

Equity Community of Practice Meeting Minutes --- 5-12-16

We started with lunch and checking that everyone has gotten the book. The discussion started with remarks about the NPR story shared in the morning: [What Young Men Of Color Can Teach Us About The Achievement Gap](#).

Ron mentioned that he found it very interesting and summarized the key points made in the story:

- It reports on a new report by Harvard Economist Ferguson, who diverged from prior work by actually “listening” to young men of color
- Young boys of color find themselves trapped. “they end up actually behaving according to a script that they don't necessarily subscribe to, but which seems a requirement to fit in and be accepted by their peers and maybe even by some of the adults.”
- Young boys of color often end up acting defiantly because they are trying to save face, to fit in; they don't have better strategies.
- Educators can help create a better environment where young men of color can be themselves and feel safer.
- The full report can be found here <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/aiming-higher-together-strategizing-better-educational-outcomes-boys-and-young-men-color>

We agreed on the need to create a documentation of these meetings. I volunteered to create the first document and we can all react, adding and amending as needed.

We spent the rest of the meeting reading some highlights of the preface of the book that we decided to read together, and reacting to them. The book is by Scott Page of the University of Michigan, entitled, “The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies” (Princeton University Press, 2008)

“Diversity, as characterized in the book, means differences in how people see, categorize, understand, and go about improving the world. I should hasten to add that the book's emphasis on cognitive diversity and the pragmatic benefits of diversity does not deny other dimensions of diversity.”

Two lines of discussion ensued:

- Focusing on cognitive diversity and showing its impact can be very powerful in an academic setting. It avoids discussion of good and bad and moral imperatives and the associated defensiveness.
- Multiplying the types of diversity can be confusing and a cover to avoid discussing the uncomfortable.

On the defensiveness and discomfort: Why do some feel very uncomfortable any time diversity is discussed or they are called to act on it?

- In the context of gender diversity, the first reaction is “women want to take over!” We need to reassure that “women want their voice heard.” --- although nothing wrong with their taking over, au contraire 😊
- In the broader context, we are uncomfortable when/because

- We are expected to do something about a problem we do not fully comprehend. As a white woman, for example, I may have a limited understanding of the problem, limited evidence of the fact that there is a problem, and I am expected to “act” to address this problem. → education is key.
- Research has shown that individuals in the majority, when they become advocates, have a critical role in changing dynamics.
- Bureaucracy/rules/regulations as status quo enforcers
 - There was a discussion of bureaucracy, e.g. College Constitutions, rules by which committees are selected and elected
 - These documents are often used to justify/defend lack of diversity. Rules are seen as sacred and immutable even though these rules and constitutions were designed when academia was homogeneous (no gender or ethnicity or any other diversity was a factor)

“identity diversity and cognitive diversity often go hand in hand.”

Cognitive diversity is more value-neutral and easier to discuss.

“People in diverse neighborhoods not only trusted people belonging to other ethnic groups less, they trusted everyone less. ..He was asking, do we get along? I was analyzing whether diverse teams make better mousetraps... Thus, we should expect members of diverse communities, cities, and nations to be more productive, even if they are less trusting.

This generated quite a bit of discussion wondering whether there was a cause-effect relationship. Book does not claim that.

“I have often been asked, when do distributed problem solving and innovation work? I think we’re still in the process of figuring that out, but we have some ideas. An organization must have some sense that improvement is possible, that it’s stuck or locked into a few perspectives. It must also believe that people with relevant perspectives and heuristics exist who could be encouraged to think about the problem.”

This spoke to the incentive for diversity. We have to feel that there is a problem, that we can do better, and that diversity holds the key to move in that direction.

This is something that can be operationalized at the institution level, but also within teams created in the classroom, encouraging students to work together and value and use diversity.

For next meeting:

Thursday May 19th at 1:30 p.m. - hoping that those of us teaching will be done by then.

Question as we read intro and chapter 1: “what can we operationalize from this?”

Thinking forward toward the questionnaire/guide that we will develop and use for class visits and reflections. Is there anything we can take from the material here?