

Journal #3 | Bringing the Academic Conversations into Practice

The most pressing thought that I have right now when thinking about the work that is being discussed in class, goes back to a comment that I made towards the end of my group's dialogue session. "It's great that we are having these conversations here and bringing to light the issues that we see, but we need to now bring these conversations over to the department itself."

The Promising Practice project has helped me reflect on how I can make changes to the behavior and work that I do in my assistantship by thinking about how to implement the above statement into practice. One of my biggest takeaways from the work that we are doing is that the conversations that are happening in the classroom, can't be limited to just the classroom or formalized setting. The conversations that break down systematic issues and then seek to combat them need to be integrated more into my work spaces/environment since I feel that it is something that my professional staff and student staff are not hitting on.

While my project is focused on developing a practice for the CUE Program's liaison role, I feel energized to bring this conversation to the entire Leadership Team (LT) of my building (which is professional staff and graduate staff of overall building operations) and the rest of the student staff. This past Monday, I was able to participate on a panel discussion that focused on how to be a leader in the age of President Trump. The audience and the panelists didn't stick to the topic at hand since we just started breaking down some of the issues that we saw here at IU, but we were still able to have engage in thought-provoking dialogue that filled the room with energy. When it came time to say my closing thoughts, I found myself saying the same thing that I said towards the end of my group's dialogue session, and that resonated with a few folks in the room. It is clear to me that students here have thoughts about the current environment that we're all in, and it has become clearer to me that I need to play a more active role in creating dialogue

with my building staff about some of the systemic issues that are at play in the residence hall that we supervise. It's time I step up a bit more as a Graduate Supervisor.

In my previous journal, I mentioned that I find it to be my duty as a rising educator to catalyze conversations that help students see the systemic issues that they may not be informed of. I have noticed that the LT that I am a part of in my residence hall focuses a lot energy in talking about common issues about the building (maintenance updates, events in the building, general announcements), but not enough time in talking about systems of privilege, power, or oppression that are present in our community. Conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion seem like afterthoughts as we talk about them either when we are instructed to by higher ups in our department, or when an incident happens in the building. I believe my building as a whole, including myself, is lacking a sense of intention in bringing these conversations to the table as genuine actions. There needs to be some kind of increased focus in staff meetings on how to educate students on topics like privilege, race, identity, dominant narratives, etc and how to prepare them to combat systemic oppression (Patton, 2015).

Student Staff meetings seem to lack moments of educational conversations and reflections on societal issues that are present in the building and in contemporary society. Leadership Team (LT) meetings seem to lack conversations on how to intentionally shape these conversations and bring them to the student leaders of the building. I mentioned in my previous journal that there needed to be more tables where these conversations can happen, but these tables have been in front of me this whole time; there's been a consistent pattern of cutting meetings short for some reason, and I feel that that time needs to be used moments of educational conversations on occasion. "As a society, we pay a price for our silence." (Tatum, 2017, p. 337). As a building, I feel that we have lost golden opportunities to bring education to our student leaders. The several changes in professional staff could be a factor for why the use of our time

has been inconsistent, but this is definitely something that needs to be brought up moving forward as I begin to close out the first year of my graduate studies.

I think the fact that I have worked with over five different supervisors during my time as Graduate Supervisor in Residential Programs & Services (RPS) has made me have to learn new styles of co-facilitating meetings, unlearning those approaches, and then re-learning new approaches when a new person comes in. These changes have left me fatigued with having to navigate so many new approaches in less than a year, but it has also shown me that I need to be intentional in making time to properly learn how to work alongside these shifting approaches. The fact that I'm also at a PWI has brought a bias of mine to the surface, where I have this feeling that of the students that I work with, that only the students of color or students that come have marginalized identities are the ones that want to engage in conversations around social justice, equity, and inclusion. I'm not able to speak entirely on what I've seen from residents, but I have been able to see a few of my RAs that do identify as white, that have challenged my original thought process. Even though RPS has their own diversity committee, maybe there could be a committee that's formed within my building staff that focuses on our own issues; there doesn't need to be just one place where diversity and equality are discussed (Ahmed, 2012) so it could be beneficial to see who would like to be included in these conversations from my building staff. The building already has a several metaphorical tables where conversations can happen, but I believe that a committee, or a group of people who are committed to examining the gaps in diversity that our building has, can be the medium for conversation to happen (Ahmed, 2012). From the data that I am observing from my project, I have strengthened my claim that my residence hall seems to be lacking in its commitment to diversity work. Ever since the CUE of our building was removed from his position (we have been without a CUE in my residence hall for about a month and a half), it seems that we don't have conversations regarding social justice,

equity and inclusion anymore within my student staff and LT members. We lack this sense of intentional commitment and it's something that needs to be addressed.

Coming in to my assistantship, I felt that there was some kind of commitment to diversity because of the presence of the CUE program and because of how diverse the student population was in my neighborhood. I saw a pocket of color at a PWI, and I thought that this was a sign of commitment to social justice, equity, and inclusion. Reflecting on all the time that has passed, I have noticed that this perception has steadily decreased the more I continue to observe how my work plays out. There is a lack of commitment from my student staff, there is a lack of commitment from my LT, and there is a lack of commitment from myself at the moment. Even though I originally believed the best thing for me to do right now is to take more of a step back from diversity work to further my education so that I become wiser than before (Tatum, 2017), I need to simultaneously challenge oppressive systems while also learning how to combat them. Diversity is a thought, not an afterthought; it is an action, not a reaction. I need to basically learn about the work, while inspiring the work, and while doing the work in a healthy manner. I need to transform myself into a diversity champion (Ahmed, 2012) that possess a genuine commitment to this type of work and can inspire others to rise up in the advocacy that is needed. There shouldn't be just a few people committed to this type of work, all agents in a department should be committed in some type of way to being a part of this movement. "Don't just talk about it, [really] be about it" (R. Pollard, personal communication, July 2013).

This class and this environment has really pushed my understanding on what it means to be an advocate for social justice, diversity, and inclusion work. I'm thankful to be here constantly reflecting and internalizing approaches on how I can move towards being a diversity champion.

Thank you

References

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