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**From Cosmetic to Metabolized Change:
Promoting Paradigm Shifts in a Dominant Culture University**

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Abstract

The authors provide three case examples modeling the implementation of the Diversity agenda in a school of education within a private Christian university. The second article in a series, the case studies demonstrate contextual application of confronting privilege as it manifests itself in a seemingly homogeneous environment. As the authors document programmatic, personal, and pedagogical methods informed by principles of social justice and equity, the intent is to move beyond cosmetic compliance with accreditation obligations towards a metabolized second order change within students and faculty.

Keywords: American Counseling Association, Christian, diversity, education, marginalization, privilege, social justice, systems, university.

Prologue

Promoting a diversity agenda in a primarily Caucasian, evangelical Christian university presents unique challenges and opportunities. The faculty in the School of Education (SOE) at George Fox University intentionally seeks to inform its governance, academic programs, pedagogy, and interpersonal relationships by principles of social justice and equity as reflections of both our faith and vocational commitments. The following represents the second in a series of articles chronicling our ongoing commitment to promoting social justice and equity.

In the initial article (Bearden, et al., 2013), the authors identified the school's Diversity Agenda, contextual setting of the SOE, along with an appraisal of its challenges. The following narratives explore three methods regarding how issues of privilege and marginalization are approached within the School of Education. Debby Espinor from Undergraduate Teacher Education, Brenda Morton in the Master of Arts in Teaching program, and Anna Berardi from the Graduate Department of Counseling tell these stories. They are just a few of the many ways in which we seek to promote a metabolized understanding of the concepts of privilege, justice, and equity.

A metabolized understanding is characterized by a commitment to diversity work reflecting second order change rather than mere compliance with accreditation standards. Our intent is to nurture principles of peace and justice as core values and central motivating factors in one's vocation (Bearden, et al., 2013). Through the unique stories and styles of each professor, our stories intend to illustrate where we struggle, what we have learned, and what we are hopefully doing well in our goal to promote metabolized change within colleagues, our students, and ourselves. Other institutions, especially

faith-based organizations, might find their story mirrored in the following narratives and perhaps discover a new angle for engaging in difficult, but imperative, conversations.

Adult Degree Program Elementary Education

Interest in the spiritual side of humanity, specifically my own students' humanity has been an ongoing part of my professional development. As I begin, it is helpful to define the terms spirituality and religion. They have overlapping meanings in many ways, but the root meaning of spirituality is taken from the Latin word *spiritus*, meaning breath or life force. Spirituality generally refers to meaning and purpose in one's life (Briggs & Rayle, 2005). Spirituality can be expressed through religious participation or involvement in an organized system of beliefs, rituals, and collective traditions (Helminiak, 2001). However, Hill and Hood (1999) stated that it is the search for the sacred that lies beneath both spirituality and religiosity.

I always felt called to teach. I never felt called to teach in religious schools, yet have spent my career investing in students who "have" over students who "have not." Therefore, I focus now on the students I have, equipping them to teach all students they have. Teaching adult students has been the most rewarding part of my educational journey. My objectives (or case) for their classrooms include a measure of spiritual diversity, along with all the other issues of multiculturalism needed to teach the K-12 students of the future.

The Case

How do I get adult teacher candidates to see spirituality development along the same continuum as academic, social, emotional, and physical development? How can they understand how the issues of privilege and equity shape their own views of truth?

Spiritual and religious diversity can be addressed through James Fowler's Stages of Faith (1981), yet the classroom I desire is one that goes further than theory and brings application in alignment with belief structures.

Illustration

My particular program offers a class called "Christian Faith and Thought" in the second year of study. The course is designed to have students contemplate their own worldview based upon seven large questions posed by James Sire (1976). These questions develop conversations around: What is the prime reality? Is it God or the cosmos? What is a human being? What happens at death? Why is it possible to know anything at all? How do we know what is right and wrong? And, what is the meaning of human history?

Looking at these questions through the lens of each person's life allows for contemplative discussion as every person has a different experience. In thinking on these large questions, I developed a continuum toward spiritual growth in the individual. Our experience allows us to filter religious and spiritual beliefs based upon our individuality encountering others.

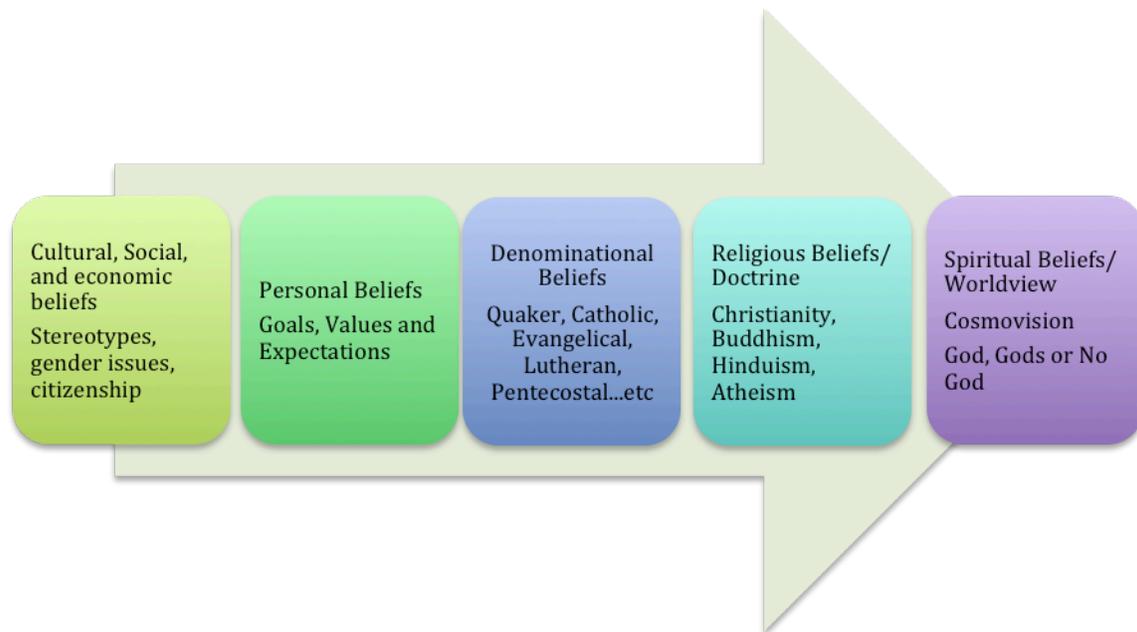


Figure 1. Continuum toward Spiritual Growth (Espinoza, 2012)

Along the continuum (Figure 1) there are areas of diversity among our teacher candidates and their own K-12 students. Our challenge is to address the differences in a manner that respects the individual voice of any age, gender, or culture.

A guest speaker in my Christian Faith and Thought course used the Spanish word for worldview. She called it *cosmovision*. People of the Mayan culture believe it was a representation of our role in time and space. The word depicts something larger than ourselves. In college classrooms, there must be room for discussion over issues of spiritual/religious diversity. As one of my students describes it:

As a classroom teacher, I hope to strive to appreciate and celebrate the diversity of my students. I would like to bring diversity of religion into my classroom teaching through social studies and history lessons. This would allow my students to broaden their perspective of others beliefs and to learn from one another. (M. Silkwood, personal communication, October 3, 2011.)

On the surface, the George Fox University School of Education could almost ignore the issue of religious diversity based on assumptions of “spirituality” among faculty and students, yet in reality, there are a great many challenges that face us on a daily basis. One assumption could be that all faculty believe the same about God. In reality, there are almost as many differences as similarities. Another assumption is with our student population. We may assume they come to a Christian university because it has “values” aligned with their own. Again, that may not always be the case as there are convenience factors, reputation factors, and many others that draw them here.

My students taught me that the subject of spirituality is close to their own hearts. Not only did they open up their lives for scrutiny in relationship to God, they struggled with the boundaries of the separation of Church and State that constrain their voice in the classroom. I learned that to avoid the issue is not the right answer. People develop and grow spiritually along with all the other more acceptable ways such as physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Although my students do not have definitive answers to their many questions, they have been allowed to struggle with their own beliefs, values, and biases along the way.

One adult student, close to becoming a classroom teacher put it this way:

The plans I have for applying my worldview at this time are to always be thoughtful and kind to others. I will also consider myself a model and teacher of acceptance. As an educator I will need to be tolerant, understand and accepting of the beliefs of my students. I will need to make sure my classroom represents all of my students. I will educate my students about differences and teach them to

interact respectfully with others. (C. Robles, personal communication, October 4, 2011.)

Diversity as a Core Value Informing Curriculum Design

The Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program at George Fox University began in 1992. The program grew to meet the demands of the community to include three distinct formats, with three program lengths to licensure, in four Oregon locations, and one in Idaho. Through the years, the SOE conceptual framework of think critically, transform practice, and promote justice continued to inform program, clinical practice, and curriculum changes. Changes include a course specifically addressing diverse populations, three distinct clinical practice experiences, and an international practicum opportunity for candidates that provides a unique cultural immersion experience to assist and educate our preservice teachers to successfully meet the needs of diverse populations.

The MAT program created a course titled “Exceptional and Diverse Populations” to explore and confront ways that marginalization continues in classrooms. The course provides opportunity for deep reflection and identification of personal biases. Once these biases are identified, candidates search for understanding as to where these views or beliefs were formed, and then begin to confront the personal growth needed to reframe these views so that they can maximize the learning potential for all students. Candidates also receive instruction in intercultural communication and applying cultural contexts to curriculum planning.

There are three distinct practicum experiences in the program. The first of these three begins with a 30-hour assignment working with students who are not members of the “majority culture.” This includes working with students who are from low-SES

backgrounds, linguistically different from the majority, from a race or ethnicity different from the MAT candidate, or from a differing ability level. Locations chosen for this practicum have included the Boys and Girls Clubs, migrant summer camps, local school district summer school programs, or the MAT International Program, to name a few. Preservice teachers complete specific assignments as they work through their 30 hours and write a reflection paper at the end about their experience with the population they chose as their focus.

The International Program option is a unique three-week experience in which candidates are completely immersed in the culture of Austria, China, or Ecuador. The goal of this type of practicum was “to facilitate transformative learning about cultural conceptions, diversity, and the dynamics of student differences with the goal of understanding one’s own cultural framework and adapting to another culture to develop empathy towards culturally and linguistically diverse students in the United States” (Addleman, Brazo, Cevallos, p. 55). To that end, the International Program in MAT was born in 2009, with the first trip to Quito, Ecuador that same year. As additional opportunities arose, the program was expanded to China and Austria in the years following.

The International program practicum involves three weeks in a country, working with school partners and teaching classes. The MAT candidates live with host families, gather with MAT colleagues to plan for their classroom assignments, complete assignments for the practicum, and debrief experiences. There is no language prerequisite for this practicum, allowing preservice teachers to experience the disequilibrium that comes from living in a country where you do not know the language,

providing empathy for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students they will have in their classrooms.

Disequilibrium was realized through the reflections of candidates who “described disorienting dilemmas including topics like communication struggles, loneliness, poverty, language challenges, and safety” (Addleman, Brazo, & Cevallos, 2011, p. 63).

Addleman, Brazo, and Cevallos also found that “cultural immersion provides a brief opportunity to view the world from a different perspective—to increase empathy for students from diverse backgrounds and improve our ability to scaffold their learning” (p. 59). Additionally, they found that self-efficacy of the students increased, and preservice teachers realized the significance of creating engaging, relevant, hands-on instructional opportunities for students.

The next two clinical practice experiences for MAT candidates are in traditional school settings. Schools include charter, private, and public schools with cooperating teachers who hold appropriate licensure and endorsements that match the teacher candidate needs. The first of two practicum experiences is a six-week assignment in a classroom setting, and the final practicum is a longer experience, lasting up to 16 weeks. The placement office takes special care to request placements in two different schools where contrasting populations of students exist. By serving different populations of students, teacher candidates are given a wide range of exposure to diverse populations of students. This practice is found in other teacher preparation programs, including Seattle Pacific University, that has a similar population to George Fox University: white, middle-class teacher candidates (Espinor, 2012). Espinor went on to say that “a focused placement intentionally puts teacher candidates in high-risk urban schools” and that this

placement prepares candidates to be successful in a similar setting upon graduation “even if they come from a white, middle-class background.”

Programs valuing diversity find ways to introduce students to a variety of experiences that highlight the richness of learning about and with others from different cultures. Many institutions located in rural or suburban areas find it difficult to meet the diversity requirements of accrediting bodies, but upon close evaluation of those standards, diverse populations are not limited to factors of race. Low socio-economic populations have needs and characteristics of which teacher candidates must be familiar. Ultimately, programs must shift the thinking of teacher candidates who espouse dominant culture values so that they are able to promote equity and justice for all students in their classrooms.

Managing Defensive Reactions in Dominant Culture Students

The Graduate Department of Counseling within the School of Education offers master level degrees in four mental health professions. The following examines a partial strategy to engage mental health graduate students in the process of thinking critically about the way in which the systemic nature of privilege influences human functioning and struggle. Specific focus is on assisting students from majority populations to work through defensive reactions as the phenomenon is explored. It assumes that resistance to seeing one’s own advantages in relationship to others is complex, and personal ownership and transformation is a process that must honor personal beliefs and experiences just as the student is required to offer the same (Breunlin, Schwartz, & MacKune-Karrer, 2001; Freedman & Combs, 1996). The process is crucial to the mental health professional’s (MHP) ability to discern how client symptoms may be indicative of a toxic or broken

social environment, rather than merely a personal growth or biologically-driven mental health issue (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Blow, Sprenkle, & Davis, 2007; Doherty, 1995; Erikson, 1964; Pipher, 1996; Yalom, 2002).

The process involves creating a scaffolding to support the student's emerging understanding of privilege. As students identify the complexity of human needs, fears, and social dynamics replicated across multiple relational domains, deeper issues underlying privilege and the challenges in response are seen as a universal human struggle. The goal is to promote a metabolized understanding of privilege as central to what a commitment to justice ultimately requires if the emerging MHP seeks to be a part of a solution to human suffering (McIntosh, 1998).

Identifying Features

Students enter GDC independent mental health practitioner degree programs intent on launching a career that is generative. They seek to make a difference in people's lives by alleviating suffering and restoring social and emotional health.

The predominant demographics of the classroom are middle class, heterosexual, white females. Identification as a Christian is not a requirement for admission. However, approximately 60% of the students identify themselves as Christian; approximately half of those persons indicate membership in a more conservative faith community. Beyond these statistical likelihoods, the similarities end. Education, work history, age, specific religious beliefs, ethnic heritage, and political preferences vary.

Common Defensive Reactions

Students easily acknowledge their differences when engaging one another around topics such as religion, sexuality, socioeconomics, gender bias, and politics. But this

racially homogenous group often displays mutual discomfort when discussions turn to white privilege. Students report feeling scapegoated for other's challenges, victims of reverse discrimination, and on the receiving end of judgment and mistrust. As white privilege is examined from an ecosystemic perspective, suddenly the concept of privilege emerges as the root struggle underlying all other diversity issues more easily acknowledged.

Unpacking the complexity of defenses activated when discussing gender and heterosexual privilege is challenging when one's foundational religious paradigms include a call to stand against immorality, mistakenly expressed as standing *against others* whose definition of what is right differs. Religious faith systems will always include ideas, expressed as doctrines or faith statements, regarding how one's sexuality should be expressed to best manifest or reflect the central goals or tenets of that faith system; this is the motivation of one's commitment to live a moral life. Most confusing, perhaps, is the tendency for people to believe that the principles or spiritual disciplines they adopt by faith should be expected for all (Berardi & Thurston, 2009; Bergin, 1983). Further confusing the student are religious communities that present love as a means to bring about change in the behavior of others deemed wrong. Care is unintentionally offered in a parentified manner that is often experienced as arrogant to those offended by such motivations (Andrew, M., 2009).

Observing differences between religions, within a faith system, and within a particular community, is often challenging. But to invite students to critically analyze the way in which a dominant faith system, for example Christianity, has functioned prescriptively in the public arena – religion as privilege – can appear to be an assault on

their faith. It is common for students to quickly identify with feeling marginalized because of their beliefs. As these reactions are further plumbed, students begin to see that a host of other issues related to human needs, fears, and vulnerabilities influence organized religion and fuel privilege, but do not minimize the importance or validity of their faith (Maher, 2006; Volf, 1996).

Teaching Objectives and Method

Guiding hypotheses and principles. Techniques utilized reflect initial strategies to provoke a tolerable dissonance within a scaffold that helps students embrace the discomfort as a trustworthy part of their professional training and transformation.

Strategies chosen are based on the following hypotheses and principles:

First, resistance to acknowledging the systemic nature of privilege and its negative impact on marginalized groups may be related to the following:

- Lack of awareness due to minimal exposure to the stories of others impacted by privilege. Once concepts presented are observed in the experience of others, a general openness follows as the student easily resonates with principles of justice and equity.
- Defensive dismissal due to personal injury. The student's own experience of witnessing or experiencing intense and/or profound injustice inhibits the capacity to empathically connect with the systemic nature of privilege. Until their personal injury is acknowledged, the capacity to see self as privileged in relationship to others who are thus harmed is difficult (Borszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- Dismissal due to cultural context. This response is exhibited in members of a dominant culture that wish to maintain specific historic views, structures, and processes as the dominant narratives. There may be minimum awareness regarding how others'

basic human wants, needs, and fears are hence exploited and/or minimized (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Confronted with statements regarding the offensive nature of privilege that is unknowingly bestowed upon members of a gendered (male), racial (white) or religious (Christian) group, the student is apt to believe that the messenger is wrong and misguided. Hence, privilege as an issue is discounted (Breunlin, Schwartz, & MacKune-Karrer, 2001; McIntosh, 1998).

Further complicating this response is the lack of community-wide agreed-upon processes for evaluating which historic narratives should be reconceptualized, and which should not, and how to respond when emerging and new dominant narratives take hold regardless of their current and future benefit for a culture. Hence, this response is not always a defense mechanism – even while defenses are not necessarily always unproductive – but a logical response given rapid and multifaceted culture change.

- Defensive dismissal due to personal threat. This reaction stems from a perceived or actual threat to paradigms that give the student's life meaning and purpose, essential to managing anxiety and forming a cohesive personal identity (Antonovsky, 1987; Boss, 2002). As students begin to comprehend the myriad of ways they may be benefactors of privilege, defensive shame-based reactions ensue (Breunlin, Schwartz, & MacKune-Karrer, 2001). For example, it is here where a student can begin exploring what *it* means to own one's beliefs in faith yet respect and embrace others who think differently. What then becomes possible is learning how to live in a complex, pluralistic public arena, not just function professionally in a role.

Second, students confronted with issues central to their identity have varying windows of tolerance for the discomfort that accompanies paradigm challenges. The

classroom experience needs to be mindful of these variances even while actively engaging the discomfort.

Mental health educators are required to do no harm in both advocating for vulnerable populations and engaging persons in processes of change, including students grappling with the nature and implications of privilege (ACA, 2005). Therefore, the educator should possess a complex understanding of human behavior and system dynamics related to privilege, along with a method of engaging students in a developmental process of change. Otherwise, students are at risk of merely internalizing messages of shame regarding various group identities (race, religion, gender), further summoning defensive reactions.

Finally, solutions to privilege require a new way to stand in relationship to overt and covert dominant U.S. values and historic Judeo/Christian mores. What is often entitled “culture wars” may be exacerbated by dominant U.S. values of individualism, competition, and its side effects (such as entitlement to impose one’s expectations and standards on others) obfuscating the articulation of a more sustainable, relational narrative capable of accommodating different beliefs and mores as expressions of those beliefs (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Volf, 2011).

Techniques and strategies. Students’ progress through a curriculum designed to prepare them for working with diverse clients (Green, 1998). The following techniques address strategies crucial in the early stages of inviting students into a deeper encounter with privilege and its impact on marginalized groups:

Externalizing. The essence of learning involves an encounter with a new experience coupled with an affective response inviting cognitive engagement (Siegel,

2012). Learning methods typically accentuate encounter through direct experience, inviting a person to increase one's capacity to be self-reflexive. However, for material that is psychologically threatening, a more varied approach is required, mirroring techniques often utilized in the therapeutic process.

Externalizing techniques are methods of inviting encounter from a distance (Freedman & Combs, 1996). By examining an item outside of self, defenses can soften as new perspectives are encountered. As students learn about human need, pain, struggle, and the process of healing, they are vicariously applying concepts and the stories of others to their own lives.

Systems theory concepts as metaframe. A student's orientation to the nature of systems and its relevance to the treatment process begins with the application of sociocultural theories of human development and social functioning. Considerable attention is given to applying an ecosystemic analysis to individual, interpersonal, and intergroup relational dynamics (Boss, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998). As students begin to engage in the multilateral application of relational principles reflecting and preserving systems of privilege, they are open to stories of self and other as both privileged and marginalized. Likewise, the role of dominant social narratives and its influence on the ways in which a culture organizes itself further assist students in understanding the systemic nature of privilege.

Additional constructs such as the tendency and risks of closed systems, the nature of destructive entitlement, the multigenerational transmission process of world views and relational patterns, and methods of effecting systemic change are applied as multilevel responses to privilege are explored (Borszormenyi-Nagy, 1986; Bowen, 1993). As

students grasp the futility of helping a child overcome anxiety outside of intervening in her broader family system characterized by violence, it is easily discerned how the struggling parent in that system may be merely manifesting the side effects of a multigenerational history of marginalization based on race and/or socioeconomic status. Breaking the generational transmission process involves cooperation from the larger systems in which these persons reside.

Foundational theories as early messengers. Foundational psychosocial theories continue to inform the training of mental health professionals. As feminist and post-modern deconstructive inquiry are applied to these theories, well-reasoned critiques by non-dominant groups provide insight into the systemic nature of privilege and its influence on language-based systems of meaning (Akamatsu, 1998).

In addition to identifying the limits inherent in many traditional theories, students are invited to examine meta-concerns, and hence congruence, between theories past and present. Students open up to the historical nature of humanity's struggle to provide optimum environments of justice and care. The intent is to decrease the paralyzing effect of shame and increase a sense of solidarity with a long line of professional ancestors who dedicated their life to changing root issues responsible for perpetuating human suffering.

Voices within one's dominant identity groups. Evidence of a metabolized commitment to diversity is reflected in our *Diversity Document's* statement regarding the utilization of teaching materials authored and inclusive of perspectives of historically marginalized and/or underrepresented groups (Bearden, et al., 2012). To mitigate the tendency for students within a dominant culture to discount diverse authors and perspectives, challenges to their paradigms must also come from those within their

various group identities. For example, Caucasian students need to hear other white men and women own the privilege that comes with race. Men need to hear other men call out sexism. Christians need to challenge other Christians to bias perpetuated in the name of their religion.

Desired Student Outcomes

Students enter the program unaware of the destructive pervasiveness of privilege. By the end of their first year, a scaffold emerges that provides a vision of the multilevel complexity of human health and functioning. Most students eventually enter into a season of disillusionment as initial defenses give way to grief. As succeeding courses promote deeper encounter with system complexity, defense structures, and barriers to change, students display an increased tolerance for the discomfort even as they see dynamics of privilege manifest across multiple domains of relationships.

As new paradigms emerge, students learn how to stand in solidarity with both self – and one’s various group identities – as well as those whose views, experience, and choices may continue to be contrary to one’s own. To promote full participation in society and to actively work to reduce barriers created by privilege stems from an overt choice to stand with other. Erikson’s (1964) nearly poetic definitions of love, care, and fidelity suddenly resonate as acts and intentions despite the antagonisms of divided function.

It is hoped that by the time our students enter internship they stand in a more culturally humbled place, ready to engage in a reciprocating partnership on the client’s behalf, learning as much as they might have to give. And only as fellow travelers

themselves, maybe even as historic contributors to their client's dis-ease, embarking on their own continuing journey of change and healing.

Conclusion

The first two articles in this series identified our Diversity Agenda, contextual challenges, and examples of our response. The series illustrates that understanding the nature of privilege and embracing other despite differences are universal struggles within all levels of relationships, whether in secular or religious environments. Thus, it represents our commitment to engage faith-based and secular communities in mutual dialog as second order-metabolized change is ultimately dependent upon and manifested in a commitment to be in relationship with one another, whether world views and experiences are similar or different.

Our narrative examples in this article illustrate our Diversity Agenda as a central organizing principle in our curricula. We directly address the role of religion as both life giving and misapplied, especially when representative of a privileged position within a culture. To bring students who are both privileged and marginalized to a place of transformation, personal needs, stories, and faith commitments must be honored in the process of helping all vested parties grow in mutual care and support.

Continuing work is needed on deepening ongoing conversation within the SOE regarding how privilege manifests itself in our school, classrooms, and the greater culture. Next steps also include identifying measures of second order change so we may better assess the outcomes of our strategies with faculty and students.

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