

3-3-2020

Teaching Justice-Connectivity

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Michael Pinard, *Teaching Justice-Connectivity*, 80 La. L. Rev. (2020)
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*Michael Pinard**

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INTRODUCTION

For a little over a decade, I taught the Reentry Clinic at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. My students and I represented Baltimore residents who were attempting to overcome the obstacles related to their criminal records. Our clients lived at the intersections of the criminal legal system and various civil-based systems. Their criminal records imposed upon them—and their families—a wide range of civil legal exclusions and related obstacles. Their records excluded them from, among other things, various types of employment, employment-related licenses, government-assisted housing, public benefits programs, jury service, and voting booths. Although systems independent of the criminal legal system impose these exclusions, they do so solely based on criminal records. Thus, these records fed our clients into these civil systems, and, as a result, they were further isolated, shunned, and stigmatized.

Similarly, children who are removed from school through suspension, expulsion, or other forms of punishment are often isolated, shunned, and stigmatized. For the past couple of years, my students and I have represented these children through the Youth, Education, and Justice Clinic that I currently teach. For too many children, school discipline merges public education with the criminal legal system.

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As many commentators, government agencies, and civil rights organizations have articulated, public schools in the United States—particularly for children who are poor, Black, Latinx, or have learning disabilities—are fused with the criminal legal system.¹ These children live perilously close to the criminal legal system through the deployment of police officers in their schools,² the intertwined relationships between school administrators and police officers, and overly punitive disciplinary policies and practices that funnel children from their schools to the criminal legal system.³

One key lesson of the Reentry Clinic and the Youth, Education, and Justice Clinic is that for clinical students to engage with their clients and to represent them effectively, they must understand how these various systems and institutions interact. The criminal legal system is not separate from other systems, institutions, and conditions. Rather, criminal legal interaction is

1. E.g., Jason P. Nance, *Over-Disciplining Students, Racial Bias and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 50 U. RICH. L. REV. 1063 (2016); THE ADVANCEMENT PROJECT & HARV. UNIV. CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT, OPPORTUNITIES SUSPENDED: THE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES OF ZERO TOLERANCE AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE (2000); U.S. DEP'T OF EDUCATION, OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS, 2015–16 CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION, SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY (2018); U.S. COMM'N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, BEYOND SUSPENSIONS: EXAMINING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES AND CONNECTIONS TO THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR WITH DISABILITIES (July 2019). For detailed analyses of the disproportionate and devastating impact of exclusionary school discipline on Black girls, see MONIQUE W. MORRIS, PUSHOUT: THE CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK GIRLS IN SCHOOLS (2016); THE NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC., THURGOOD MARSHALL INSTITUTE, OUR GIRLS, OUR FUTURE: INVESTING IN OPPORTUNITY & REDUCING RELIANCE ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN BALTIMORE (2018).

2. According to the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, 24% of U.S. elementary schools and 42% of U.S. high schools had sworn law enforcement officers (including school resources officers) in the 2013–14 school year. U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., 2013–14 CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION: A FIRST LOOK 5 (2016). However, 51% of schools where Black or Latinx children comprised more than 75% of the student population had sworn law enforcement officers. *Id.*

3. In the 2015–16 school year, White schoolchildren comprised 49% of the public-school students in the United States and constituted 36% of students referred to law enforcement or subjected to school-related arrests. In stark contrast, Black schoolchildren comprised 15% of students overall but were 31% of the students referred to law enforcement or subjected to school-related arrests. U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., 2015-16 CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY 3 (2018).

often the sum, or the end result, of circumstances and conditions that have led to involvement with these other systems and institutions. Similarly, exclusionary disciplinary practices that disproportionately—and, in many instances, overwhelmingly—exclude Black and Latinx children from school are connected to other systems and conditions, such as mass criminalization,⁴ harsh policing practices, and under-resourced schools, that similarly isolate and shun.

This deeper understanding of how various systems, institutions, and conditions intersect is similar to the practice of holistic criminal defense that public defender offices pioneered approximately three decades ago.⁵ Robin Steinberg, the visionary founder of the Bronx Defenders and now the CEO of the Bail Project,⁶ describes the four pillars of holistic defense: (1) “seamless access to legal and nonlegal services that meet client needs”; (2) “dynamic, interdisciplinary communication”; (3) “advocates with an interdisciplinary skill set”; and (4) “a robust understanding of, and connection to, the community served.”⁷

Public defenders developed holistic representation models, rooted in these four pillars, to respond to the realization that their clients’ criminal charges often related to, or were the culmination of, a host of other legal and non-legal issues in their lives. Although addressing the client’s criminal charge is their primary responsibility, holistic defenders work to recognize and resolve these other issues with the goal of helping the client move past the circumstances that led to or otherwise significantly contributed to the charge. Thus, holistic representation operationalizes the multidimensionality of criminal defense lawyering. It covers different legal fields and involves non-legal professionals, such as social workers, who can help address non-legal issues.

4. As Professor Kristin Henning urgently explained: “Black boys are policed like no one else, not even black men.” Kristin Henning, *Boys to Men: The Role of Policing in the Socialization of Black Boys*, in *POLICING THE BLACK MAN: ARREST, PROSECUTION, AND IMPRISONMENT* 58 (Angela J. Davis ed., 2017).

5. Professor Kim Taylor-Thompson traced the beginnings of what later became known as holistic advocacy to the Defender Association of Seattle, which opened in 1969, and the Public Defender Service of the District of Columbia, which opened in 1970. Kim Taylor-Thompson, *Tuning Up Gideon’s Trumpet*, 71 *FORDHAM L. REV.* 1461, 1504 (2003).

6. The Bail Project’s mission is to “pay bail for people in need, reunite[e] families and restore[e] the presumption of innocence.” *Mission*, BAIL PROJECT, <https://bailproject.org/mission/> [<https://perma.cc/UKH8-2R4Y>] (last visited April 8, 2019).

7. Robin Steinberg, *Heeding Gideon’s Call in the Twenty-First Century: Holistic Defense and the New Public Defense Paradigm*, 70 *WASH. & LEE L. REV.* 961, 987–97 (2013).

Holistic representation applies to all aspects of poverty lawyering. Indeed, one common denominator of poverty lawyering, regardless of legal specialty, is that clients often have multiple legal and non-legal issues. Although lawyers usually specialize in one area of law, they find themselves frequently learning new areas of law and coordinating with other lawyers and non-lawyers to attempt to address these other issues.

In light of these realities of law practice and the need to help clients address these wide-ranging issues, law schools must take the initial steps to prepare students to be holistic lawyers. Specifically, law schools must propel students past developing skills and providing experiences in a particular legal specialty to building the wide and broad knowledge base necessary to recognize, forecast, and address the constellation of legal and non-legal issues that often confront marginalized and isolated clients.

This Essay conveys the importance of building in law students the foundation to recognize the various systems, institutions, and conditions that often crash into the lives of their clients, as well as the residents of the communities that are just outside law schools' doors. It does so through proposing a teaching model that I call *Justice-Connectivity*. This model aims for students to understand and be humbled by the ways in which different institutions, systems, and strands of law converge upon, oppress, isolate, and shun individuals, families, and communities. The ultimate teaching lesson is that individuals, families, and communities are often marginalized, thoroughly and exhaustively, across multiple dimensions, through seemingly disparate institutions, systems, and conditions that are actually interrelated and interconnected. At its core, *Justice-Connectivity* strives to enable law students to understand the contexts that often define and confine lives, so that they are better able to understand, contextualize, and address the legal and non-legal issues that impact their clients and, more broadly, work with communities to dismantle oppressive laws, policies, practices, and systems.

Part I of this Essay discusses the evolution and tenets of holistic lawyering in the context of criminal defense. Holistic lawyering, however, translates to all aspects of poverty lawyering because it connects the client's immediate legal issue—the issue that brought the client to the lawyer—to other related legal issues and non-legal issues. In Part II, this Essay conveys some lessons that holistic lawyering brings—or can bring—to legal education. Lastly, in Part III, this Essay proposes the teaching model of *Justice-Connectivity*. Using the criminal legal system as a frame, this Part explains *Justice-Connectivity*'s goal of helping students realize that effective and impactful representation requires them to develop a deep and broad understanding of the ways in which various systems and conditions—including education, housing, employment,

public benefits, voting, immigration, and policing—connect to the criminal legal system. The same is true for any other type of poverty lawyering. Contemporary understanding of these connections, however, is not enough. Justice-Connectivity also requires a historical understanding of how these systems and conditions have developed and warped over time.

I. THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HOLISTIC LAWYERING

As with any other practice within a profession, criminal defense lawyering has evolved over time. Traditionally, lawyers focused on the criminal case, to the exclusion of the other legal and non-legal issues that might have confronted the client simultaneously and perhaps were even part of the underlying reasons why the client entered the criminal legal system. This narrow focus was not unique to criminal defense lawyering. In general, public interest lawyers practiced in silos, with little to no collaboration between them, on a range of issues that might have impacted a client whom the lawyer represented in, as examples, a criminal matter, a housing matter, a public benefits matter, or an employment matter. The client's legal problem—that is, the legal problem that brought the client to the attorney—defined and confined the attorney's scope of work. Likewise, the type of law that an attorney practiced, such as criminal defense, housing, employment, social security, or debt collection, defined and confined the issues to be addressed.

Over time, criminal defense lawyers, particularly public defenders, realized that their clients were often suffering from multiple intersecting legal and non-legal problems. The criminal charge that brought the client to the public defender's office often related to or resulted from a host of other legal and non-legal issues. As a result, public defenders expressed that the traditionally narrow approach to criminal defense lawyering, which only involves resolving the criminal charge, was not enough, at least if the goal was to resolve the issues that brought the client into the criminal legal system.

In response, pioneering public defenders broadened their role and their representation. Their practices evolved as they used their experiences to advance the profession to meet their clients' myriad needs. A new form of criminal defense practice—holistic representation—emerged. The tenets

of holistic defense lawyering have been well displayed in practice and scholarship over the past few decades.⁸

At its root, holistic defense lawyering recognizes and confronts the fact that an individual's criminal charge is often the sum of various issues, conditions, and systems that, standing alone, are independent of the criminal legal system. Holistic lawyering understands that issues such as mental illness, addiction, inadequate education, unemployment, housing instability, poverty, and trauma can be relevant, and sometimes central, to a client's involvement with the criminal legal system. The holistic model works to address these underlying issues, with the immediate goal of helping the client move past the particular charge and the ultimate goal of keeping the client away from the criminal legal system forever.

Public defenders throughout the United States have expanded their representation to address these various issues. Holistic public defender offices have attorneys who specialize in diverse areas of civil law, such as housing, public benefits, and immigration.⁹ Some attorneys in these

8. See, e.g., James M. Anderson et al., *The Effects of Holistic Defense on Criminal Justice Outcomes*, 132 HARV. L. REV. 819 (2019); M. Chris Fabricant, *Rethinking Criminal Defense in "Zero Tolerance" Policing Regimes*, 36 N.Y.U. REV. L. & SOC. CHANGE 351 (2012); Brooks Holland, *Holistic Advocacy: An Important but Limited Institutional Role*, 30 N.Y.U. REV. L. & SOC. CHANGE 637 (2006); Michael Pinard, *Broadening the Holistic Mindset: Incorporating Collateral Consequences and Reentry into Criminal Defense Lawyering*, 31 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 1067 (2004); McGregor Smyth, "Collateral" No More: *The Practical Imperative for Holistic Defense in a Post-Padilla World . . . Or, How to Achieve Consistently Better Results for Clients*, 31 ST. LOUIS U. PUB. L. REV. 139 (2011); Robin Steinberg & David Feige, *Cultural Revolution: Transforming the Public Defender's Office*, 29 N.Y.U. REV. L. & SOC. CHANGE 123 (2004).

9. For example, the Neighborhood Defense Service of Harlem represents clients in family court proceedings, civil proceedings, and immigration proceedings. *Practice Areas*, NDS HARLEM, <http://www.ndsny.org/index.php> [https://perma.cc/8LK3-WC2K] (last visited April 8, 2019). In addition, the Bronx Defenders have a Center for Holistic Defense that has partnered with the Center for Court Innovation to train public defender officers throughout the United States on holistic defense services. See, e.g., *The Center for Holistic Defense Announces 2013 Grant Awardees*, BRONX DEFENDERS, https://www.bja.gov/Funding/HolisticDefensePR_03-13.pdf [https://perma.cc/Z8PZ-55AX] (last visited Aug. 6, 2019) (announcing that the Alameda County Public Defender Office in Oakland, CA; the Arch City Defenders in St. Louis, Missouri; the Jefferson County Public Defender in Birmingham, Alabama; the Office of the Public Defender in Atlanta, Georgia; the Santa Clara Public Defender in San Jose, California; and the Shelby

offices are also experts on the various “collateral” consequences that attach to each client because of a criminal charge itself or the disposition of that charge, and they work to ensure that clients are counseled thoroughly with regard to these consequences. Some public defenders take on other legal matters that directly relate to and stem from their clients’ criminal charges, such as representing youth clients in school suspension and expulsion proceedings. Schools have removed these clients for the same alleged incidents that might lead to charges in juvenile or criminal court. As another example, some public defenders represent clients in expungement proceedings after the client’s criminal case has ended.¹⁰

Ultimately, criminal defense lawyering is one branch of poverty lawyering. The overwhelming majority of individuals charged with crimes are poor¹¹ and live with a variety of legal and non-legal issues. Holistic criminal defense, as is true of any form of holistic poverty lawyering, is multidimensional because it covers different legal fields. Holistic defense is also multi-professional because it involves non-legal professionals, such as social workers, who respond to non-legal issues. Importantly, it is “an aspirational rather than a static model.”¹² Thus, holistic representation requires adaptability to address changing and emerging needs, as well as the humility necessary for self-reflection and self-critique.

II. HOLISTIC LESSONS FOR LEGAL EDUCATION

Over the past decade, law schools have incorporated more skills-based courses and practice-focused training into their curricula. Schools have taken significant direction from the bench, the bar, and law firms, which have called for legal education that better prepares students for the rigors

County Public Defender Office in Memphis, Tennessee, were awarded grants for holistic defender training).

10. For example, public defenders in Baltimore represent clients in expungement proceedings. See *Expungement*, MD. OFF. PUB. DEFENDER, <http://www.opd.state.md.us/expungement> [<https://perma.cc/C5RD-XEFH>] (last visited Apr. 8, 2019).

11. See, e.g., Richard A. Oppel, Jr., & Jugal K. Patel, *One Lawyer, 194 Felony Cases, and No Time*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 31, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/31/us/public-defender-case-loads.html> [<https://perma.cc/26GU-HKAW>] (“Roughly four out of five criminal defendants are too poor to hire a lawyer and use public defenders or court-appointed lawyers.”).

12. Steinberg, *supra* note 7, at 986.

of practice after graduation.¹³ This call rang loudest in the aftermath of the 2008 economic downturn. Law firms expressed that they could no longer devote traditional resources to train newly minted lawyers and turned to law schools to deepen the foundational skills taught to students. They want associates who are better prepared to engage with the demands of private practice. Likewise, judges seek clerks with advanced research, writing, and analytical skills. Legal employers have thus stressed that it is the job of law schools to move students toward becoming “practice ready.”

In response, legal educators have taken steps to increase skills-based learning. The American Bar Association, which accredits law schools, now requires students to earn at least six credits in a clinic, field placement, or simulation course.¹⁴ The New York Court of Appeals now requires that applicants “demonstrate that [they] possess[] the skills and values necessary to provide effective, ethical and responsible legal services in [the] State.”¹⁵ Schools have increased opportunities for students to practice in clinics,¹⁶ take experiential courses, and take doctrinal courses that professors infuse with experiential components. The bottom line is that legal education is grasping the importance of engaging students more deeply in the issues that impact individuals in need of legal services and providing more practice-based experiences that expose students to the array of skills, competencies, and issues necessary to represent clients in a variety of settings, including litigation and transactional contexts.

In a similar vein, law schools need to train students to practice holistic lawyering. Given the necessity of holistic representation to poor clients who are often immersed in multiple legal systems and confronting multiple issues that relate to the legal matter at hand, there is an urgent need to translate the holistic lawyering model to legal education. As law

13. See, e.g., Robert Kuehn, *Universal Clinic Legal Education: Necessary and Feasible*, 53 WASH. U. J.L. & POL’Y 89, 94 (2017) (“State bar reports . . . note the need for more practice-based training in law school and urge regulators and schools to take action.”).

14. AM. BAR ASS’N, 2018–2019 STANDARDS AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHOOLS, Std. 303(a)(3).

15. N.Y. CT. APPEALS., RULES OF THE COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ADMISSION OF ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELORS AT LAW § 520.18(a).

16. As of October 2018, “over one-third of [law] schools . . . require or guarantee each graduating J.D. student enrollment in a law clinic or externship course—43 schools require a clinic or externship of at least 2 credits and 32 schools guarantee that training.” Robert Kuehn, *If 6 Turned Out To Be 9, I Don’t Mind (But 3? or 2!): The Uneven Implementation of Mandatory Experiential Credits*, 27 CLINICAL LEGAL EDUC. NEWSL. 7, 7 (Winter 2018–2019) (internal citation omitted).

schools expand experiential opportunities and work to better connect legal education to the skills necessary for legal practice, important questions remain, including: (1) what lessons can legal education take from holistic lawyering, particularly with regard to how law schools should teach students about the law and legal systems?; and (2) how should law schools prepare law students to practice holistic lawyering so that they can one day understand, grapple with, and address the holistic needs of their clients?

The essence of holistic representation is that lawyers work to resolve the range of legal and non-legal issues that interfere with their clients' lives. In the legal education context, holistic representation is critical if the ultimate goal of the representation is to resolve the issues that contribute to, or otherwise relate to, the legal problem that brought the client to the lawyer. If nothing else, legal education should impart the tenets of holistic representation as a form of lawyering to law students. Much more, however, can and should be taught.

As a first step, students should understand the importance of adopting a holistic mindset. This mindset orients lawyers to analyze a legal problem broadly, exploring possible connections to other legal and non-legal issues confronting the client. Thus, the holistic mindset helps students develop the fundamental understanding that a legal problem, particularly for a poor client, is not an isolated event. The problem is often wedded to the client's marginalization across multiple dimensions, including, but certainly not limited to, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, poverty, education, and community. Accordingly, holistic lawyers identify, assess, and address the legal issue in the context of other conditions and systems that have marginalized the client over time.

The overarching lesson that law schools should take from holistic lawyering is that for law students to develop the foundational skills necessary to eventually meet their clients' holistic needs, they must gain a deep and broad understanding of the ways in which various systems and conditions connect to their clients. Students must then apply this broader understanding to the particular legal problem that brings the particular client to them. This lesson carries through all aspects of poverty lawyering. Take, for example, the prototypical person charged with any one of the common misdemeanor crimes that flood lower criminal courts each day. *Prototypical* in this regard means that the person is poor, Black, and lives in a hyper-policed, hyper-criminalized community. More likely than not, various institutions, systems, and conditions—such as education, employment, public benefits, policing, redlining, community disinvestment, health issues, medical care, housing, poverty, racism, and age—have connected this particular individual, in varying degrees, to the criminal legal system. As a result, the issues and problems burdening the client extend beyond the criminal charge. Indeed, for

some clients, the criminal charge may be among the least of their problems. Students must therefore appreciate that focusing solely on the criminal charge may not address the underlying issues that confront the client. Accordingly, students must develop the tools necessary to recognize and confront these broader issues.

Law students should also understand that although commentators explain and discuss holistic lawyering most frequently in the criminal defense context, holistic lawyering applies to every form of poverty lawyering. The criminal defense example discussed above is illustrative of the problems facing clients in any other area of poverty lawyering. The legal problem—whether it is a possible eviction, denial of public benefits, or school suspension—often results from or is fed into an amalgam of other issues that live with the client. In sum, the holistic representation lens allows students to view these various systems and conditions as branches of one deeply rooted tree.

III. JUSTICE-CONNECTIVITY

Legal educators should utilize these lessons from holistic lawyering to lay a foundation for students to develop, understand, appreciate, and implement the tools necessary for representing clients holistically. Holistic representation requires that lawyers identify and find ways to address connected legal and non-legal issues. For lawyers to be able to look for, see, and assess these connections, they must understand the institutions, systems, and conditions that shape their clients' communities. Holistic representation, therefore, is individual-focused because the lawyer is working to address each client's discrete problems. Just as important, holistic representation is also community-influenced because the lawyer must understand that the broader issues infiltrating communities may correlate with—and thus help the lawyer identify—some of the issues burdening the client. Simply put, understanding communities often helps lawyers understand their clients. This broad and deep knowledge gives lawyers the context necessary to represent their clients holistically.

One pedagogical model for imparting these various tools to law students is what I call Justice-Connectivity. Quite simply, Justice-Connectivity is a tool that helps students recognize that impactful representation requires them to identify, appreciate, and work to resolve the range of legal and non-legal issues that interfere with their clients' lives. Through Justice-Connectivity, students learn how intuitively disconnected systems and conditions fuse in ways that consume the lives of poor people.

Contemporary understanding of these connections is not enough. Justice-Connectivity also requires a historical understanding of how these

various systems and conditions have developed and warped over time. This deeper knowledge leads to a broader understanding of the various issues that clients confront simultaneously and constantly, including the assorted narratives that often define and confine their lives. Through this understanding, students can begin to develop the holistic mindset that will help them identify and connect the issues necessary to represent clients holistically.

The pedagogical experiences specific to Justice-Connectivity are expansive, deep, and intentional. This pedagogical tool produces seemingly endless ideas for teaching students because of the breadth of issues that are the everyday realities for poor, marginalized individuals and their communities. Recognizing the many possible approaches to Justice-Connectivity, some fundamental and overarching requirements emerge.

First, the entire law school curriculum must include Justice-Connectivity. It cannot be confined to law school clinics, other experiential opportunities, or those courses that have traditionally been the cloistered venues for discussing and exploring marginalization. Justice-Connectivity requires law schools to uproot the silos that have traditionally separated various components of the curriculum. As holistic representation requires attorneys to knock down walls, Justice-Connectivity will require law schools to do the same.

Doctrinal courses are integral to building the foundation of holistic representation. Students can dig deep into conditions that have developed and persisted over time that both broadly and specifically relate to the doctrine; interrogate the ways in which legal decision-making created and exacerbated these conditions; discuss how these conditions shape legal strategies; and explore the client's role, voice, and power in developing and executing these strategies. Through this deeper context, students can then analyze and scrutinize the caselaw that drives these courses. Students can subsequently operationalize these deeper contexts in clinical and externship courses because they will have a broader, clearer vision of the various systems and conditions that have pushed their clients to them. In essence, the students will be "primed"¹⁷ to see each client's multidimensional marginalization, the relationship between the legal problem a client brought

17. One of the often-stated goals of experiential legal education is to prepare students to be "practice ready" lawyers upon graduation. However, Renée M. Hutchins, Dean of the University of the District Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law, asserts that, in light of the years of experience necessary to truly become "practice ready," a more realistic goal is to prepare students to be "practice primed." Email correspondence between Renée M. Hutchins and Michael Pinard, April 8, 2019 (on file with author).

to them and the other legal and non-legal issues confronting the client, and any potential legal and non-legal issues that may confront the client subsequently based on the outcome of the legal problem at hand.

Second, the law school curriculum must be defined broadly within the Justice-Connectivity context. Educational experiences outside of the classroom are vital in helping law students gain the perspectives and develop the skills necessary to represent clients holistically. These experiences must supplement and deepen the doctrinal learning.

One way for law schools to provide this deeper context is through diversifying guest speakers who engage the law school community. Practicing lawyers should speak to the law school community to present examples of how their clients' legal issues connect to other legal and non-legal issues and to share methodologies for representing clients holistically. Non-lawyers, such as social workers, doctors, nurses, sociologists, schoolteachers, and historians, can discuss ways in which non-legal issues, systems, and conditions relate to the legal problems that bring clients to lawyers. Also, a cross-section of local community stakeholders—such as youth groups, activists, community watch groups, faith leaders, and justice-involved individuals—can teach law students and faculty about the various systems and conditions, historically and presently, that have long plagued the communities surrounding each law school.

These conversations should not only take place in law schools, but also in the communities where these speakers live and work. A major tenet of Justice-Connectivity is that experiences outside of law school are as important as the experiences in law school classrooms. Indeed, students should develop “a robust understanding of, and connection to” communities.¹⁸ Through this immersive education, students can begin to see and understand the various connections between institutions, systems, and conditions that compromise the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

Third, in addition to employing Justice-Connectivity to help students build the framework necessary to practice holistic lawyering, law schools must convey that through this pedagogical tool law students will also become better people. As important as it is for students to develop and improve their legal skills in law school, it is equally important for them to improve who they are by becoming better than who they were on their first day of law school. In this regard, critical components of clinical legal education are developing non-judgmental and empathetic mindsets. Students learn that two of the ways to earn their clients' trust is to not judge their clients and to be empathetic. Conversely, they learn that two ways to

18. Steinberg, *supra* note 7, at 997.

destroy their relationships with clients is to judge them and to lack care and concern. Thus, students must learn and understand the importance of valuing their clients, particularly in light of the various differences that stand between them and their clients—such as race, age, gender, socioeconomic status, education, access to resources, and privilege.

Justice-Connectivity can help bridge the gaps that, if left unchecked, exacerbate assumptions and biases and lead students to judge their clients negatively and in ways that undermine their client relationships. Specifically, it teaches students to understand that the legal problem confronting their clients is, in all likelihood, tethered to a host of other legal and non-legal issues connected to systems, institutions, and circumstances that are largely impossible for their clients to navigate, let alone escape. Through Justice-Connectivity, students learn about the depth and gravity of the various issues that paint holistic pictures of their clients' burdens. Likewise, students learn the harsh lesson that to these various systems and institutions, their clients are disposable. These systems and institutions coordinate to judge, isolate, confine, and stigmatize their clients. Through this knowledge, students will, as Bryan Stevenson asserts, be more "proximate" to their clients.¹⁹ They will understand that "there is power in proximity" and that "getting proximate can make the difference" in securing justice.²⁰ Thus, students will know their clients more deeply. They will understand that, in addition to addressing their clients' legal and non-legal issues, they have to afford their clients the dignity that has eluded them in these other systems and institutions. Indeed, holistic representation, at its core, is about addressing and promoting dignity. Through understanding their clients holistically, students are able to fight harder for them and to stand more closely to them.

CONCLUSION

Justice-Connectivity forms the foundation, the context, and the perspective necessary for holistic representation. It requires law schools to offer an immersive educational experience that connects dots between theory, doctrine, practice, community, and humanity. For law students, as well as for faculty, the Justice-Connectivity learning curve is steep, as it must be.

19. Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: Race and the Criminal Justice System*, 11th Annual Anne and Loren Kieve Distinguished Speaker Lecture, Stanford University (Jan. 13, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5DfVmtKgzw> [<https://perma.cc/29D4-FKKN>].

20. *Id.*