**HOWARD UNIVERSITY**

**DIVERSITY IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM**

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**3/12/24**

**ASSIGNMENT: EXPERIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSITY**

**Experiencing the practices of another culture is one of the best ways to broaden your perspective about others.  For this assignment, learners should participate in a cultural experience and observe the practices of others. Write a 3- 4-page summary about your experience and how that experience influences (or might influence) the view you have of students in the university classroom.**

I grew up in Trinidad - southern Caribbean Island, where the ethnicities were predominantly Black, East Indians, a slightly smaller third group consisting of people of mixed ethnicities, and a small percentage of Chinese.

In 1995 I matriculated from a predominantly black college in Trinidad to another predominantly black college in Huntsville Alabama. Even though my transition was a smooth one, and I had a friendly personality, my assimilation into the culture was slow and I experienced culture shock in many ways.

In my second year, I transferred to Howard University, completed my degree, and began my career as an occupational therapist. Working in various healthcare communities in the Washington DC Metropolitan area, Maryland, and Virginia, afforded me the opportunities to observe and interact with diverse individuals on a professional and personal level.

After many years of assimilating into the American culture I have developed and maybe in some areas still developing my perspectives. For this assignment, however, I will attempt to summarize and share my insights.

**FROM A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE:**

My education began in the British education system, which was more comprehensive in its approach to testing. My experience with the American education system is easier. I found the layout of the syllabus to be a simpler step by step approach. I learned a lot about diversity through the education system. Fostering diversity through group work and advancing student integration through creative, technological means. I have worked closely with many students. I have worked alongside dedicated Muslim students committed to their faith, making time for prayer and their course work. I’ve experienced the work ethic of white female student therapist during my undergrad at Howard who were focused on their course work and kept preforming at a high level. They were no different than the African American students who graduated at the top of the class. As an aspiring educator, I hope to embrace similar strategies that would maximize learning and developing specialized skills through diverse teamwork.

**FROM A BUSINESS OWNER /PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE:**

For 5 years I owned and operated an assisted living residence. While setting up this enterprise I was told my peers/friends (other health administrators in the community) that l need a white male to do my marketing if l wanted to keep my facility at capacity and make progress. I did not heed this advice, instead, I responded with ‘well, I don’t see what’s wrong with my back face, l will do my own marketing’! I prided myself with my credentials and abilities and the amazing community that was created.

I was hardworking, made a lot of connections, received referrals, and although members of the community were impressed with our work, business was slow at times. I believed everyone deserved a slice of the pie and l was here for it. Maybe I didn’t want to admit it then, but in hindsight the nature of the business is built on good reputation, good marketing/referral system, and it’s also male dominated.

Overall, the experience was a good one, however, there were times dealing with racist individuals were challenging. Generally, my clients and their family members were gracious and compliant. I remember one Caucasian woman who was demanding to me and my staff. She was belligerent, insisting that I take DNA testing to determine where in Africa my heritage originated and suggesting that my heritage originated from West Africa, questioning my staffs, ‘credentials, and demanding specific foods served to her outside of mealtimes, this was becoming a real problem. This client required a lot of care, but was a short-term stay, so we found creative ways to deal with her.

At the end of her stay, she cried, thanking me for the work we did, apologizing for her attitude, stating that she knows she was difficult to deal with but appreciated what we did for her. She remarked that she ‘has a black friend who is well respected and lives in her building, he is very smart, and that we are good people’. I professional replied, ‘thank you’ and wished her all the best. (However, l pondered , woman please, you do not think black people are good, we all know you are miserable and racist, you think you are better than everyone else, you got the best care in the house yet you were mean to everyone including other residents).

To my surprise, the client followed up with, ‘after my upcoming procedure l would like to return here to recover until it’s time to go home’. I almost passed out, (you’ve got to be kidding me, I thought, after this hellish experience with you! once bitten twice shy).

I respond with, sure not a problem, but I think you should consult with your social worker, because you might be well enough to return home and that would be the best option for you, because l knows how much you’re looking forward to return home. She agreed. Just then the transportation arrived, and she was officially discharged.

About a week later the client followed up asking to return, I encouraged her that she was much stronger and shouldn’t be afraid to return home, with caregiver services. I provided recommendations for home health care and outpatient rehab. She took my advice. I followed up with her a few weeks later, to remind her that her friends need to pick up her mail. She informed me that she was doing well and didn’t require additional care.

In my entire professional and business experiences I have had some encounters with obnoxious people, in healthcare you meet them all. White clients, however, displayed the most entitled, bigoted behaviors. As a clinician my approach is to protect myself, my license and do my best to remain vigilant. Ignore what can be ignored, address clearly what needs to be addressed, an work through the rest.

**FROM A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE:**

From a social perspective, I attend different types of churches within my denomination. Those I’ve visited includes: Ghanian, Hispanic, Predominantly Caucasian, and African American Seventh-Day Adventist churches and also multicultural churches. I currently attend a multicultural congregation in Fairfax Virginia and enjoy a dynamic worship experience. It is easy to grow spiritually in an environment that’s warm and diverse, and make genuine friendships.

I’m quite comfortable participating in with various communities and have had very positive relationships with individuals from other backgrounds. In Trinidad, intermarrying is part of the cultural experience, a few of my relatives have married interracially (Chinese, Indian, White), and this is also my perspective - marry who you love. Embracing diversity has always been fascinating to me, whether it be in my appreciation for other cultures, nature, or abstract art. As an educator I will encourage opportunities for students to learn how meaningful it is to cast a wide net, to make room for diversity and to enrich their lives through meaning interactions and friendship as they develop skill and expertise.