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## Urban School Violence Prevention: A Suggested Intervention Utilizing Liberation Psychology

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Urban School Violence Prevention:

A Suggested Intervention Utilizing Liberation Psychology

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BY  
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### **Abstract**

In the past decades, numerous programs have been developed in attempts to reduce the rates of violence facing students in American schools. The spotlight on these programs have increased since horrific mass shooting events have taken place throughout the country. Many of these programs have utilized varied methods in their attempt to reduce school-based violence, from the implementation of hardline policies meant to act as violence deterrents to the development of risk assessment teams aimed at identifying and intervening against potential threats; however, few of the existing programs have shown substantial efficacy rates. Additionally, several of the violence prevention programs have demonstrated substantial negative impacts for minority students. This paper suggests a violence prevention program aimed at addressing the unique and overlooked needs of urban, minority school students with an emphasis on community-based, culturally informed interventions. The suggested program separates itself in its focus on the community rather than just the school, operating from the belief that schools are mirrors of both the strengths and challenges of the whole community; therefore, violence prevention programming must be community rather than solely school-based. Liberation psychology and participatory action research form the foundation for the recommended program with the community identifying the problems contributing to violence and determining the appropriate interventions to meet the specified goals.

## **Urban School Violence Prevention: A Suggested Intervention Utilizing Liberation Psychology**

Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook Elementary School, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Santa Fe High School, and Northern Illinois University - these names are easily recognizable by the general public - each of which are schools that have experienced a mass shooting incident. As more media attention, and, therefore, national attention has increased over the years, communities have engaged in calls for action, asking for the implementation of programming to reduce school violence, decrease access to guns, and increase the ability to identify potential threats.

Over the past decades, experts across many different fields have worked to create programs whose primary goal is to eliminate violence within school settings. Psychologists, school boards, educators, parents, the Department of Education, and even the United States Secret Service developed different systems to mitigate violence. Unfortunately, the efficacy rates of the programming currently in place in schools is questionable, at best (Price & Khubchandani, 2019). At worst, the discipline and punishment protocols used to respond to problematic student behaviors have been harmful to students, creating direct links to prisons and increasing racial, economic, and social injustices (Cornell et al., 2018; Kodelja, 2019; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba et al., 2014; Welch & Payne, 2010). Furthermore, the existing programming fails to address the unique needs of minority, lower socioeconomic, and urban youth who have higher rates of exposure to violence (Santilli et al., 2017; Stein et al., 2003; Welch & Payne, 2010). Mass shootings have garnered a great deal of media attention and justifiable outcry from the American population; however, the violence urban students face on a regular basis continues to go largely unnoticed with the media paying little attention or, when they do report on urban

violence, casting the victims or overall community in a negative light (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Parham-Payne, 2015).

The argument could be made that some of the programs referenced in this paper were developed for mass shooting incidents and were not intended to be used for the other types of violence that occur more regularly in school settings. While on the surface that may seem like a fair critique, in actuality it simply underlines the emphasis placed on suburban, white schools and communities over the needs of the urban student and the failure of society to recognize and feel outraged by the violence *all* students experience. Petula Dvorak (2018), a writer for *Washington Post* explored this in her article “The Nation is Focused on Students and Gun Violence. But Kids in Urban Schools Want to Know, Where’s Everybody Been?” Dvorak interviewed students and school directors of urban schools who expressed frustration at the lack of attention given to the violence they face every day; many of these students had lost friends and siblings to gun violence that did not receive the same nationwide outrage that suburban shootings receive. Zachary Wright (2018), a teacher in an urban school, wrote an opinion piece about this very issue. He eloquently explained the differences when he wrote:

A suburban school shooting is a lightning bolt of trauma, a single, focused explosion of terror and fear. That is not the urban school experience, or at least not my own.

We don’t have lightning bolts of trauma; our collective trauma is the steady undercurrent of societal oppression and its corresponding generational poverty. Our collective trauma lies in the reality that is expressed when a class I am teaching reads Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* and more than three-quarters of them share that they have a family member who is in prison or has been there in the past. Our collective trauma lies in the fact that a student who was

in his seat yesterday is not there today because he has been arrested. Our collective trauma lies in the T-shirts, sweatshirts, and tattoos that honor deceased loved ones. Our collective trauma lies not in the attack of a school shooter, but in the almost daily routine of gun violence that too many of our students face when they leave school. (paras. 5-11)

Urban students face violence at much higher rates than their suburban counterparts, but far fewer resources are supplied to them and programs are rarely aimed at addressing these needs. The comparison is fair and very, very real.

Throughout this paper, a brief history of violence within schools will be explored in order to create a foundational understanding of rates and types of violence, perpetrators, and how factors such as socioeconomic status (SES) of the community, race/ethnicity, and gender influence how violence is portrayed and responded to. Programs and rules that schools have put into place in order to prevent violence will be explored, with an emphasis on how these programs affect students of color and/or students from lower SES backgrounds. A review of the literature will demonstrate that these programs either ignore the unique needs of students from urban backgrounds or negatively impact these students, when compared to how these programs affect their suburban peers. After exploring the major programs schools have in place for responding to violence and reviewing the effects these have on urban youth, the paper will shift to making recommendations on how violence prevention programs could be developed to meet the unique needs of urban students using a unique, culturally informed, community-oriented lens. Liberation psychology as described by Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994) will provide the frame for ways in which these violence prevention programming could be tailored to fit the community needs.

### **Violence and Youth**

The Center for Disease Control (2020) reported that violence throughout childhood is known to have long-term, negative effects including mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), academic difficulties, engagement in high-risk activities including sexual behavior and substance abuse, and an increased risk for future violence perpetration and victimization. Furthermore, the CDC (2018) reported that homicide is the third leading cause of death for people aged 10-24 and that in 2018, 14% of deaths of youth aged 1-19 was due to firearms. Adolescents aged 13-17 are 12 times more likely to be shot and killed than children under the age of 13. Black youths are ten times more likely than whites of the same age to be shot and killed and males are 4.5 times more likely to be shot and killed than their female counterparts. The Children's Defense Fund (2019) reported that the leading cause of death for black children is being shot and that children from low-income backgrounds are at higher risk for being exposed to or experiencing violence.

The National Center for Education Statistics (Musu et al., 2019) published their report *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, a look at the overall rates of crime and safety in urban, suburban, and rural United States schools. Here are some of the key findings from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016: there were 30 school-associated homicides, of the 1,478 youth deaths labeled as homicides, 18 occurred at school. Seventy-nine percent of public schools reported some sort of crime, violent or nonviolent 47% of schools reporting that at least one crime involved the police. In 2017, students between ages 12-18 reported a total of 827,000 nonfatal victimizations, including theft, a higher rate of victimization than what was reported outside of school. One percent of this same age group reported a violent victimization while less than 0.5% reported a seriously violent victimization. Students who attended urban, public schools had the highest reported rates of gang presence in their schools when compared to suburban, rural, or private

counterparts. Four percent of high school students (grades 9-12) stated that they had carried a weapon to school in the past 30 days. Urban students reported higher rates of fear of being harmed at school than suburban students.

The National Center for Education Statistics (Musu et al., 2019) also found that minority students face higher rates of violence at schools. Minority students reported higher rates of being threatened/injured by a weapon on school property with Native students having the highest rates, followed by black students. Black students, followed by Pacific Islander, and then Hispanic students report the highest rates of engaging in physical altercations on school property. These rates differ slightly when physical fights are looked at outside of school settings, with Native students having at least one fight in the past year.

### **Violence Prevention Programs**

In order to understand what conditions urban students are experiencing in their schools, it is important to look at the history of violence reduction programs in the United States and explore what current programming is prevalent in educational setting. There are an immense number of programs that use different lenses to get at the same goal of reducing school-based violence, far more than could be individually addressed in this paper; however, many have similar features/protocols. The main programs explored here will be ones developed from the original threat assessment research, zero tolerance policies, and school hardening techniques as these are the most prevalent programming across the nation. It is important to note that there is a gap in research that looks at the efficacy of these models and how demographic factors, including context, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, influence these programs (Cornell et al., 2018; Homer & Fisher, 2020; Price & Khubchandani, 2019).

### **The “Hardening” of Schools**

Price and Khubchandani (2019) describe the “hardening” of schools as one preventive response to school violence. The hardening of schools operates from the belief that students have access to weapons, including firearms, and the goal is to keep students from using weapons inside school. Oftentimes, this includes the employment of school resource officers (SROs), installment of metal detectors, video cameras, and bulletproof glass, law enforcement patrolling schools, and active shooter plans, to name a few. Much of these tactics are meant to be visible measures to increase parent and students sense of security; unfortunately, Price and Khubchandani’s literature review found most of these to be ineffective in reducing levels of violence in school. The authors reported SROs do not actually prevent students from bringing weapons, including guns, to school. Additionally, while metal detectors were found to reduce the rates of some weapons being brought into schools, they are not effective in dealing with new technology such as 3D printers being used to build guns. In fact, there is at least one documented case of a college student telling someone he would bring in this type of gun as it would not be picked up on by a metal detector. Price and Khubchandani summarized the use of these interventions by stating “...we need to be aware that none of these interventions have been shown to unequivocally reduce or eliminate school shootings” (p. 162).

A lack of efficacy is, unfortunately, the most neutral effect of hardening schools. Homer and Fisher (2019) explored how race, ethnicity, and gender affect rates of student arrests in schools. They found that schools with police in them have higher rates of arrests than schools without police and schools with higher rates of minority students, particularly black and Hispanic, are more likely to have arrests take place. While arrest rates in schools across the United States are low overall, black students are arrested at higher rates than their white or Hispanic counterparts. Rather than discipline being handled by teachers and school

administration, in situations where police or SRO's are involved, students' misbehaviors can then be seen as criminal and handled in that way.

Many of these "hardening" tactics are utilized in urban settings or situated in lower SES neighborhoods. The National Center for Education Statistics (Musu, 2019) found "Many safety and security measures tended to be more prevalent in schools where 76% or more of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than in schools where a lower percentage were eligible" (p. 112). Students in urban settings were more likely to have random metal detector checks, require school uniforms, picture IDs, and the presence of security cameras.

### **Zero Tolerance Policies**

Another well-known technique used by schools to deter violence are known as zero tolerance policies. Skiba and Peterson (1999) defined zero tolerance policies as "policies that punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor" (p. 373). They go on to explain zero tolerance was established in the 1980s by the United States government attempt to tackle the perceived drug problem by enforcing strict punishments, including harsh prisons sentences, for drug use. Throughout the early and mid 1980s, zero tolerance became a response not only to drug use but to a wide array of other issues including "environmental pollution, trespassing, skateboarding, racial intolerance, homelessness, sexual harassment, and boom boxes" (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 373). In the late 1980s, the American public began to voice outrage at the incongruent punishments being handed out and a push was made for the legal system to change; unfortunately, zero tolerance was just beginning to find its place in schools and the public outcry did not extend there.

Originally, zero tolerance policies implemented in schools focused on drug possession and gang involvement, but some school administrators looked to make it more wide reaching,

extending it to any student who created disruption in the school. Consequences of breaking the rules went anywhere from immediate suspension, complete expulsion, and/or the involvement of police. Zero tolerance policies received their federal stamp of approval in 1994 when President Bill Clinton signed the Gun Free Schools Act, making it a federal law. “This law mandates an expulsion of one calendar year for possession of a weapon and referral of students who violate the law to the criminal or juvenile justice system” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 373). It required that any school receiving federally supplied financial support implement this law and added a provision that the one-year expulsion could be modified (shortened or extended) by school administrators.

In order to fully comprehend zero tolerance policies, it is essential to understand the theoretical underpinnings behind them. Zero tolerance policies developed out of deterrence theory. Novak (2019) wrote, “Deterrence theory argues that individuals are deterred from engaging in delinquent and criminal behavior if consequences assigned for the behavior are appropriately swift, severe, and certain” (p. 1166). Novak explained that policies implemented using deterrence theory are meant to function not only at an individual level but on a societal level as well and it is believed that the use of these policies will reduce the number of undesirable behaviors exhibited as a whole because others will learn by seeing the effects on the offenders. Additionally, Novak found that students who were suspended from school by the age of 12 were more likely to engage with “deviant peers” and be involved with the justice system by 18 years of age. These findings are unsurprising; prior research has demonstrated the long-term detrimental effects of out-of-school suspensions. Noltemeyer et al. (2015) reported school suspensions were correlated with lower rates of school engagement and poor academic achievements, increased engagement in delinquent behaviors, feelings of alienation, substance

abuse, and dropping out of school. The authors' metanalysis of school suspensions and student outcomes supported the poor outcomes and noted that students in urban schools experience higher rates of suspension and, therefore, the aforementioned risks correlated with out of school suspensions.

Students most affected by school discipline often have other risk factors and/or minority identities such as engagement in special education, histories of trauma or neglect, identity as an ethnic and/or racial minorities, and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). These students are more likely to be suspended, expelled, or arrested yet research shows these students are not more likely to misbehave or create problems in schools as compared to their peers who do not have the aforementioned identities or experiences. Students who identify as black males are at the highest risk of facing out of school suspensions while LGBTQ youth are 50% more likely to be questioned by law enforcement than their heteronormative peers (Skiba et al., 2014).

### **Threat Assessments**

The federal model of school threat assessments is the original behavioral threat assessment used in schools from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the United States. In their article, Modzeleski and Randazzo (2018) describe the creation of school threat assessments. A task force was created in response to a number of school shootings that occurred in the U.S. during the 1990s; while the Department of Education attempted to address the violence of the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, they struggled to create an effective program and eventually brought the U.S. Secret Service into the discussions. Utilizing techniques that the secret service used to assess threats to the president of the United States, the Safe School Initiative (SSI) was developed.

Modzeleski and Randazzo (2018) described SSI as “a study of the thinking, planning, and other pre-attack behaviors engaged in by students and former students who carried out school shootings” (p. 110). The goal was to determine whether school officials and law enforcement could have known that an attack was being planned and, if that was possible, what types of prevention could be put into place to stop attacks from occurring in the future. SSI had three main findings that informed the protocols implemented in schools. First, SSI discovered most school attacks are premeditated and other students and/or friends are generally aware of the plans. Second, school shootings can be prevented by identifying students who are on what is called the “pathway to violence”, “...the person of concern was thinking about, planning for, or gaining lethal capacity to implement a plan to engage in a school shooting” (p. 110). The third finding of SSI is that there is no definable characteristics or demographics, otherwise known as a profile, of someone who may engage in a school shooting.

The authors (2018) addressed four major pieces of the threat assessment: first, one must identify the individual posing a threat; second, one should speak with multiple sources in order to gather relevant information about the individual; third, an evaluation of the person’s threat of violence should take place; and, finally, a plan should be created and implemented that is specific to the needs of the individual. Modzeleski and Randazzo emphasized that threat assessments are meant to create supportive interventions for the individual at risk of engaging in violent actions, rather than engaging in punitive punishments. Unfortunately, Price and Khubchandani (2019) noted that threat assessments have not been shown to decrease firearm violence in schools as there are high rates of false positives and false negatives. At this point, a slight deviation to comment on efficacy seems important. Cornell (2020) wrote of the difficulties determining overall efficacy of prevention models, noting the ethical issues that make it

impossible to validate the accuracy of violence prediction strategies for violence prevention. In order to do this, researchers would have to first make predictions of which individuals may be violent and then simply allow them to act to determine if the research hypothesis would be correct. Obviously, this is not allowable and if violence is predicted than an immediate intervention must follow. If the individual predicted of violence does not then engage in a violent act, how does one determine if this is because of an effective intervention or because the individual never would have actually engaged in the violent action? The conclusion is that there is a bias in the data: researchers are generally seeing when they fail and not when they succeed. This means that prevention models must be viewed through a more nuanced lens, not simply of success versus failure, but with the acknowledgement that some of the efficacy rates cannot be completely known. This does not, however, undermine many of the findings regarding threat assessments including the inability to accurately create a profile for a school shooter or the potential for warnings signs for future violence to be misinterpreted and lead to further stigmatization of specific student groups.

After the creation of the threat assessment as described above, schools and organizations have taken to utilizing it as part of their standard practices in violence reduction. While the implementation of threat assessments in order to increase school safety is admirable, few studies have been done to determine the efficacy of this assessment. In fact, Price and Khubchandani (2019) performed a literature review from 2000 to 2018 and found that "...regarding school firearm violence prevention failed to find any programs or practices with evidence indicating that they reduced such firearm violence" (p. 164). Cornell et al. (2018) called attention to this lack of empirical evidence and determined to look at how threat assessments have been implemented. The researchers focused on public schools in Virginia, the first state to require threat assessment

in all public schools, to see how threat assessments were being utilized and their effectiveness. Furthermore, the researchers investigated how student demographics, including age and race, affected the findings of threat assessments. Male students made up 75% of threat assessment referrals. Both Black students and students in special education were more likely to receive referrals for threat assessments. When looking at what threats were found to be credible and serious, Cornell et al. (2018) reported,

Notably, determinations that a threat was serious did not differ as a function [of] student race/ethnicity; however, threats made by students receiving special education services were more likely to be considered serious. Multiple studies have documented disproportionate use of disciplinary sanctions for minority students and students receiving special education services. Although threat assessment is not a disciplinary consequence, there is concern that implicit biases, which may play a role in disciplinary disproportionality could similarly influence determinations about the seriousness of a student's threats. (p. 219)

In a later study, Cornell et al. (2018) looked at how racial identity affected disciplinary consequences following a threat assessment. While it is well documented that minority students usually face more frequent and more severe discipline in school settings, this was not the case for students who received a threat assessment. The researchers found there was no significant difference based on race/ethnic background for students who received disciplinary action because of threat assessments; students receiving discipline after a threat assessment were most likely to be suspended or expelled based on the presence of weapons or the seriousness of the threat. Students in special education were, however, more likely to be suspended following a threat assessment as compared to their peers. The researchers hypothesized that one reason for

the racial parity in disciplinary actions may be because threat assessments offer a unique break in the usual zero tolerance approach and studies have demonstrated a decrease in rates of school suspension in schools that utilize threat assessments. There are certainly some benefits to threat assessments including a reduction in racially prejudiced discipline in school settings, a definite win and something that cannot be understated; however, the predictive nature of threat assessments combined with the lack of homogenous profile of violent school offenders creates a challenge to threat assessment efficacy and encourages a move towards preventative interventions over predictive.

### **Liberation Psychology**

Liberation psychology was mainly developed by Ignacio Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994). Martín-Baró was a Spanish, Jesuit priest living in El Salvador during the Salvadoran civil war. He believed that the theories and practice of psychology being used throughout Latin America was taken from Western psychology and failed to consider the specific contexts and needs of Latin American people, particularly the oppressed. In his essay, *Toward a Liberation Psychology*, Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994) stated, “The historical misery of Latin American psychology derives from three principal interrelated causes: its scientific misery, its lack of adequate epistemology, and its provincial dogmatism” (p. 20). Martín-Baró believed that the United States psychological theories and ideologies failed to consider the culture and values of Latin American people and, therefore, were not useful to them. He argued that a new psychology, Liberation Psychology, had four main tasks to create a psychology that was useful, both theoretically and practically, to the people it is meant to serve: “Problem identification”, “the recovering of historical memory”, “de-ideologizing everyday experience”, and “utilizing the people’s virtues” (p. 30-31). Finally, Martín-Baró identifies the goals of liberation psychology as

conscientization and the development of a new praxis in order to create the desired changes.

While Liberation Psychology was created to meet the needs of the Latinx community, the process it suggests of decolonizing psychology and creating culturally intuitive, person centered interventions creates a wide range of applicability, far beyond the Latinx community.

### **Problem Identification**

Liberation psychology believes the most effective way of creating solutions for communities, regardless of the problems, is by allowing people within the community to identify what they believe the challenges or issues that need to be addressed are. In the Western world, it is very common for outsiders to look at certain populations, neighborhoods, etc. and draw conclusions on what needs to be addressed and fixed, often without actually interacting with those who live in these places. Martín-Baró discussed psychologists' general practice of entering communities through those in power, noting that educational psychologists enter at the school, not the community, industrial psychologists are brought in by the CEOs and business owners, not the workers, and community psychologists enter with their own perceptions of how things should be done. He elegantly explained, "It is not easy to figure out how to place ourselves within the process alongside the dominated rather than alongside the dominator" (1974-1989/1994, p. 29). Liberation psychology believes that accurate problem identification is best done by members of the communities, as they likely have greater insight into the underlying problems people are encountering. Martín-Baró's theory parallels a psychological research methodology called participatory action research (PAR). Fernández (2020) writes that liberation psychology and PAR align because each emphasize engaging with the issues confronting communities by intentionally standing alongside the community members, rather than viewing it from outside or above those being affected. Both liberation psychology and PAR work to bring together

researchers and/or practitioners with community members and to allow the community to guide and lead the process in order to create change and transformation as determined by the community. Both PAR and liberation psychology focus on communities negatively affected by oppression, the development of solutions that are created by the communities, the use of multidisciplinary approaches, and the empowerment of community members to create the desired action and change.

### **Recovering of Historical Memory**

The second step in liberation psychology speaks to the people reconnecting with stolen and lost identities and cultural values. Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994) beautifully explained the importance of restoring historical memory by writing,

It has to do with recovering not only the sense of one's own identity and the pride of belonging to a people but also a reliance on a tradition and a culture, and above all, with rescuing those aspects of identity which served yesterday, and will serve today, for liberation. Thus, the recovery of a historical memory supposes the reconstruction of models of identification that, instead of chaining and caging the people, open up the horizon for them, toward their liberation and fulfillment. (p. 30)

Historical memory, the pieces of culture and belief systems that hold together both individuals and communities, are obliterated when people are colonized, displaced, and oppressed. By recovering historical memory, people are able to feel empowered in their identities and become experts in not only their own needs, but also their own ways of healing.

### **De-ideologizing Everyday Experience**

When Martín-Baró wrote about de-ideologization, he was referring to stepping outside of the negative narratives and stereotypes that are often supported and proliferated by the media and

those in power and that lead to the denigration of experiences and cultural systems that are outside of the norm. This functions not only in disenfranchising specific groups of people, but also denies the everyday, lived experience of those who are poor and oppressed. By de-ideologizing these narratives, people are able to assert their own experiences and begin to create solutions to the very real problems they are facing.

### **Utilizing the People's Virtues**

Martín-Baró believed that the Latin American people have resources and virtues that should be harnessed rather than turning to the Western virtues that psychology so often honors. Martín-Baró identified five core assumptions of Western psychology he believed were unhelpful in the development of a psychology that serves people outside of the western world. Positivism, individualism, hedonism, the homeostatic vision, and ahistoricism were each believed to contribute to what Martín-Baró identified as an “inadequate epistemology” (1974-1989/1994, p. 21). By homeostatic vision he meant the avoidance of change and loss of stability while ahistoricism is defined as the belief that human nature is universal so all human needs can be evaluated and understood in the same way. The emphasis on these stems, Martín-Baró argued, from a focus on Western culture and the failure to meet the needs of those who are outside of this culture.

By looking for answers outside of the culture at hand, the knowledge, virtues, and potential of the people are ignored; however, psychologists can begin to assist communities in this fourth step. To honor and empower the people, psychologists should look to the spirit of the people they are working with and use their specific, unique strengths rather than simply generalizing from populations that hold little to no resemblance to the group in question. This

task holds the foundational belief that people and communities are experts on their own needs and, if allowed, can create their own solutions and healing processes.

### **Conscientization and a New Praxis**

Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994) explained that these four processes lead to one of the goals of liberation psychology: conscientization. Tate et al. (2013) describe conscientization as the realization of the oppression that has been experienced and the new sense of empowerment to create change that has developed as a result of the four tasks listed above. Conscientization works at both individual and community levels, allowing for the transformation of both singular person and the collective society. As conscientization is gained, a new praxis is developed. Tate et al. (2013) explain “In essence, praxis is the confluence of theory and action” (p. 377). Reflection has taken place and awareness has been raised, action must begin. Liberation psychology argues that the finding of truth is but one piece of the puzzle, with the other being taking the truths and knowledge that has been discovered and creating active change that honors these discoveries.

### **Liberation Psychology Outside of Latin America**

Though liberation psychology was founded in Latin America, its tenets and ideas have been far reaching, with psychologists and researchers across the globe utilizing it. Mayengo et al. (2018) are researchers in Uganda who were interested in how schoolchildren conceptualized conflict and peace. The writers stated,

Our focus is to integrate research, university teaching, and community-level praxis that takes into account, rather than excludes, the realities of sociological forces on the well-being of Ugandans. The proclivity to omit, downplay, or distort the impacts of these

forces on psychological well-being has been characteristic of traditional, Western psychology. (p. 355)

After years of colonization and intense violence, the researchers wanted to find ways for communities to begin the process of peacebuilding; they decided to focus on school-aged children because of the ability to shape student's early learning as well as the belief that these children will eventually become the leaders of their nation. Their findings demonstrated the importance of integrating the very factors referenced above. They were able to develop a deeper understanding of how the children in different regions (and, therefore, different exposure to/participation in war and violence) varied. By doing this, the researchers were able to make plans with school and community officials to create specific peace-building curriculum that catered to the differing needs of each community.

### **Liberation in Action**

Martín-Baró's (1974-1989/1994) writings helped to create a frame for psychologists to find new, inclusive ways to engage communities in creating solutions to the challenges they experience; however, much of his writing is theoretical and abstract, making it difficult, particularly for the general public not well versed in psychological teachings and writing, to find real, tangible ways to apply the tenets. One of the best ways to help bridge the gap from the abstract to the concrete is to look at research that has utilized similar principles to Martín-Baró's and which he himself supported, as mentioned above.

PAR is a unique form of research in that it is completely reliant on members of the community to define, create, and implement the research. The researchers act more as fellow collaborators and assistants rather than as directors. In their article *Participatory Action Research*, Baum et al. (2006) describe PAR with the following:

At its heart is collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they find themselves. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context, and embedded in social relationships. The process of PAR should be empowering and lead to people have increased control over their lives. (p. 854)

The authors explain that empowerment is the key component of PAR, as the research is considered a failure if the participants do not feel more powerful because of the project.

PAR's roots in liberation psychology can easily be seen in the three main principles McIntyre (2000) described as the guide for PAR: "...1) the collective investigation of a problem, 2) the reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem, and 3) the desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem." (p. 128) These three ideals parallel Martín-Baró's work closely; the first principle aligns perfectly with Martín-Baró's problem identification, the second encompasses the second and third principles, recovering historical memory and de-ideologizing everyday experience, and the third links with Martín-Baró's stage of utilizing the people's virtue. Both PAR and liberation psychology aim to focus on the specific needs of a community, as defined by the community, actively involve community members in the process of understanding and confronting these needs, and, in so doing, empowering the community to take active ownership of their needs, creating a sense of power that likely had been taken away by years of colonization, systemic racism, and derogatory narratives. Rather than simply developing knowledge for the sake of knowledge, empowerment and action are the end goals of PAR and liberation psychology (Fernández, 2020).

### **Participatory Action Research Example**

McIntyre (2000) conducted a PAR project that will be used to aid in elucidating Martín-Baró's theoretical framework. McIntyre, a professor of graduate level education studies, would often present research related to the experiences of urban students and school-based violence reduction programs in her classes. She noticed that many of her students who identify as white, middle to upper SES students would often take the findings of the research and fail "...to take into account the interconnections and relationships that exist between the individual and her or his embeddedness in social contexts" (p. 125). Her graduate students would often see challenges with violence in urban settings as issues to be addressed on an individual basis, rather than seeing these issues as features of much larger, systemic, ecological factors. McIntyre determined to see how students in urban settings view violence and to collaborate with faculty and staff on the development of this project.

Rather than simply going into urban areas and sending questionnaires to the community, McIntyre engaged with a principal and a teacher of a local elementary and middle school. These leaders granted McIntyre the opportunity to ask the students if they would like to be engaged in the research. Importantly, McIntyre did not go forward saying she is specifically looking at students and violence. Instead, she stated that she wanted to develop a project to understand "...how students make meaning of their community, and how living in an urban area and attending an inner-city public school inform and influence their life" (p. 127). This goal is broad enough to allow for all possibilities to come forward; it has not been narrowed down by McIntyre's own expectations or conceptions, but has been left open for the community, in this case the students and teachers, to develop their own questions and put forward their own perspectives.

McIntyre's project had four main objectives, each corresponding with the ideals of liberation psychology. First, the researchers gather information about the community. They developed relationships with stakeholders and community leaders and experts, including businesses, local residents, faculty and staff of the school, church personnel, and a group of sixth grade students. While McIntyre entered at the school level, she expanded her reach into the community, acknowledging that these people are the core of the given community and must all be integral members of the research as they each shape that given population. The researchers also became active members of the community, spending time in the classrooms and field trips in order to truly gain a knowledge and understanding of the participants.

Second, McIntyre attempted to find creative and interactive ways to engage the students so as to better understand how they make meaning of their community and lives. The researchers engaged in "community resource inventories" to develop an idea of what community meant to the students. This speaks to their third objective. After developing relationships and insights into the community, the researchers, students, and major stakeholders mentioned above developed a photography project. They provided the students with cameras and photography lessons as another way of allowing the students to tell their story in their own way. These second and third objectives were essential. Through these steps, the researchers developed a larger scope of the experiences of these students. For example, rather than just seeing violence through a traditional lens of threat of injury, violence came to mean much more, particularly around "environmental violence" such as the presence of drugs, graffiti, and garbage (p.132). McIntyre stated,

Their descriptions of trash, pollution, and abandoned houses and their feelings of disappointment, frustration, and resignation over the inability to clean up their neighborhood challenge us – and them – to broaden our conceptualization of violence to

include violations of the environment, which, as the participants suggest, have powerful implications in their community. Rethinking violence to include environmental violence, which directly and indirectly violates the self and collective, challenges educators and researchers to reexamine the social, economic, and political conditions that sustain the multiple of forms of violence that exist in many low-income urban communities. (p. 132)

Without having involved the community and letting them tell their own narratives, this very important piece regarding environmental violence may have been missed, despite it being an extremely relevant factor of how the community makes sense of violence.

The final objective was for the researchers, students, and community stakeholders to develop an intervention or program that would increase the well-being of the community. The participants decided to create a clean-up project around the school and community that is supported by local businesses, residents, and government officials. Additionally, the participants assisted in the creation of a career exploration program to help in creating future academic and career goals. Finally, the students shared their photography skills by teaching others in the community.

McIntyre's PAR project demonstrates how Martín-Baró's principals can be applied to students facing violence. It also underlined the importance of viewing issues of violence within the contexts in which students live, rather than as the problem of an individual student. This study can act as a guide for how schools and communities may develop their own violence reduction programs that take into consideration their own unique needs.

### **Application**

The goal of this paper is to create a realistic, functional program that school systems can readily modify to fit the unique needs of their specific population. One of the challenges of creating any model using liberation psychology is that there will not be a one size fits all program; that would undermine the fundamental beliefs that make liberation psychology what it is. While this is what potentially makes a liberation psychology more challenging to use, it is also what I believe will increase the efficacy rates of programs, particularly in minority, urban settings. With that in mind, the model suggested here will ideally provide a frame for school personnel, whether that be principals, psychologists/therapists, or school boards, creating a starting point for how to develop an effective program for their community's specific needs. It should be seen as a flexible, dynamic plan rather than an intractable set of requirements. The plan will be detailed below, with examples provided for each phase. While each phase builds on the other, they do not end when the next begins. It is likely that one will need to move back and forth among the phases as new information develops; this should be seen as a positive and important process as it allows for space to grow and for new information be effectively utilized.

Before diving in fully, it is important to note that truly effective violence prevention programs will not solely look at the needs of the school but will broaden its gaze to encompass the needs of the community as a whole. Schools are often microcosms of the communities in which they reside, and the violence perpetrated in school can often be viewed as a commentary on the functioning of society. This may initially make this type of intervention seem more challenging and, frankly, it may be. But it is also what is likely to create lasting healing and change the community wishes to see.

**Phase One: Enter the Community and Identify the Problem.**

The first step in this process is to understand how one enters the community (are they being asked to join, are they a member of the community, have they noticed a problem they believe should be addressed) and determine their role. Fernández (2020) writes that the role of researcher (or psychologist, outsider, etc.) is as "...a facilitator and ally to support the efforts and initiatives that communities want to lead" (p. 99). Kidd and Kral (2005) write that researchers must allow for flexibility in their ideas on goals, methods, and interventions and walk the line "between bringing rather than imposing knowledge" (p. 189). Once one has entered the community, one must determine whether the community is interested in the initiation of a project, in this case aimed at reducing violence in the school setting.

A key component of problem identification is in *how* one goes about this process. Again, this cannot be done by outsiders; rather, it must incorporate the population being affected by the problem. How does the student body view violence? Does this differ between the grades/classes or racial background or socioeconomic status? What are parents', caregivers', and faculty/staffs' understanding of violence within the school? What about the community as a whole? How does the community make sense of the violence the school and the community at large experience? This may seem excessive, at first glance, to include so many, but this is an essential component. Schools are an extension of their communities; they do not operate in isolation. Often, what is occurring within a community is being brought into the school as well. By including the community at large, one creates a greater, more intimate knowledge of the problem and its complexities, including what it looks like outside of the school and how that is directly affecting students. Additionally, it can increase community buy in for creating solutions for the problem, a crucial factor to create lasting and sustainable change.

Problem identification should be done using a number of different tools in order to increase response levels. Surveys, town halls, focus groups, and open discussions are all useful ways of gathering information and facilitating discussions. Martín-Baro (1974-1989/1994) encouraged the use of public opinion polls, which will be described in greater detail later. Additionally, contacting key community experts and stakeholders, people who are well established and well known by the community can increase buy in and create further insight and understanding to the problem. This could include members of schoolboard, parents, teachers, and even police officers.

Once the problem(s) are identified, this beginning phase is about creating a deeper understanding of all aspects of the problem. How does the problem present? Is it in the classroom, hallways, gyms? How do faculty and staff become aware of the problem? Is it only after a violent act has occurred or are students talking about building tensions or are there other indicators prior to the violence happening? What preventative measures are currently in place; are there any preventative measures? What happens once a true threat has been identified or violent act has taken place? What are parents' or caregivers' understandings of violence prevention? What roles do they play in the goals for violence reduction? While these are examples of directions in which the conversation may unfold, it is likely that community members may have insights or perceptions that are surprising; researchers should not only be prepared for this but should welcome this as it is indicative of the community taking ownership of the problem.

### **Phase Two: Build an Understanding of the Problem**

Once the community has come together to create a list of the problems they believe are linked to violence within their schools, the attention should shift to create an understanding of

why these problems exist. Ideally, this is an ongoing process and may require many talks and collaborations to come to any sort of agreement, particularly since there are so many false narratives perpetuated about urban communities of color. Unfortunately, the pervasive nature of these narratives may even be held by the people within the communities; the fallacies and stereotypes surrounding minority communities are not only heard by white communities but are seen throughout the very populations that are being targeted.

Bryant (2011) looked at how internalized racism was associated with the Black youths' tendency for violence, something he describes as an "epidemic" (p. 690). His study found a direct correlation between the engagement in aggressive behaviors, beliefs about violence and guns, and internalized racism. This finding suggests that the fallacies and stereotypes are being seen and heard by the communities and are directly impacting the targeted groups' behaviors and attitudes. Research on internalized racism in teachers, psychologists, and other potential stakeholders in urban school settings is, unfortunately, scarce. Despite the lack of research, it seems fair to hypothesize that biases, including beliefs in racist stereotypes, are likely held by these groups. It can be seen in the increased rates and intensity of discipline minority students receive as well as in the misdiagnosis of non-white youth (Skiba et al., 2014).

In a meta-analysis, Liang et al. (2016) reported higher rates of diagnosing African American youth with conduct disorders, psychosis, and disruptive behaviors whereas their white counterparts received diagnoses such as substance use disorders, mood disorders, or adjustment disorders. This is the same for Hispanic youth and Asian American/Pacific Islander youth. The authors write that while there is no current conclusive reason for the racial disparities in diagnosis, there are some theories that treatment setting and criteria used for diagnosis may contribute to such diagnostic differences. Additionally, the authors believe a lack of cultural

awareness among clinicians as well as biased or insufficiently normed assessment measures as a reason for biased diagnosing. The authors conclude negative implications for misdiagnosing is immense as it means these youth are not receiving appropriate treatment. Disruptive disorders and conduct disorders are often associated with issues of self-control, conflict with societal norms and expectations, aggression, defiance, poorly controlled emotions, irritability, and engagement in behaviors that violate the rights of others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It becomes easy to see the potential negative implications of diagnosing some children, in this case racial minorities, with diagnoses associated with these types of descriptions over seemingly more benign diagnoses such as adjustment disorder.

One may ask, “Why is all this relevant? What does it have to do with a violence prevention in urban schools?” It is simple: narratives matter. Parham-Payne (2014) explored how the media’s portrayal of crime increases stereotypes and biases, with Black perpetrators more widely reported on than crimes with white assailants. The author argues this makes it difficult to view Black people as victims and it creates a belief that violence in urban settings is the cultural norm. The conclusion, she states, is “...the deaths of children or minors in urban areas are ultimately viewed as routine. Thus, for those who reside outside of such areas, the issue is perceived as something from which they are separated, and therefore, not something for which they should be concerned” (p. 757). These perceptions infiltrate the mind and becomes the accepted view. Internalized racism leads to the belief that one’s own self is worth less and results in self-denigration and alienation. It is often connected with feelings of shame related to one’s race and the belief that another race, generally White, is superior (Bryant, 2011). When one is constantly bombarded by a specific set of beliefs and narratives, it becomes difficult to continue to question the existing storylines and push for change. The combination of misdiagnosis,

negative narratives perpetrated by the media, and increased experiences of disciplinary actions demonstrate the importance of all, teachers, mental health professional, school leaders, community stakeholders, and students becoming aware of their own biases and confront any internalized racism that exists.

This is an excellent place where academics, including psychologists, have the ability to step in and provide the aforementioned facts both to the community, should it be needed, and to those outside of the community, to validate the importance of this process. Once the focus has moved away from self (or victim) blame, communities can begin to explore the history of problems they came up with in phase one. In their article *Liberation Psychology as the Path Toward Healing Cultural Soul Wounds*, Duran et al. (2008) discussed using a “tribal genogram” (p. 290). The authors explain this process allows one to trace back into clients’ sociohistorical context to find where the problem originated. While they are speaking of tribal genograms in a different context, therapy in a tribal setting, this method could be utilized on a broader scale. For example, mapping out the context of the school within the community, including how the community has looked throughout generations, what problems it has faced, and what solutions it has utilized. The goal of this phase is to create a holistic understanding of the problems the community believes has led to violence in their schools and this very likely requires looking outside of the school and into the community, both past and present.

Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994) argued for the use of public opinion polls as a way to develop greater understandings of the problem as well as to de-ideologize the people’s experiences. He believed they are not widely utilized because psychology fails to see the benefits, choosing to focus on individuality and the present, rather than seeing the value in the collective and an acknowledgement of the historical past. He wrote, “...systematic opinion

polling can become an outstanding instrument for dismantling the alienating discourse of the dominant social sectors and letting grassroots organizations strike up a constructive dialogue with the community consciousness, to search for a new collective identity” (p. 190). He expanded on this process by explaining that public opinion polls must include four conditions in order to be effective. First, it must be systematic rather than quick and random. The polls should occur over time in order to collect the most deeply held beliefs and attitudes rather than assuming a single measurement at one point in time will provide the truth. Second, Martín-Baró argues that public polls must be representative of the whole population or, if it cannot be, to be very specific of which pieces of the population it applies to so as not assume one sector’s opinions are held by others. Third, public opinion polls should emphasize wholeness. “Wholeness means that the poll not only exposes attitudinal configurations, showing how opinions relate to one another rather than presenting themselves as isolated entities, but also exposes the social soil in which these attitudes and opinions may possibly be rooted” (p. 192). Finally, Martín-Baró stated that these polls must be dialectic, or available to the population. He explains that this will allow the population to compare and contrast what their lived realities are with what the primary narratives are saying, in this case, the etiology, causes, and prevalence of violence in the urban school setting.

### **Phase Three: Drawing on Strengths and Moving Towards Action**

Shapiro (2020) writes that the primary goals of any project using PAR as a theoretical basis should be “...to include the voices of those most disparaged and marginalized, toward recognizing, resisting, and refusing oppressive social ideologies while generating new knowledge contributing to greater equity” (p. 249). Simply by engaging in the first two phases, the process of change has already begun. Community members have begun to develop an

understanding of violence in their schools and communities and have started to recognize the narratives they tell themselves versus the narratives told by outsiders; they have begun the important step of de-ideologizing their experiences. Martín-Baró (1974-1989/1994) writes that this de-ideologization allows people to begin to confront their beliefs and attitudes as well as the events, in this case the school violence, that is happening and determine if they would like to “...assume a new attitude, either continuing as they were or breaking off” (p. 192).

An understanding of the problem, its etiology, and the changes the community wishes to be seen is now well understood by all. This next step once again requires the community to look back into its past but, this time, it is to identify the healing and problem-solving techniques those before them have utilized. This step directly pulls for Martín-Baró’s final step: utilizing the people’s virtue. Liberation psychology believes that the people have the answers to solve the problems they are confronted with but may have lost touch with this due to historical trauma, systemic racism, and social injustices. Phase three looks to empower the community to take hold of their own strengths and find solutions that are meaningful to those affected by the problem. These steps directly align with the constructs outlined by Martín-Baró as they are the embodiment of conscientization and praxis, or the fusion of the knowledge gained and action taking place.

There are a variety of qualitative methodologies that can be used to assist in this phase. Mayengo et al. (2018) used a focus group methodology for their research while Shapiro (2020) spoke of using more creative methods. She wrote, “Culturally centered creative arts, arts-based activism, artivism, and art-based PAR can generate new knowledge for transformative responding even to conditions of psychopolitical oppression, material scarcity, and suffering” (p. 248). She went on to discuss the use of storytelling, photovoice, graphic novels, telenovelas, hip-

hop, photography, graffiti, dance, embroidery, public murals, and videos as some of tools used for “shared learning and collaborative affirmation and discovery” (p. 250).

Mueller et al’s (2021) study looked at this process of using qualitative measures to gain an understanding of coping and healing practices at a community level for people who experience poverty and trauma in an urban setting. Included in these were “Seeking and practicing positive social connection” where community members found shared interests and positive interactions with community members. Participants identified block parties and barbeques as ways to facilitate positive interactions in the community; perhaps schools could do something similar, creating community-based events that offer places of safety and positive interactions for students, families, and the community at large. Additionally, participants identified “Drawing on and envisioning community-based resources” as an important component, stating local programs, particularly programs run by community members, were mutually beneficial as the community knew the owners and the owners understood the community needs. Participants also reported spaces where there were positive activities for youth were essential, something schools are inherently able to provide.

Though Mueller et al. (2021) did not ask *why* these particular strategies were listed, it is likely they draw on value and belief systems of the people: communal, family oriented, and so on. If the community identifies creative expression as important ways of healing, this too could be incorporated and interventions surrounding the arts could be created. In short, the interventions created should speak to that which the community values and believes will be effective in creating change.

#### **Phase Four: Evaluate and Make Changes**

As the community continues to hear the power of its own collective voice, takes ownership of its narrative, and engages in the agreed upon actions (activism, art-based work, etc.), the researchers can turn to measuring the effects, and determining what is working and what issues still need to be addressed, of course, all with through the guidance of the community. Martín-Baró's (1974-1989/1994) use of public opinion polling would be effective in gathering quantitative data to determine the efficacy of the interventions in place and measuring the shifts of the peoples' experiences, attitudes, and levels of empowerment. Using regularly scheduled evaluations, school administrators and psychologists should periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative, not only by using quantitative measures, but by having regular meetings with the community members, students, and teachers. The data gathered from these evaluations should be quickly applied to the plan, making any alterations as needed, but continuing to stay the course, recognizing that change and healing takes time. Encouraging consistent community involvement and buy-in should be done by keeping members informed on the progress of the work.

The data collected during each of the steps should be retained and given to the community members as well as viewed as a way to apply for additional funding. This is an essential component as it provides the opportunity to determine the efficacy of the interventions which can allow for changes to be made to increase effectiveness, apply for grants/funding, and ensure that the work being placed into such a project is useful. Furthermore, being able to provide evidence for changes that may come from this intervention can help to increase community buy in.

It is important to remember that this type of intervention is not simply one and done, but, rather a "self-reflective spiral composed of multiple sequences of reflecting, planning, acting,

and observing” (Kidd & Kral, 2005). The changes being attempted are complex, nuanced, and dive deep into the depth of the community. For that reason, change may appear slow and frustrating, but it is important to remember that the work being done extends past the walls of school. It may be helpful to think of this as gardening: rather than simply chopping off the heads of weeds, the community is digging deep into the soil to find the roots, understand how the roots came to be there, and determine the best way to get rid of the weeds for good. There will be missteps and mistakes, but the change will be profound once it occurs.

### **Conclusion**

The United States is facing an epidemic of violence that has entered into our schools and is directly affecting our youth. The adverse effects of exposure to violence during childhood is well documented, with children experiencing increased rates of physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, difficulties in school, and engagement in aggressive behaviors (Moffitt & Klause-Grawe, 2012). While the problem is well documented and there have been targeted campaigns to attempt to prevent and reduce violence in schools, these programs have shown little efficacy. Furthermore, the programs that have been developed have focused on the needs of the suburban, white youth rather than the urban school settings which are often comprised of racial minorities.

As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, the violence prevention programs currently in existence, particularly the strategies involving zero tolerance policies and the hardening of schools, often fail to prevent violence from occurring and, what is perhaps more troubling, lead to an increase in punitive punishments against minority students that can result in ostracization, school failure, and even incarceration (Cornell et al., 2018; Homer & Fisher, 2020; Price & Khubchandani, 2019). New ways of preventing violence that do not penalize children for

their racial or ethnic identities, socioeconomic status, or school location must be considered.

Liberation psychology, in combination with participatory action research, offer the opportunity for violence prevention to be developed for and by the community members in a unique way that has not previously been utilized.

Liberation psychology and PAR developed in recognition of the ways past and present psychological theories, methodologies, and practices have failed to consider the unique needs of oppressed communities (Fernández, 2020; Martín-Baró, 1974-1989/1994; Shapiro, 2020).

Utilizing the strengths of the people most impacted by violence and honoring the belief that people have the ability to create their own healing, the above method offers a unique approach for any interested person (be it educators, parents, researchers, etc.) to allow the community to create the changes it deems most relevant. This method encourages the community to become invested in their own growth, to reclaim the narratives that have been stolen from them, to develop ownership over the change they wish to see, and to create interventions that honor their ancestral histories, cultural beliefs, and communal values. The steps outlined provide a general enough outline to be a guide for those who are just embarking on the journey of incorporating liberation psychology and PAR into their work, while allowing for the significant amount of flexibility and fluidity that these techniques require. By honoring the strength of spirit all people have and the willingness to take risks to create change that is deep and lasting, hope remains that this epidemic of violence our children experience can be faced and overcome.

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## Appendix A

## Suggested Checklist for Utilizing Liberation Psychology and Participatory Action Research to Address School Violence

- Identify the perceived problem
- Enter the community and develop an awareness of your role in the process
  - Ask yourself:
    - What is your role in this community? Are you a member or an outsider?  
Be honest with yourself and others who are apart of the proposed project
- Identify who should be included in the project
  - Who is affected by the perceived problem?
  - Focus on those who are often seen as the least powerful – the youth, parents, teachers, etc.
- Contact the stakeholders and community leaders
  - They will have insight into the community and the problem; if you are an outsider, they may be able to facilitate you meeting the community

**At this point, the community has the opportunity to choose if they wish to engage in the identified problem or the refuse. If they refuse, it is likely the problem you perceived is not the most relevant issue facing the community and other issues must be addressed first. Assuming the community agrees, continue to the next step.**

- Develop an understanding of the problem
  - Utilize focus groups, town halls, public opinion polls, or any other methods to gather information from as many community members as possible
  - Remember to be intentional in uplifting the voices of those who are most disenfranchised
  - Focus on the history of the problem and what the community beliefs surrounding the problem are
- Draw on the Community's Strengths
  - Help the community identify the ways it believes change and healing occurs
    - This can be art, music, gatherings, religious or faith-based services, or activism
- Take Action
  - Implement the identified plans for healing and change
  - Continue to utilize focus groups, polls, and so on to check in with the community and provide the community the opportunity to have their voices heard not only by you but by themselves
- Evaluate
  - Analyze the data coming in from the groups and polls to determine perceptions of change, empowerment, and engagement in the project
- Bring the community back together, re-evaluate, and begin again with the process, making any changes suggested by the community