

In Our Own Hands: Diversity Literacy

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in consultation with Linda C. Powell*

Diversity means different things to different people and in different contexts. Certainly though, diversity means multiplicity. This essay intends to spotlight the essential territory of *diversity homework* (examining what's in our own hands) as one key to dealing effectively with diversity issues and encounters, whether in one-on-one interactions or in group situations.

My diversity fieldwork has been done as a classroom teacher, as a public school Diversity Coordinator, and in the context of SEED (Seeking Education Equity & Diversity), a national faculty and curriculum development project based at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women [now Wellesley Centers for Women]. In the SEED Project, [now in Year 30], we have found stories to be useful vehicles for examining diversity issues. The following story, sometimes told as a joke, is a case in point.

A professor drinks more than he can hold at an evening campus diversity meeting. Clumps of people continue to jabber outside the room after the meeting is over. The professor stumbles through the crowded hallway and out to his car, where he realizes that he has somehow lost his keys. He wanders back to the hall outside the meeting room, but finds it too dark and crowded to look for his keys, so he blunders back outside the building to search beneath the street light in the parking lot. Others leaving the meeting pass him. They ask what he's doing. He says he's looking for his car keys. They ask where he lost them. He replies, "I lost them in the hall, but this is where the light is."

In my experience, diversity work frequently contains the disequilibrium and irony found in this story. We are haunted by not finding illumination in the press of a crowded hallway where it's so sorely needed. Yet diversity work demands a quality of light and the solitary space of a clearing in order to sort its complexity astutely. This is not to deny, however, that crowds hold their own clues.

This paper means to offer a few flashes of light for seeing keys obscured in the density of today's diversity work. While we might wish, along with the confused professor, that lost keys could be simply located in an empty parking lot, what is needed is the ability to find our way to them where they are, hidden in the crowd. But this is not a simple matter.

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In the last two decades, group life has become increasingly complicated by heightened awareness of the effect of visible diversity on group interaction. However, powerful as categories such as race, class, and gender are, they don't begin to reveal all the diversity contained within people and within groups of people. Abundant light is needed for navigating the immense and crowded diversity hallway of contemporary life.

Acknowledging the diversity contained within the self can equip individuals to work more competently in groups, making all of us more aware of the landscape of diversity found in group life. This article will highlight three concepts linking internal and external diversity, propose a working definition of diversity literacy, and describe three specific ways to aid the development of diversity literacy in the context of examples drawn from work inside schools.

KEY DIVERSITY CONCEPTS AND A DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY LITERACY

1. Diversity literacy begins with the self.

Diversity literacy is the ability to observe multiplicity, analyze power dynamics, and use both (as an individual) to understand and/or intervene in group dynamics for the greater effectiveness of all concerned.

Diversity literacy begins with the self. Diversity literate folk take up the authority of the "textbooks of their own lives" (Style, 1982) even as they move with humility, aware that all people, no matter how well-educated or well-intentioned, have their blind spots.

Diversity literate people are aware of the reality of large cultural systems and how they position people differently; for example, the diversity literate know that life is not a level playing field. Some who are diversity literate choose to work as activists for equitable access to the common good by making productive use of their own location in these large cultural systems. Those who are powerfully placed, in traditional terms, can make the choice to "use their power to share power," as Peggy McIntosh puts it.¹ However, it should be noted that the focus of this paper, i.e., developing basic diversity literacy, is not the same as specific work for social justice—though I would maintain that any social justice work, indeed any family situation, is enhanced by diversity literacy.²

2. Groups have a life; group life is deeply affected by diversity.

Groups have a life which is deeply affected by diversity. A person in any group situation who is diversity literate is informed by the major role that projection,³ fostered by societal systems, plays. A diversity literate person holds as a given that multiple perspectives exist within any group and within individual members of a group. These are all part of group life.

The phenomenon of splitting and projection is one overwhelming effect of the tradition of dualistic thinking and either/or categories of thought on group life. This occurs for individuals as well as groups. Often unconsciously, we project *good* onto one face/one group or segment of a group while *bad* is split off, lodged in another place/face. The human capacity to do and be both good and bad has been understudied, and thus projection and splitting abound.⁴ Our intellectual and institutional capacity to deal productively with multiplicity is thus underdeveloped.

For instance, in terms of student achievement in schools, something as simple as keeping track of the best (and worst) test scores colludes with the practice of tracking. Both reinforce a split between *good* and *bad* students, with some students viewed as inherently more than half full (of human potential) and others having an image projected onto them of being half empty (of human potential). Institutional tracking in schools, in effect, works to school our whole society in splitting and projection; furthermore, cognition itself gets understood as fundamentally dualistic rather than pluralistic (Oakes, 1985).

Limiting our thought processes to dualistic categories creates and perpetuates conceptual and pragmatic problems for a country which claims to be a democracy “with liberty and justice for all.” It is difficult for many to imagine that *all* might actually be competent—as citizens, for instance, when notions of difference are thought about chiefly in terms of superiority and inferiority.

3. Within any group, there is as much invisible diversity as visible.

What if multiplicity and variety were understood as the norm? With the “parking lot” of the entire planet as the informative text, diversity sensitivity would be seen for the key sensibility that it is. While recognizing or creating categories is a useful skill in conceptual work, being able to weigh multiplicity and variety is also fundamental for balanced cognition.

In transformational diversity work, differences, whether minute or of great magnitude, are seen as user-friendly. Viewed as a resource, diversity data does not divide, alienate, or polarize group life. Rather, its acknowledgment is a measure of excellence and rigor, sensitivity and sensibility. In a civilized culture, it is problematic when anyone is oblivious to diversity literacy.

We must be able to think beyond “us and them” to achieve greater clarity and coherence in both public and private life. In the face of multiple realities, we need to openly acknowledge our ecological need for being with each other in conversation and in community. To know each other in our diversities requires working at becoming aware of significant invisible territory. Exercise A, *Circles of Our Multi-Cultural Selves*, offers one way to do this.

Circles of Our Multi-Cultural Selves (Exercise A) reveals that we all are multi-cultural, carrying more than one group identification. Basic literacy (diversity literacy) about our own multiple roles and the skills needed for role and code switching ought to inform any meeting (in the classroom or other places).

For diversity literacy to develop, abundant material (especially from lifetexts) needs to be surfaced and given scholarly weight.⁵ Diversity literacy acknowledges that the personal is powerful and cannot be seen simply as private or irrelevant since projection and splitting are such potent forces in group life, operating covertly as well as overtly.

One way to mitigate the dynamic of projection that gets going in group life with visible diversity is to surface some of the invisible diversity. This requires the skill of self-disclosure and structures which invite its thoughtful practice. It also requires an understanding and tolerance of turbulence and dissonance. Group life and basic learning, like life itself, are often unsettling, i.e., not safe. Learning theory, in fact,

has long taught about cognitive dissonance as providing a vibrant opportunity for new learning to occur.

GROUND RULES USEFUL

It has been my experience that diversity literacy can be well-seeded by establishing ground rules which encourage productive conversation, good for the growth of all, due to a *balance* of listening and speaking. One way to promote more balanced thought and talk, if numbers permit, is to give all who are present the opportunity to speak briefly, in turn, around a circle. In seminar conversations led by SEED leaders in public, private, and international schools in over 30 states and in 10 other countries [42 states and 14 other countries as of 2015], many have found ground rules to be useful in guiding groups of concerned teacher/citizens into productive discourse about many kinds of difference.⁶

Some Ground Rules... to help good SEED-ing happen

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1. Speak for yourself. Use I-messages. Be aware of your own “politics of location,” to use Adrienne Rich’s phrase.⁷
2. Listen to understand.
3. Share the air-space when taking your turn around the circle and in other conversations as well; i.e., tend to your own balance of talking and listening.
4. Practice the discipline of the circle, listening and waiting your turn, knowing you can engage in conversation (cross-talking) at other times.
5. In a circle, there is always the right to pass, i.e., to continue listening.
6. Be attentive to the various roles of silence—in talking circles, in various types of conversation, indeed in public life and media coverage.
7. Handle with care—confidences that are shared in a specific circle, context, or conversation.

SEED conversations are not intended to create consensus or to impose political correctness. Rather, they foster authentic community-building which can be related to the “E Pluribus Unum” motto. I join with others in emphasizing that a common ground of “unum” cannot come to be without the genuine process (and often painful unpacking) related to the multiplicity and variety implied in “pluribus” (Banks, 1991). Certainly, a democracy is worthy of the work involved in developing what we can now define as a form of literacy—*diversity literacy*.

Teaching about power and systems in society as well as skillfully surfacing invisible diversity can significantly advance the diversity literacy of individuals and groups. Certainly we will continue to feel the effects of diversity, visible and invisible, on us

as individuals and as groups. The challenge is: how to make the best of the situation, which is not the same as a quest to keep things smooth.

Without fundamental diversity awareness, adequate ground rules, and some illuminating theoretical frameworks in place, meeting agendas (in school classrooms and plenty of other places) often get sidetracked by powerful diversity issues which erupt overtly or create underground turbulence. By now, diversity as it manifests itself in the variables of individual identity is so far out of the closet in American society that it can never be completely locked back in. Furthermore, the natural world's ecological structure (as well as the varieties of human cultures) informs anyone who is willing to notice that diversity is not the enemy. Diversity is a fact of life to be acknowledged and worked with. Diversity is a complex given. What we make of it depends on our diversity literacy. Diversity literacy does not imply that commonalities don't exist, but does insist that commonalities are not the whole picture. In other words, to only see commonalities is not to see accurately.

My professional development work with the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum over [30] years has made me increasingly aware of the need for the "flashlight" of diversity literacy to shine on areas of group dynamics where people regularly lose their way because they are frustrated without adequate ways to think or act.

My observations of and experiences in classroom teaching, professional development, and community life have shown me that certain strategies and skills can lead to greater effectiveness in the work of groups over time. Rather than settling for attending "the same bad meeting" over and over again, observing predictable and distressingly incoherent dynamics of group life, I am committed to teaching directly about diversity literacy in ways which will enable more successful democratic conversation and community.

We need to develop a public discourse capacity which encourages sensible thought rather than driving our talk into polarized corners. Beyond the shallowness of knee-jerk fear and cynicism await the rich depths of diversity—if we can invent common language astute enough to mine such wealth. Ann Chapman and others have described the binary oppositional aspects of the English language (1991). For instance, many verbs in English function like "on/off" switches rather than "dimmer" switches, so we who speak English tend to think that way. The many who are bilingual in our society may hold keys to unlock the limitations of those of us who are English-only speakers. As a language arts teacher, I am interested in helping to invent contemporary discourse which can take our society beyond polarizing impasses in our talking and thinking about diversity.

THE EVADED CURRICULUM

In developing my thinking about diversity literacy, I am indebted to the concept of “the evaded curriculum” found in the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Report on *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (Bailey et al.) and to Peggy McIntosh, one of the co-authors of that 1992 report from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women [now Wellesley Centers for Women]. The report reveals the degree to which fundamental matters of human life such as power, gender, race, and sexuality have not received rigorous attention in American schools. Such evasion obscures the existence of these elements of life and ignores the developmental needs all students have for intellectual and emotional competency in them.

I contend that all students need diversity literacy to be able to deal, individually and collectively, with the pervasive influence of group contexts in their own lives and in the society. Not to teach diversity literacy is to collude with the crudeness of diversity illiteracy, allowing violent projection and splitting to implicitly school American society.

Exercise B, in mapping Segments of Self-Knowledge, invites the critical examination of authority as well as insisting upon the need for humility—as part of the process of developing diversity literacy. The authority rooted in personal experience is tempered when one is aware of the segments of unknowing which also exist within any self. The authority granted by any individual’s location in the world of experience must be coupled with humility because anyone’s sphere of DON’T KNOW that I DON’T KNOW (DKDK) is significant, a segment to be reckoned with indeed.

While Exercise A reveals an individual’s multiple identities (which come into play in any group situation) and Exercise B reveals the need for a balance of authority and humility on any individual’s part, neither of these exercises is to be understood apart from cultural systems which project unequal patterns of relating upon all of us, in varying ways. A critical consideration in relation to both exercises is to note the politics which exist between certain people’s blind spots and whatever societal power (or lack of it) is projected upon them (or not), or held by them (or not), in any given context. About such complex tension, Deborah Meier has written, “The odd combination of hubris and humility essential to intellectual work is tenuous, a fragile balancing act, but it’s within the grasp of all of us” (1995). In a 1988 essay, I suggested the image of school curriculum as window and mirror as a way of conceptualizing its need for balance.⁸ Here in this essay, I push once again for balance by insisting that, given the complexity of any lifetext, authority and humility must be in balance for the self to function at optimal capacity in a group context.

AN EXAMPLE OF NOT KNOWING THAT ONE DOESN’T KNOW

In the late 1970s, I was teaching in an urban public high school in New Jersey. As a white woman in that situation, I was in the racial minority. One day toward the end of a semester, a black male student came early to class to ask whether I, as a white woman raised in a Christian home, could explain to him, given that he too had been raised in a Christian home, how it could be that any parents would actually teach their children to hate black people. In his sixteen-year-old Christian heart he found

this hard to fathom since, as he declared in the quietness of the classroom before others arrived, he had been taught by his parents “to love everybody.”

In the next moment the classroom door was opened by a buddy of the questioning student. The buddy proceeded to yell, “Did you see all those faggots on TV last night?” (It was June and gay pride marches were occurring.) The self-proclaimed Christian student spontaneously blurted back at his buddy, “I hate faggots; I can’t understand why they put them on TV!” Then, vehemence spent, his eyes swung back to me, remembering where our conversation had been. What the sixteen-year-old student said, in that learning moment, as he was forced to bridge the internal boundaries between what he KNEW, what he had just declared he DIDN’T KNOW and what had erupted that he DIDN’T KNOW that he DIDN’T KNOW was: “I guess I have something to think about myself, don’t I?”

The competency displayed by that young man in that classroom moment and witnessed by me is one that school curriculum ought to develop rigorously. Part of becoming educated ought to involve the development of the ability to stop, in any given meeting, and reflect upon a dissonance that has arisen from one’s own depths.

Clearly, dimensions of identity, such as those evident in the example just given, enter into the life of any group situation in profound ways that often go undetected and seriously complicate communication. In the SEED Project, we have found that certain exercises, such as the two given in this paper, whether their data is reflected upon privately, shared with one other person or with a larger group, offer a way to bring to the surface in any meeting or classroom how much diversity (often invisible) exists within each person as well as within any group of people. The discourse emerging from more conscious attention to both commonalities and differences serves to ground subsequent tackling of agenda items of any nature very differently than traditional small talk.

ERUPTIONS OF THE EVADED CURRICULUM

Two other incidents from my public school teaching illustrate the need to address the evaded curriculum and to teach about diversity literacy directly. These incidents occurred in the early 1990s in a suburban New Jersey high school. Racially, the students are white, as am I. The first incident took place in September on the third day of a class when I told a young man in the front row to turn around and pay attention. He replied, loud enough for students on each side of him to hear, “Don’t mess with me; I do to women what Mike Tyson does to women!”⁹

How I as a female teacher chose to handle the sexism of that student response was related to what I KNEW and what I KNEW I DIDN’T KNOW (yet) about that particular young man. My response was also related to what I KNEW about violence against women in the culture in general.

In that classroom encounter, I was aware of the power located in my professional/authority self and of the projection operating upon me personally/generally as a female teacher. The violence embedded in that young man’s verbal jab affected how I selected curriculum content for the whole class.¹⁰ What that one student blurted out informed my thinking about how to manage that particular community, over time, given the need for me to promote cultural change—while simultaneously functioning as a cultural maintainer, given my teacher/power

role in relation to those students. As a white woman teacher, I found myself in a complex situation as the evaded curriculum blatantly manifested itself in my classroom.

A second incident from that teaching situation also involved the variable of gender. Midway through the school year with the same class, a joking remark was made by another male student. “Hey, have I got a riddle for you, Style,” he said, invitingly, after winter break:

Imagine that there’s a quarter lying on the ground and the following walk by: Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, a dumb woman and a smart woman. Who picks it up?

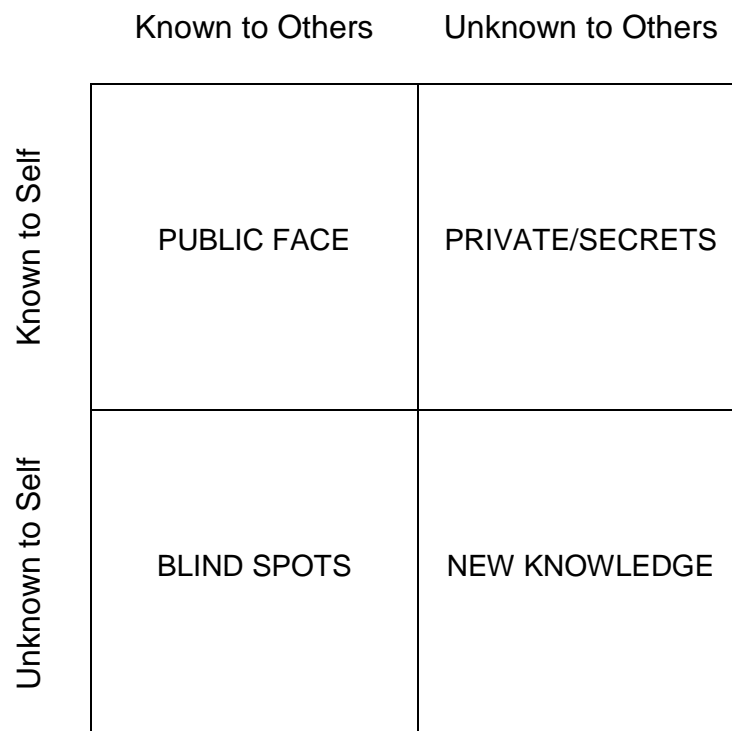
The answer, the student proclaimed with a smile, is:

The dumb woman—since there’s no such thing as Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny or a smart woman!

My location in class had moved from being seen as an (acceptable) target of violence to being accepted (and invisible). My student’s sexist dismissal of smart women led me as teacher to create a joke unit which examined what was embedded in jokes submitted by all students. The unit insisted that they examine, intellectually and emotionally, the content of their own self-selected joke curricula. The *evaded curriculum* was confronted by this unit. To teach diversity literacy and critical thinking, student jokes became class text, with me as teacher exercising my professional authority, insisting that my students attend to all three segments of their self-knowledge: what they KNEW, what they KNEW they DIDN’T KNOW, and what they DIDN’T KNOW they DIDN’T KNOW (Exercise B). I also insisted that they pay attention to the Circles of their own Multi-Cultural Selves (Exercise A). As they became more aware of the multiplicity in the room, we could talk as a class about the faulty logic of flat “projection” and simplistic “splitting” which was operating in our midst. I also insisted that they face up to overt assumptions of superiority based on categories such as gender and race.

THE JOHARI WINDOW

One useful framework for developing diversity literacy is that of the Johari Window (Luft, 1970,11-20). Groups can exert a powerful pull over individual members, often outside of their conscious awareness. “Involvement in a group evokes the social paradox that is known as the self,” according to Linda Powell.¹¹ Groups can be a tremendous source of information, to the extent that we are prepared and willing to learn in them. Joseph Luft used the Johari Window to visualize the opportunities for learning that exist in group membership, as the following version¹² indicates.



Fundamental to lifelong learning is the clarifying and extension of one’s Public Face in various settings which, in turn, leads to greater understanding and coherence within/across all the quadrants of the self as theorized by Luft. Being willing to learn about blind spots, responsible self-disclosure, and the development of new knowledge via interactions with others are all basic to diversity literacy.

During staff training for the 1994 New Jersey SEED summer workshop, Linda Powell drew the circular illustration found in Exercise B as another way of highlighting the elements in the Johari Window. Three internal segments of knowing are differentiated in that illustration: K, KDK & DKDK. A listing of what one KNOWS (K) about any given content area and what one KNOWS that s/he DOESN’T KNOW (KDK) can be used to surface data related to any group task. The segment containing what one does not know and DOESN’T KNOW that s/he DOESN’T KNOW (DKDK), is obviously left *blank*, though this is most often the area where breakthrough eruption/learning occurs.

Simply labeling one of the segments within individual self-consciousness as a *blank* proved to be very useful during the New Jersey SEED training. We found that naming the blank (*that there was a “there “there*) illuminated group process, since some dynamics, inevitably, emerged from the DKDK segment, from within one or more individuals in the group. The knowledge potential contained by DKDK is tremendous. Public discourse, inside and outside of schools, suffers from our not being able to talk openly about the DKDK factor operating in group life.

AUTHORITY AND HUMILITY

Diversity literacy demands self-knowledge about internal segments and commitment to bridge them—sometimes, with the help of others. To attend to balance and equity in any group, an examination of participants’ K and KDK areas of knowing can be conducted so as to assess the operation of democratic authority and humility. Diversity literate individuals in a group (aware of itself as an entity) have the capacity to acknowledge the (hidden) effect of DKDK on any task and on each other.

Unfortunately in many meetings, the authority of some is arrogantly over-reaching (sometimes with intention; other times, oblivious to segments of knowing and unknowing within the self, their own included). On the other hand, given the operation of systemic inequity, the humility of others is exaggerated way out of proportion (sometimes by projection; sometimes by internalization or as a survival strategy). Adrienne Rich has named these dynamics as “the politics of location” (1986).

For example, in many discussions of the problems caused by dealing with race and gender, soft-spoken folk will declare their concern—with the disclaimer that, personally, this doesn’t involve them. When our culture is more diversity literate, such “fish” will be less ignorant of the “water” in which they too are swimming. People will notice early and study in school about *everyone* having gender and race placements which deeply affect their experiences of life/water.

The purpose of diversity literacy is not to blame anyone; but instead, to reveal that all of us are born into cultural systems which position us differently. Eventually, it will become common knowledge that fish who fit the mainstream are often the last to know its elements even though they have benefited mightily from its currents.

Roberts’ Rules of Order are not sufficient to help groups manage the dynamics of authority and humility addressed in this paper. But surely, given the prevalence of their operation in contemporary life—within classrooms and other places—there ought to be a way, a way of diversity literacy, which helps to foster coherence out of such regular occurrences. My hope is that diversity literacy ground rules, i.e., commonplace cultural etiquette, will eventually come to be seen as an efficient way of promoting democratic order by enabling public talking and listening which is capable of productively handling differences.

COMPETENCIES OF DIVERSITY LITERACY

One competency of diversity literacy is the ability to move, by way of intelligent self-reflection, between the circles of our multi-cultural selves (Exercise A). A second competency is the ability to monitor the balance of one’s own authority and humility. Exercise B provides the opportunity to *list* what one knows, and what one knows that

one doesn't know, and to note the vast sea of DKDK simultaneously. The intellectual rigor and emotional courage needed to face this unseen sea should not be underestimated.

In referring to human beings encountering one another in classrooms and in other places, South African playwright Athol Fugard once said, "I am talking about the living of life at the most mundane level and what I am saying is that at that level—at the level of our daily lives—one man or woman meeting with another man or woman is finally the central arena of history."¹³

I would maintain that individuals dealing authentically with the diversity within themselves and with the segmented nature of their own knowing also face a "central arena of history." The degree to which individual incoherence exists in those participating in any meeting often affects the degree to which group interaction can or cannot proceed to deal coherently with any content. Alas, diversity illiteracy which manifests itself in floundering and incoherent public discourse is visible in many contemporary situations. For instance, the amount of hate talk roaming the land is a virulent manifestation of projection and splitting run rampant. But I believe that it is possible to create conceptual bridges and to offer intellectual frameworks so that citizens in a society will have diversity options other than, for instance, suspicion and fear which can escalate so quickly into fighting and violence.

THE PROCESS OF BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN GROUP LIFE

Certain folks' position at society's margin due to their race, gender, or another variable means that the knowledge of society's power (to exclude) is clearer to them. For many, basic survival has depended on their developing what I'm calling their *diversity literacy* (in spite of and because co-education and integrated education have avoided dealing with this aspect of intelligence). Consequently, these folks, wise to systemic inequities, end up serving in many classroom/meetings as translators or bridge builders between so-called central concerns and marginal ones. The diverse elements within (so-called) marginal groups, however, often remains invisible, thus limiting the overall development of diversity literacy.

Having the role of *bridge* projected onto anyone permanently is problematic.¹⁴ Some end up carrying the responsibility while others are absolved. This very split can sometimes occur with a designated diversity position in a workplace; when, unfortunately, the importance of everyone becoming diversity literate is obscured. This paper's attention to the basic competencies of diversity literacy means to illuminate conversations, wherever they occur, and to insist upon everyone doing *diversity homework*. The skills/capacity needed for external bridge-building work are first honed/developed internally. However, since this is the territory of the evaded curriculum in schools, the adult population is, at present, very unevenly educated about the existence of the domain of diversity literacy.

DIVERSITY LITERACY FOR ALL

Until now, education in diversity literacy has happened clandestinely, for survival, in a society which deeply depends upon its exercise even as it devalues its practice. The (subject) matter is profoundly political, capable of altering the balance of power in

any given classroom/meeting. Some, whose self-interest is served by the status quo, do not wish society at large to become more cognizant of such dynamics.

I find Audre Lorde's words about difference instructive: "Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged... We have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation... But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (1984). Lorde's words resonate with a quotation attributed to Simone de Beauvoir: "It is from the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting." The revolutionary potential of diversity literacy (in relation to the variable of gender, for instance) is suggested by Muriel Rukeyser's naming in "Kathe Kollwitz," a 1968 poem, that if even one woman told the truth about her experience, "the world would split open"

Most year-long SEED (Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity) seminars involve teachers and take place inside schools. Others involve community parents having their own diversity conversations. In terms of diversity, schools face the challenge of managing curriculum content in a society full of what scholar Michelle Fine terms vast "communitarian damage."¹⁵ Therefore, hand-in-hand with overt curriculum and pedagogical examination is the need to create a (learning) community which can harbor the co-existence of (some) change and (some) continuity. It should not be surprising that the task is both daunting and rewarding. Whether institutions and individuals muster the energy to undertake it can be analyzed/examined in part with regard to their "politics of location."

A CONCLUDING EXAMPLE: TEACHING DIVERSITY LITERACY

In the fall of 1994, a white suburban elementary principal in New Jersey hired a new head custodian, a Hispanic man. She personally took him to each class in the building to introduce him and to field questions and comments from students about how he could best serve the school community. The last class they visited was the kindergarten; there, a five-year-old boy raised his hand and said, "I want to know why he has the keys to our building when he's a black man."

In the face of that moment, the principal reached back to a conversation she had had with two principals of color during a year-long SEED seminar for principals (sponsored by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and co-led by Peggy McIntosh and myself). These principals had been discussing how they made skin color an overt emphasis of the school curriculum as one way of combating society's black/white racism. Though she had been interested, at the time the principal thought that such curriculum attention was probably not relevant to her predominantly white school population.

However, in the face of the little boy's question, the principal asked everyone to stand and join hands in a circle (a learning circle informed by diversity literacy) so that they could examine their shade of skin color compared to that of the person next to them. This led to an on-the-spot vocabulary lesson about which words accurately described the various skin colors. The many shades of "white" were given names, and, in the process, the "almond-brown" skin tone of the Hispanic custodian got seen

as part of the circle. The principal also explained to the children that the new janitor had the keys to the building because of his role as head custodian. He would not have been hired for the job, she told them, if he was not a trustworthy person which, she agreed, he needed to be in order to have the building keys.

The kindergartner's question reminded the principal that color-awareness exists in every classroom. America is a very color-conscious culture. School curriculum in the United States which is unable or unwillingly to deal forthrightly with color and color diversity is far from excellent, ignoring reality. Furthermore, a colorless curriculum, like a genderless curriculum, doesn't exist. To put it bluntly, evading matters of diversity in the curriculum colludes with racism and sexism.

After the incident, the principal returned to her office and ordered multicultural crayons and rainbow packets of multicultural/flesh-toned paper so that overt attention to the various shades of skin color would now be a curricular emphasis for all the children in her school. Diversity literacy gave the principal the intellectual rigor and the emotional courage needed to turn the little boy's classroom question into productive curriculum territory. She skillfully orchestrated the self-disclosure of everyone's skin color to deal overtly with what got blurted out from the covert territory of systemic racism.

This essay does not mean to imply that diversity literacy alone will address the racism which made itself obvious in that *innocent* classroom comment. Kindergartners of all colors as well as older students need to be taught accurately about people of color throughout history who have carried a range of keys in trustworthy ways. When such historical material is not taught, stereotypes and fear of the unknown are given license to reign. The need for both curriculum content transformation and diversity literacy work is great.

[In our 30th year,] those who staff and participate in SEED know abundantly that the SEED model effectively addresses the need for diversity literacy. In monthly seminar meetings over the course of a year, adult educators speak with each other in productive ways about difficult issues that, in the schooling of most of us, were part of the evaded curriculum. When students and teachers take the textbooks of their lives just as seriously as any other scholarship studied in school, a balanced curriculum emerges, a community of learners is formed, and the capacity for diversity literacy can be developed. The cognitive skills of critical thinking and rigorous analysis that are part of diversity literacy positively influence other classroom learning. This is something to celebrate. For teachers in SEED seminars, the data is clear: diversity literacy can be taught. We can all think and behave in smarter ways about matters of diversity.

It is too late in American culture to remain on a kindergarten level of diversity understanding, to not openly teach about everyone's multi-cultural selves. When a young person projects automatic suspicion onto the person of another skin hue or sexual orientation, for example, the problem is obvious. When will we learn that differences are never going to simply melt away? They insist upon attention, in one way or another.

The memory of my African-American student's dramatic realization of his (segmented) self-knowledge inspires me to be bold in teaching about the segments within us all, including the domain of oblivion. His capacity to learn in that moment

of cognitive dissonance revealed his capacity for diversity literacy. This capacity resides within us all.

In group situations, I believe that learning about diversity is best initiated with exercises about internal diversity in order to explore multiplicities that exist within the self. Developing the capacity for such reflection will strengthen any individual's power to observe, analyze, and intervene effectively in group life.

Everyone is able and entitled to use the power that she or he holds in any given meeting or situation. Everyone's capacity for diversity literacy can be developed. Grappling with the impact of any one person doing diversity work reminds me of the old folk tale about a woman whose reputation for wisdom irked the children in her village, making them determined to trap her somehow. They went to see her with a bird in hand, sure they would be able to prove her wrong regardless of the answer that she gave to their question: Is the bird dead or alive? If she said dead, they would open their hands and let the bird live. If she said alive, they would crush the bird to death. The woman studied their hands, and her answer to the children's question feels deeply related to the homework domain of diversity work. She said to them, "It's in your hands."

To realize our internal diversity creates "flashlights" for us to use in the wider world. Imagine the collective illumination that might come to be in the crowded hallway of contemporary life with our many flashlights being used to locate keys for understanding multiplicity and power systems. The diversity ideas, proposed definition of diversity literacy, and diversity exercises in this article are intended to help develop the transformational power of shared illumination which can create communities, small and large, strengthened by an ecology, rather than a polarity, of difference.

EXERCISE A

Circles of Our Multicultural Selves

Seeing ourselves in more than one circle, dancing in between center and margin ...

Some Possibilities

family role

friendship

religion

race

workplace role

volunteer role

physical appearance

gender identity

gender expression

age

gender

ethnic group

country of origin

sexual orientation

state of physical

or mental health

school affiliation

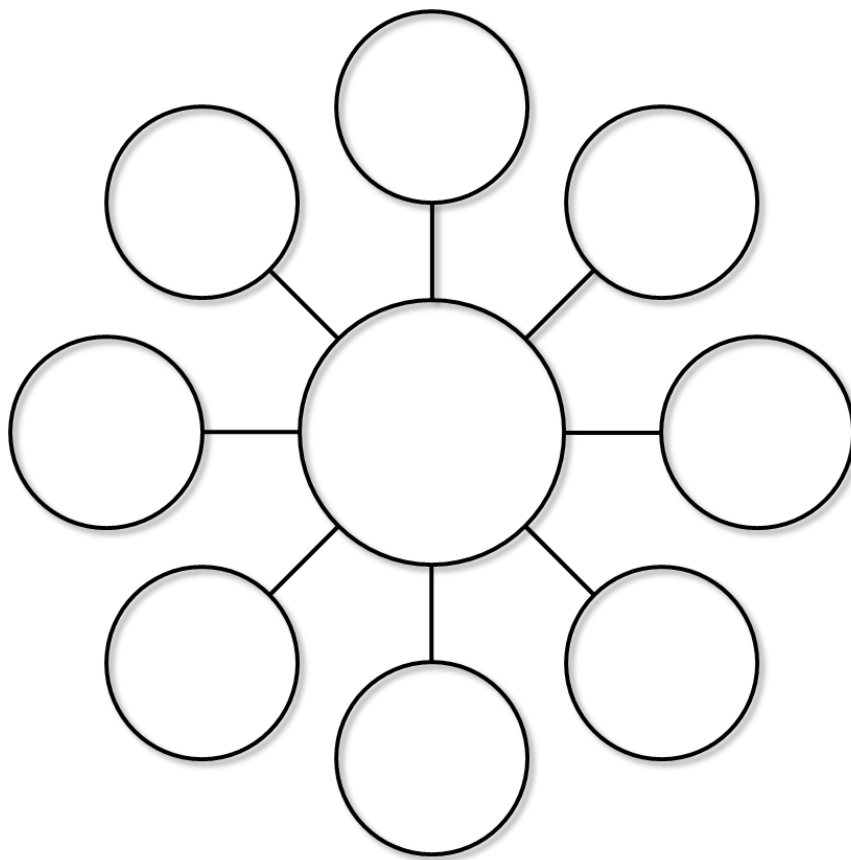
political belief/ideology

geographic location

neighborhood

language

hobby/pastime



*Naming ourselves in more than one circle
acknowledges the dance that our life is . . .
in between/within circles.*

Directions

1. Write your name in the center circle. Think about how you see yourself and how others see you.
2. In the surrounding circles, name the most salient group and role affiliations that make up the "circles of YOUR multicultural selves."

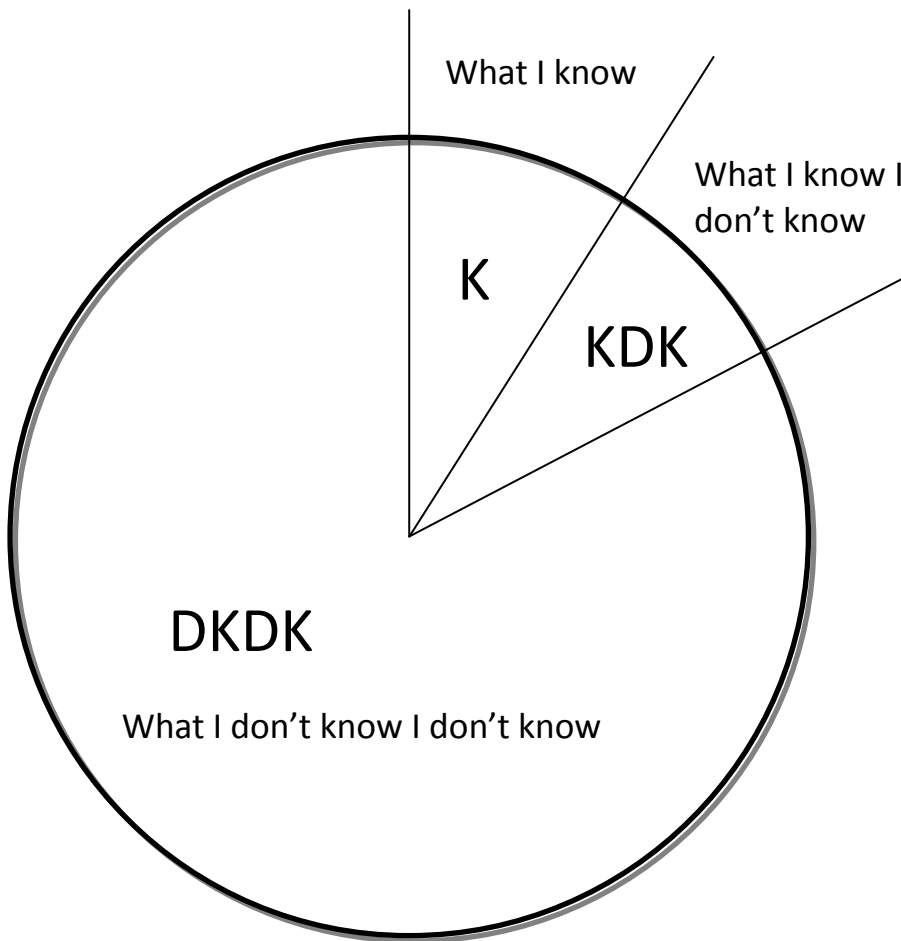
For Possible Sharing

3. If you wish, share a moment when you felt particular pride about one of your circles.
4. Also, if you are willing, share a moment when you felt particular pain about one of your circles of identity or affiliation.
5. Is there something you wish people would NEVER say about one of your circle identities?
6. Is there an identity circle that has undergone significant change—across time—for how you see yourself inside it?

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EXERCISE B

Segments of Self-Knowledge



1. List what you **KNOW** about a selected task.
2. List, about the same task, what you **KNOW YOU DON'T KNOW**.
3. Compare your understanding of the task with someone else's.
4. Think about any aspect of the task that might involve your **DKDK**.

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NOTES

¹ I recommend Peggy McIntosh's own scholarship which, due to our conceptual and hands-on work together as Co-Directors of the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum [for its first 25 years], has informed my thinking for years. Especially poignant, in relation to diversity literacy, is McIntosh's identification of the interior multicultural worlds we all carry. In her 1990 paper on Interactive Phases of Curricular Re-vision, she wrote the following words which we include in a National SEED Project Description:

The multicultural worlds are in us as well as around us; the multicultural globe is interior as well as exterior. Early cultural conditioning trained many of us as children to shut off connection with certain groups, voices, abilities, and inclinations, including the inclination to be with many kinds of children. Continents we might have known were closed off or subordinated within us. The domains of personality that remain can fill the conceptual space like colonizing powers. But a potential for more plural understanding remains in us; the moves toward reflective consciousness come in part from almost-silenced continents within ourselves (13).

² It strikes me as odd that diversity work is not more often related to family life in its various forms, given that families always have to deal with multiplicity and do so intimately and intensively.

³ All people see—and are seen—through lenses/filters which frame “others,” accurately or not, in light of the viewer's previous experience and own ideas. Even as books are regularly judged by their covers, people are regularly seen in distorted ways due to the fact that projection is often a part of perception.

⁴ My own thinking about the splitting and projection of “us and them” has been most recently informed by scholar Elaine Pagels' book entitled *The Origin of Satan* (1995) in which she invites readers, as she explains in the introduction, “to consider Satan as a reflection of how we perceive ourselves and those we call *others*... What interests me... are specifically *social* implications of the figure of Satan: how he is invoked to express human conflict and to characterize human enemies [both within and across] religious traditions.”

⁵ Sometimes the surfacing of such material remains strictly in the realm of private reflection; what matters most is that people/we become more conscious of the contours of interior diversity.

⁶ A SEED seminar consists of ten to twenty colleagues, meets monthly over the course of the academic year, and deals with many kinds of difference in the process. A fuller description of the basic SEED model can be found in Peggy McIntosh's and my 1994 essay entitled “Faculty-Centered Faculty Development.”

⁷ The reference and an explanation of this Adrienne Rich term are given later in the paper in the section entitled AUTHORITY AND HUMILITY.

⁸ “Education needs to enable the student both to look through windows into the realities of others, and into mirrors to see her/his own realities reflected back” (Style, 1988).

⁹ SEED colleagues Verdelle Freeman and Alexander Jones have urged me to weigh, when recounting this incident, how easy it was/is for Tyson's name to be *used* by a white teenager such as my student. For a complex look at Mike Tyson as a cultural icon in a racist society, I recommend African-American writer June Jordan's essay “Requiem for a Champ” (1992).

¹⁰ This display of classroom misogyny made me resolve to deal overtly with the topic of violence against women during the course of the year. For one example, when looking at the character of “Curley's wife” in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*, students were asked to consider her as a

(possible) battered woman in light of statistics and other basic information about domestic violence in the United States.

¹¹ Powell stated this as part of her instruction to the NJ SEED staff about the complexity of the/one self which, in fact, appears variously in different group contexts.

¹² Version used by Linda Powell in NJ SEED training, August 1994.

¹³ Quoted in *Time*, May 1984, from Fugard's commencement address that year at Georgetown University.

¹⁴ Donna Kate Rushin's "The Bridge Poem" (*Bridge*) is an eloquent articulation of the experience of playing a bridge role—so as to fill in everyone else's knowledge gaps.

¹⁵ I know this term from personal conversations with Michelle Fine in the context of doing SEED work supported by the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative which she co-directed with Jan Somerville from 1988 to 1993. Her published writing is abundant and full of many insightful and original namings. In relation to the challenge of dealing with the evaded curriculum, I recommend *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School* (1991).

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Note: I invite correspondence from readers as to their understanding and/or the efficacy of the key diversity concepts, the definition of diversity literacy, and the exercises. Permission is given to copy this paper and/or its exercises as long as the use is respectful, educational, and the copy carries appropriate citation. I want to acknowledge that this paper has been shaped by the thoughtful editing suggestions of Donna Crawley, Margaret Crocco, Kay Fowler, Dawn Gross, Jill Kushner, Peggy McIntosh, and Joe Russo; and also, that Linda Powell's work with me and the staff of New Jersey SEED [was] enlightening, useful, and cherished. I am grateful to the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and The St. Paul Companies for their funding of the first two years of New Jersey SEED branch training in that, in addition to the preparation of new SEED leaders, their funding made possible Dr. Powell's and my work on *diversity literacy* as an integral part of overall leadership development. The 2015 SEED website posting of our intertwined thinking is dedicated to her and the leadership mentoring she gave me.