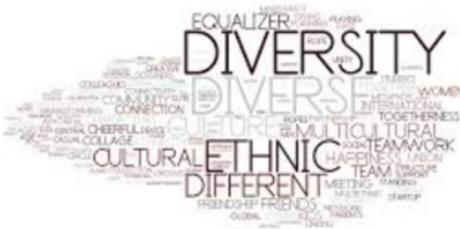


Diversity

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So if I'm being honest, I never wanted to teach diversity. I am a White male who grew up on a farm in Rupert, Idaho. I am a marriage and family therapist (MFT) by trade, and so when I think of topics that most resonate with me, they are about couple and family relationships. Yet when I arrived here at Utah State University 10 years ago, that's where I found myself: teaching undergraduates about diversity. My sense of inadequacy was through the roof.

I am not sure he remembers it or not, but each year for the first few years, I went to my department head and asked to teach a different class. I'd like to believe I first used my keen wit and charm to make my request. Then I shifted and used my well-refined powers of persuasion. Each time I was met basically with, "No. Teach the class." So I may have even tried throwing an academic tantrum. Still no. I was stuck.

So once I stopped trying to get out of teaching the class, I did the next best thing: I tried to make it my own. Since that time, I have come to really enjoy teaching about diversity. Of course, I still suffer a bit from imposter syndrome and wonder what my students might be missing from learning about diversity from a White male. Yet I have come to recognize that I definitely have some things that I can contribute to the conversation about diversity.

So what have I learned? Well, quite a bit, actually. Now, before I mention a few of the lessons that have been most useful for me, please understand that this blog entry is not about me trying to represent how I have become "woke" and now am an enlightened person in terms of

diversity. Learning about diversity is not a journey where you one day "arrive" and are officially declared culturally competent. I much prefer the idea of cultural humility, which refers more to a lifetime pursuit of a way of being where we open up space for the experiences of others. My hope is that, with this blog post, I can do a small part of helping move the conversation forward.

Lesson 1: Recognize the humanity of others.

Martin Buber talked about two ways of relating: I-It and I-Thou. When we see others as "it," we see them as objects, not as humans whose experiences and needs are every bit as important as our own. Even when we disagree with one another, the best results come when we can acknowledge the humanity of one another and treat them accordingly. If we are constantly seeking to justify ourselves and villainize the "other," nothing will ever change.

Lesson 2: Power and privilege exist.

I know this idea can be a bit controversial for some. However, I firmly believe that members of majority groups can be granted unearned advantages. I have seen it in my own life. I'm not saying that all advantages are unearned, just that some are given a head start because of various social identities (race, SES, gender, etc.) that they possess. I often have students say that they feel guilty. I would rather have them be aware and then do something about it. I love a quote by USU professor Melanie Domenech Rodriguez: "You are where you are, grow from there."

I also think the following quote by Bryan Stevenson is relevant: "The true measure of our commitment...cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned." (In *Just Mercy*, p. 18).

Lesson 3: Open space for the stories and experiences of others.

I don't even come close to knowing how to solve the many challenges that our country is facing related to diversity. However, I have witnessed firsthand the incredible value of people meeting and sharing one another's stories (for an example, check out the work of Narrative 4). When we do that, I think our humanity truly comes through. Similarly, we need to spend time with one another and learn from one another. I love the following quote from Gregory Boyle:

"We don't go to the margins to 'make a difference.' We go to the margins so that the folks at the margins make US different. We don't walk with the poor and disparaged to rescue them. But--go figure--if we locate ourselves WITH them, we all find rescue." (In the foreword for *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything: Finding Abundant Communities in Unexpected Places*)

Of course, there are many other lessons. However, these are three of the lessons that have meant the most for me. I completely recognize that other people's experiences may highlight different lessons that are more salient to them. My main hope is that we can continue moving forward and work towards real change as individuals and a society.