, staff, and students enter the organization and bring with them their own lenses, thereby influencing the community's lens (Powers, 2016). Indeed, creating a sustained shift to the ecosocial paradigm must not be based on any one champion, rather it needs to be situated firmly in community, partnerships, policies, practices, and pedagogy (Whiteman & Powers, 2012). Further, the interdisciplinary course on environmental justice and the study abroad program, could be used as stepping stones to infuse a transformative ecosocial lens into social work program(s) where such courses are offered. Additionally, the course title could be renamed *ecological justice* rather than *environmental justice*, and it could be made a mandatory course in that program rather than an elective.

Social work practitioners, educators, and students are increasingly engaged with environmental concerns and responses as they enter complex practice settings where they join communities and practitioners from other disciplines. Current and future social work professionals are essential leaders in the interdisciplinary response to the global ecological crisis. For example, ecosocial workers are joining with civic and governmental groups for community park renovation projects that enhance the possibility of people enjoying healthy connections with nature and each other. In such settings, the social worker, operating from an ecosocial lens, can help not only bring together and establish platforms for all voices to be heard, but can also be an advocate for ecological justice (e.g., how are the renovations impacting the whole ecosystem, not just looking at potential benefits for humans). Through embracing the ecosocial lens, such social work leaders, including the authors of this paper, have also developed interdisciplinary forums (e.g., books, Google, Facebook and Twitter groups) for collaboration, been instrumental in the integration of environmental justice as a competency for the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Program Standards of 2015, established a Committee on Environmental Justice for CSWE, and developed and established the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Climate Justice Program. Such advocacy, community building, and civic engagement are key to the process of transformative ecosocial change.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

Bay, U. (2013). Environmental social work. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 32, 1–2. doi:10.1080/02615479.2013.797655

Besthorn, F. H. (2002). Is it time for a new ecological approach to social work: What is the environment telling us? *The Spirituality and Social Work Forum*, 9(1), 2–5.

Block, P. (2009). *Community: The structure of belonging*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Boetto, H. (2017). A transformative eco-social model: Challenging modernist assumptions in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 48–67.

Climate Emergency Declaration. (n.d.). *Call to declare a climate emergency*. Retrieved from <https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/>

Gamble, D. N. (2013). Well-being in a globalized world: Does social work know how to make it happen? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 48(4), 669–689. doi:10.5175/JSWE.2012.201100125

Gamble, D. N., & Weil, M. (2010). *Community practice skills: Local to global*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Hayward, R. A., Miller, S. E., & Shaw, T. V. (2012). Social work education on the environment in contemporary curricula in the USA. In M. Grey, J. Coates, & T. Hetherington (Eds.), *Environmental social work* (pp. 246–259). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hooks, B. (2009). *Belonging: A culture of place*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2018). *Special report: Global warming of 1.5°C*. Retrieved from <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

Jones, D. N., Powers, M. C. F., & Truell, R. (2018). Global overview. In D. N. Jones (Ed.), *Global agenda for social work and social development: Third report. Promoting community and environmental sustainability* (pp. 1–50). Rheinfelden, Switzerland: IFSW.

Jones, P. (2010). Responding to the ecological crisis: Transformative ways for social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(1), 67–84. doi:10.5175/JSWE.2010.200800073

Jones, P. (2018). Greening social work education: Transforming the curriculum in pursuit of eco-social justice. In L. Dominelli (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of green social work* (pp. 558–568). New York, NY: Routledge.

Maathai, W. (2003, March). *The green belt movement: Sharing the approach and the experience*. New York, NY: Lantern Books.

- Maathai, W. (2006). *Unbowed: A memoir*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Mapp, S. C. (2008). *Human rights and social justice in a global perspective: An introduction to international social work*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Mason, L. R., & Rigg, J. (2019). Climate change, social justice: Making the case for community inclusion. In L. R. Mason & J. Rigg (Eds.), *People and climate change: Vulnerability, adaptation, and social justice* (pp. 3–19). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- McMichael, P. (2017). *Development and social change*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Merton, L., & Dater, A., (Producer and Director). (2008). *Taking root: The vision of Wangari Maathai [DVD]*. Marlboro, VT, USA: Marlboro Productions.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration. (2019). *2018 fourth warmest year in continued warming trend, according to NASA, NOAA*. Retrieved from <https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2841/2018-fourth-warmest-year-in-continued-warming-trend-according-to-nasa-noaa/>
- Orr, D. W. (2004). *Earth in mind: On education, environment, and the human prospect*. DC: Island Press.
- Orr, D. W. (2016). *Dangerous years: Climate change, the long emergency and the way forward*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Powers, M., & Rinkel, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Social work promoting community and environmental sustainability: A workbook for social work practitioners and educators (Vol.2)*. Rheinfelden, Switzerland: International Federation of Social Work (IFSW).
- Powers, M. C. F. (2016). Transforming the profession: Social workers' expanding response to the ecological crisis. In A.-L. Matthies & K. Narhi (Eds.), *Ecosocial transition of societies: Contribution of social work and social policy* (pp. 286–300). London, UK: Routledge.
- Powers, M. C. F., Schmitz, C. L., Nsonwu, C. Z., & Mathew, M. T. (2018). Environmental migration: Social work at the nexus of climate change and global migration. *Advances in Social Work*, 18(3), 1023–1040. doi:10.18060/21678
- Romm, J. (2016). *Climate change: What everyone needs to know*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schmitz, C. L., Matyók, T., James, C. D., & Sloan, L. M. (2013). Environmental sustainability: Educating social workers for interdisciplinary practice. In M. Gray, J. Coates, & T. Hetherington (Eds.), *Environmental social work* (pp. 260–279). New York, NY: Routledge.

Schmitz, C. L., Powers, M. C. F., Nesmith, A., & Forbes, R. (2017, October). *Environmental justice across the curriculum: 2015 EPAS and beyond*. Grand Challenges Teaching Institute accepted for presentation at Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Dallas, TX.

Sloan, L. M., Joyner, M. C., Stakeman, C. J., & Schmitz, C. L. (2018). *Critical multiculturalism and intersectionality in a complex world*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Sloan, L. M., & Schmitz, C. L. (2019). Environmental degradation: Communities forging a path forward. *Journal of Transdisciplinary Peace Praxis*, 1(1). <https://jtpp.uk/>

Taking Root. (n.d.). Words from Wangari: *Selected quotes from Taking Root*. Retrieved from <https://takingrootfilm.com/the-film/words-from-wangari/>

University of South Carolina College of Social Work. [USC CoSW]. (2013, December 4). *Seeking a big impact with a small footprint* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdhAPrbC2go#t=35>

University of South Carolina College of Social Work. [USC CoSW]. (2014, August 22). *Making a Big Impact with a Small Footprint: Infusing Ecological Consciousness into the College of Social Work at USC* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9fIGlhM6Og&feature=youtu.be>

Wallace-Wells, D. (2019). *The uninhabitable earth: Life after warming*. New York, NY: Tim Duggan Publishing.

Whiteman, D., & Powers, M. C. F. (2012). Environmental leadership through campus project teams: Green structures for linking students, faculty, and staff. In D. Rigling Gallagher (Ed.), *Environmental leadership* (Vol. 1, pp. 459–467). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.