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Journal Entry 5
EDLP 320

Part 1: Update me on your journal goals. How are things going for you? What insights (if any) have you gained over the last couple of weeks?

After my last journal reflection, I was determined to make substantial (or at least noticeable) progress this week. During our class session, I was able to share my Case Study and participate in the Group Consultancy Protocol. During the process, I tried to make my clarifying and probing questions as clear and unbiased as possible, and focused on the quality of my questioning during Jerry's case study. Group members gave me informal feedback that my questions were insightful and focused, both through body language and casual comments. My group is all aware of each other's goals in our collaborative class, and to get positive feedback from them felt reaffirming. The week prior, I facilitated the Group Consultancy Protocol in our whole group session, which felt like a big risk for me. I do believe that the confidence and skills I have gained through my reflections on this goal allowed me to lead the questioning sections more effectively and thoughtfully.

As the class is now in the second half of the term, I find myself starting to brainstorm about the applications of these skills in my career over the next few years. With all of my focus and reflection around these goals, I find myself a bit desperate to make this skill transferable to other groups in my life. The challenge I am ruminating on is this- will this skill be easily transferable if other groups I participate in are not necessarily collaborative? Will I continue to have to reflect on this skill as much as I am doing now? Will the mastery of this skill become apparent at some point, or will I just reach a certain level of comfort? All of these questions, while slightly unnerving, are worth for me to think about before we reach the end of the class. It will be important to develop

strategies to not lose the skills that I have gained through this collaborative work, and be able to transfer them into my next stage!

Part 2: What are your reactions after completing the implicit bias assessments? How might issues of bias impact collaborative teaming? Do you have personal experiences with this? What conditions need to be present for collaborative teams to engage in conversations that involve differences of opinion, discussions about different personal values, and ideas about privilege, equity and social justice?

I was excited to learn and discuss the topic of implicit bias, differing personal values and privilege in class. As a heterosexual, white female, I experience much less bias than others, and recognize my place of privilege in current society. I will share a more personal story below, and then build to my understandings of bias in collaborative teams.

I had a really intriguing conversation with a old high school friend and her boyfriend, who came up to Burlington a few weeks ago. This story takes a bit of setup, so bear with the details for a bit! The town that I grew up in was relatively conservative and homogenous, and I do think that I have become more aware of privilege and other perspectives from living in places other than small-town Rhode Island. The conversation that my husband Silas and I had with this other couple was centered around privilege, especially for men and women in the workplace. Another important point before I get to the meat of the story- the boyfriend, who I will call H, a white male, was diagnosed with cancer when he was 16, then beat the long battle with leukemia, and then unfortunately lost his dad to cancer this summer. The last 10 years have been very difficult for his family, for he is an only child and his dad suffered from cancer for multiple years. Another note- his mother is an incredibly successful business woman, who was known as “a bull”, fierce and demanding, and rose quickly in the 80’s and 90’s to become where she is today.

H was determined to not be labeled as privileged. He insisted (rightly so) that his life has been incredibly difficult with cancer and losing his dad, and his existence has been marred with challenges that most do not face in their teenage years and early 20’s. Silas and I, upon later

reflection, came to the conclusion that his perception of privilege didn't line up with the definition we were aware of, or the definition that we are using in this class. H did not understand why others would belittle his hardships by saying that because he was white, he automatically had it easier. Even through our attempts to moderate this discussion, he felt personally impacted and took insult by someone labelling him as privileged. I had not seen this pushback personally before, and it was fascinating (in an academic way) to witness. H was also quick to push back on bias against women in the workplace, reiterating how his mom's immense effort and sacrifice had led to her success, and that others who perpetuated an idea of women struggling against power were negating his mom's experience. This interaction sparked conversations between Silas and I about the importance of openness and empathy when discussing these difficult topics, for Silas also lost his mom at 16 years old, but also how we had both underestimated how much others projected their personal experiences on labels like "privilege", "bias" or a political party. We found ourselves debating whether we took our own policy ideals too philosophically, and not personally enough, or if removing our own personal experiences from these terms allowed us to approach the concepts in a more academic fashion. After reflecting on this story and on our readings, the following statement resonated with me- "It's also important to remember because people often look at privilege *individually* rather than *systemically*. While individual experiences are important, we have to try to understand privilege in terms of systems and social patterns. We're looking at the rule, not the exception to the rule." (Ferguson, 2014). Our friend H had been examining these phenomena so personally, and Silas and I found ourselves frustrated with that. It felt like H was missing the "point" of our conversation about privilege- that you can't necessarily control where or who you are born to (skin color, gender, socioeconomic status, zip code), but acknowledging that those aspects of your life and how they have impacted your potential outcomes, is super important. If anything, this

conversation reiterated the importance of empathetic discussion, and also the discouraging fact that H did not come away with the same understanding of how privilege had influenced his life.

Silas and I came to a similar conclusion after listening to an NPR story over the weekend. The story was basically about divisions between groups of people in the US, specifically in the political world we live in now, and how bias can influence how we humanize different groups. Issues of bias impact our interactions with others in the world. For me, I can easily see how you view bias, or have had bias work against you, can change how you interact with others, especially in a collaborative group. When I worked at a school in Chelsea, MA, I witnessed the implicit biases my friends had for the community I was working in. Chelsea was a poor, underserved, immigrant community, and my friends (who had never been to Chelsea) had inherent reactions or statements that they would regurgitate about areas like Chelsea, or people that lived in Chelsea. It was eye-opening as an educator to see my smart, caring, compassionate friends unintentionally continue the cycle of biases against the students I was spending the majority of my time with.

It is clear to me that the structures that we have discussed in class, specifically norms, can be utilized to minimize the effects of implicit bias. In the Duhigg article, there were numerous examples of how groups worked more productively with norms in place. However, the real takeaway for me was that the norm-established 'safety net', or comfort in that structure, allowed the team to function more effectively. For example, "...for Project Aristotle, research on psychological safety pointed to particular norms that are vital to success. There were other behaviors that seemed important as well — like making sure teams had clear goals and creating a culture of dependability. But Google's data indicated that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical to making a team work." (Duhigg, 2016). Through the research we have done in class, this idea did not necessarily surprise me. When group members approach a team with clear goals, a strong sense of

trust, an interest in relationship building, and a desire to minimize implicit bias, the team will be more productive and inclusive for all.

Works Cited

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