Artifac D2: Best Written Work (Literature Review)

SDA Learning Outcome 4: Understanding & fostering diversity, justice & a sustainable world formed by a global perspective & Jesuit Catholic tradition

This entry contains one of my best written works from the Student Development Administration program, a literature review on multicultural engagement that I wrote for SDAD-578: Student Development Theory, Research, & Practice.

This entry shows my development in understanding and fostering diversity, justice and a sustainable world formed by a global perspective and Jesuit Catholic mission by displaying my commitment to creating a space for dialogue, seeking diverse perspectives while questioning whose voice is missing, and identifying injustices and working for change.

Creating a space for dialogue is an important first step in understanding and fostering diversity, justice, and sustainable practices. While everyone has opinions, people are more likely to voice their perspective when they feel that there is a safe space to share it, especially when their opinion dissents from the majority’s stance. A great example of creating a space for dialogue occurred in my EDUC-515: Multicultural Perspectives class. Each student in the class was assigned a group, and after journaling in response to the weekly reading, we dialogued with our group about what stood out for us. The readings that impacted me the most centered on the concept of white privilege, and I really appreciated the chance to work through some of my assumptions and insights with other members of my class. I am aware that I hold a particular perspective, and experience privilege as a direct result of my identities that other members of my class may not experience. I appreciated that in this safe space, members of the group could both support and challenge each other, all in the pursuit of equity and justice. My participation in the course made me more aware of myself and more conscious of the experiences of diverse others.

As my artifact contends, schools indirectly serve as cultural centers, and should strive to be intentionally inclusive and encourage dialogue between diverse groups (Brahim, T., & Syarif Sumantri, M. M., 2010). There may not be space for these important conversations to occur elsewhere, so it is imperative that they are incorporated into educational environments. Another opportunity that allowed me to create a space for dialogue while teaching tangible skills was during a group project for SDAD-578: Student Development Theory, Research, & Practice. Our group was tasked to create a multicultural competency workshop for undergraduate volunteers around the theme of “building bridges across cultures.” The workshop was very successful in creating a space for the students to gain self-awareness and transition their knowledge of themselves into effectively working with diverse others. I believe that creating a safe space for dialogue about multiculturalism is a best practice for encouraging a diversity of opinion, or “controversy with civility” as it’s referred to in the Social Change model.
Seeking diverse perspectives while questioning whose voice is missing is another key part of understanding diversity and fostering justice. But before a person can understand diverse opinions, they must be self-aware. My own experience with self-awareness was heavily impacted by student development theory, particularly Helms’ Model of White Identity Development, which examines how people who identify as white can abandon their racist assumptions and work toward the evolution of a nonracist identity (Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido, F., 2010). As a person who grew up in a diverse suburb of San Francisco, I have always considered myself to be culturally aware and competent. However, my introduction to Helms’ model and the concept of white privilege allowed me to realize the privilege that I have been benefitting from my whole life. It is not enough for me to just engage with diversity, I have to be aware of the systems that are disproportionately benefitting me and figure out a way to collaboratively work for change. My increased self-awareness motivated me to dive deeper, to seek diverse perspectives, and to question whose voice is missing from the conversation. One course that always explored whose voice was missing was EDUC-520: Social Justice. I appreciated that my professor encouraged dissenting opinions and always checked me on my assumptions. I learned a lot about myself and how I should always keep the social justice implications of my words and actions in mind. I was able to explore this concept further while writing an opinion paper about the redevelopment of Seattle’s public housing neighborhood, Yesler Terrace, in my PUBM-569: Community & Economic Development class. I critiqued the redevelopment plan for its lack of community buy-in and focus on profit. I appreciated that this class gave me the opportunity to apply the concepts that I had been learning around justice and equity into a real life situation that was occurring just blocks from my house and school. It’s clear that seeking diverse perspectives while identifying whose perspective is missing is an important step in promoting a just and humane world.

Identifying injustices and working for change must be incorporated into the promotion of diversity and justice. We must accept that we do not live in isolated communities, but that the world is interconnected. Therefore, an injustice for one person is an injustice for all, even if it does not directly impact us. My experience volunteering at the Yesler Terrace community center, as well as in my role as Coordinator of the Academic Support Team at Washington Middle School (WMS) through the Center for Service and Community Engagement at Seattle University, allowed me to both identify injustice and work to impact change. Working at WMS was a very unique experience because the school houses an Accelerated Progress Program (APP) as well as generalized education for sixth through eighth graders. The sixth grade study club that I supervised had students from both the APP and general education populations. It was shocking to witness the obvious differences in achievement and support that students from each population were receiving. I was happy to provide a space that could support both groups, because too often they were separated. It is my belief that every child has the same potential for high achievement, but the difference is in how we as educators encourage and support them. In this role, I did my best to support each student individually, despite how the school categorized them. Although I
felt that this separateness was not beneficial, and in many ways unjust, I also realized that my program was providing a deliberate space for collaboration and learning. I feel that in order to understand and foster diversity and justice in the global perspective, we must identify injustices and actively work together to eliminate them. As my artifact points out, creating a collaborative school culture serves as an effective learning environment for diverse groups, while providing a sense of community and trust (Hajisoteriou, C. et. al., 2011).

References

