CTLT Equity & Diversity Working Group
Case Study: "I'm for equity and inclusion, but…"

In response to the Provost's commitments to the Intersectional Gender-based Violence and Aboriginal Stereotypes (IGBVAS) Task Force Report *(http://equity.ubc.ca/files/2014/05/RENEWING-OUR-COMMITMENT-TO-EQUITY-AND-DIVERSITY-FINAL-02.pdf),* CTLT has created Equity and Diversity Working Group (EDWG) to support the Task Force's goals through CTLT's programs and services and for internal capacity development within CTLT.

As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) argue, it is one thing to say that you value and support social justice. Whether you practice it is completely a different thing. The practice of social justice requires both collective actions (instead of actions only by those who are in charge of promoting equity and inclusion within the institution) and social justice literacy of individuals. This is because the issues we are dealing with are systemic, that is, we all are positioned differently within social institutions (including universities) that unevenly distribute power and resources. These different social positions that we occupy shape our identities and power dynamics with others. Being entrenched in the historically and continuously unequal social structures, we are socialized and "trained" into seeing oppressive social relations and inequitable social structures as natural and normal. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) call this actively nurtured perspective as "social justice *il*literacy" and argue that social *in*justice thrives on this *il*literacy (p. xvii).

Goals

To move forward, this case study exercise sets forth two goals:
1. To develop social justice literacy.
2. To engage participants in reflecting on their own positionality.

Key Concepts

In order to engage with the case study, understanding the concepts of "positionality" and "intersectionality," and the relationship between the two, is essential.

Positionality:

Positionality refers to the how differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society. Misawa (2010, p. 26) cites a few key definitions of positionality:

> Maher and Tetreault (2001) stated that positionality is the idea that "people are defined not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed" (p. 164). Similarly, Martin and Gunten (2002) described the term positionality as "a concept that acknowledges that we are all raced, classed, and gendered, and that these identities are relational, complex, and fluid positions rather than essential qualities" (p. 46). In other words, whether we want it or not, all parts of our identities are shaped by socially constructed positions and memberships to which we belong. Such automatic categorization is embedded in our society as a system and is pervasive in education and at the workplace.

Positionality is related to intersectionality, a concept arising out of Black feminist legal studies and critical race theories. In acknowledging positionality, we also acknowledge intersecting social positions and

power dynamics as explained below.

Intersectionality:
According to Hankivsky (2014), intersectionality refers to "an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g., 'race'/ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion)," which are located within interconnected systems and structures of power (p. 2). Therefore, in an intersectionality perspective, "inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences" (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2).

The Organization of the Exercise

This exercise is comprised of three parts:
1. **A case scenario** that presents a workplace discussion that became stagnant.
2. **Three common responses** to the case situation in a form of internal monologues. Each response is followed by some points of critical consideration. This section is provided in order to present different themes involved in the case scenario and to offer some language of social justice to help participants identify some of the assumptions underpinning the response.
3. **Reflection/discussion questions** to engage participants in problem-solving of the case study and in applying the case study to their work settings. This section is intended to allow participants to apply social justice literacy to problem-solving and to reflect on their own positionality and responsibility in real life.

Instructions

1. All participants are asked to read the case scenario.
2. Participants are divided into three small groups. Each small group is assigned to read one of the three responses (Response A, B, C) to the case scenario. Participants take a few minutes individually to read an assigned response and respond to the reflection/discussion questions.
3. In small groups, participants discuss their responses to the reflection/discussion questions.
4. In a large group, small groups share what they discussed.

Case Scenario

Please read a scenario below that illustrates a situation in a workplace.

You work at an organization within the public sector in Canada. The staff members of the organization are relatively diverse in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, physical dis/ability, etc. Your colleague Staff X belongs to a social minority group, and she is the only staff member being responsible for promoting inclusive and equitable policies in the organization.

The organization is currently revising its strategic plans. At a meeting to develop new plans, "equity and inclusion" was proposed as one of the values, along with other values, such as excellence, innovation, integrity, and collaboration. Staff X questioned how the organization as a whole is going to align its practice to "equity and inclusion." She passionately insisted that the value would be simply tokenistic and meaningless when it is not woven through the organization's practice, and that the value should be

removed otherwise. The discussion went into silence.

Common Responses

Now, please read one of the following responses assigned to you (either Response A, B, or C). These responses represent some of the common responses to a case situation like this. Please suppose that these responses are internal monologues of Staff X's colleagues attending the meeting.

Each common response is followed by some points for consideration. Please read these points and then respond to Reflection/Discussion Questions individually. Then, please discuss with your small group members.

The provided points for consideration are meant to offer some entry points to unpack the given response with some social justice language. Please note that these points for consideration are not definitive or complete explanations of the case scenario or given response. Nor are they meant to defend Staff X one-sidedly. Staff X's response to the situation might not have been the best response she could possibly present. However, her colleagues' thoughts presented in Response A, B, and C equally deserve a critical analysis in order to develop a better understanding between them and Staff X, and ultimately to make the office's work toward equity and inclusion more meaningful rather than tokenistic.

Response A:

"Whenever there is a discussion on issues related to equity and diversity, Staff X gets emotionally charged. I am not always confident that I am able to handle the situation in a good way, and I'm afraid of asking stupid questions or saying something inappropriate. So, I just shut down."

Points for consideration:

What is important to consider here is socially embedded nature of our emotions. As Hochschild (2003) puts as "feeling rules," our feelings tend to be socially constructed and regulated. Our society and culture determine what to feel and not to feel, and what emotion is in/appropriate to be expressed (e.g., "Boys don't cry."). For example, one may simply see Staff X's emotional intensity as anger – an inappropriate feeling that should be restrained especially in a professional setting. However, it could possibly be distinguished as "moral anger" (Zembylas, 2007) against the tokenization of the feel-good language of equity and inclusion for no substantial commitment, thereby the maintenance of status quo.

In addition, our emotions are embedded in our positionality within institutional and social structures. Staff X's strong feeling can be, to some degree, stemming from her repeated lived experience as a solo diversity worker with little institutional support. Likewise, we often perceive and judge others' emotions from our own positionality. Why Staff X's colleagues feel difficult to engage with the given situation can vary depending on their positionalities among many other factors.

Response B:

"We live in Canada, where our strength is multiculturalism and diversity. I feel as though we're all equal, diverse, and tolerant. Our organization is also pretty diverse and can see that we value diversity through embracing other cultures (one example is our annual multicultural event!). What is the problem?"

Points for consideration:

  Diversity is indeed often accepted or embraced in our society. However, often times, it is so when it is just about *cultural* differences (e.g., food, music, festivals), and it is often overlooked that different levels of power are attached to different cultures. In addition, our identity consists not only of culture but also of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, among many others. We all embody these multiple and intersecting identities, and we are positioned unequally in our society.

  It is for this reason that the bracket term "diversity" is critiqued: It masks inequality in our society, instead of exposing and changing inequitable social structures and practices (Ahmed, 2007; Bell & Hartmann, 2007). More specifically in a Canadian context, multiculturalism has been established on colonized lands, covering historical and ongoing colonial oppressions on the one hand, and celebrating cultural diversity on the other (Simpson, James, & Mack, 2011; St. Denis, 2011).

Response C:
"I really value equity, diversity, and including all people. But if we always talk about what differentiates us from one another, I feel as though it will further divide us as people. Why can't we shift our perspectives on what unites us rather than what divides us?"

Points for consideration:

  As Bell and Hartmann (2007) critique the popular discourse of diversity as a "happy talk," a desire to achieve unity by emphasizing our commonalities suggests an uncritical imagination of harmonious plurality, in spite of existing inequality among us. We do have many commonalities, and a desire to work towards equity and inclusion from a common ground (e.g., "We are all humans.") cannot be entirely dismissed. However, when we are positioned differently in institutional and social structures, prioritizing commonalities over differences can gloss over our social complexities and undermine a work against social inequities.

  A good example of this blind spot is the second wave feminist movement with the notion of "sisterhood." The idea of sisterhood suggested that the movement was for the liberation of *all* women. However, it was actually organized and mobilized primarily by white middle-class women, and it worked to elevate their position to become equal to white middle-class men, as seen that some of those women went into white-collar workforce by hiring women of color as nannies or housekeepers (hooks, 1984).

Reflection/Discussion Questions
1. What stood out to you in this exercise? What insights or questions surfaced for you?
2. How would you respond to the staff meeting situation?
3. What might you do differently considering your own positionality in your work at CTLT?

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