UMDLI Reflections 2015

Jane E Haskell

Edges. Sharp, distinct, not rounded
Cages. Sharp-edged, distinct, solid, confining, separating, cold
Voices. Loud, grating, penetrating, judgmental, bitter, resentful, cagey, sharp-edged, cold
Faces. Sharp, wary, vacant, harried, scared, scarred
Privilege. Sharp-edged, abundant, separating, wariness, fear, scars

Edges, cages, voices, faces that infiltrate and switch to reptilian-brain fight, flight and freeze reactions
Enforced, endorsed differences.

Leadership.

Reframe.
Possibility.

Diversity leadership.
Embraceable, emergent
Apparent commonalities
Softening of the reptilian flight, fight or freeze response
Blurring of difference, merging
Trusting other with my vulnerability
Open hearts in open welcoming spaces
Smiles. Heartfelt, warm, genuine, welcome
Acknowledgement. Heartfelt, joy, warmth, emergent, similarity

Engaged diverse leadership.
Espoused at UMaine?
Yes.
Mainstream at UMaine?
Apparent at UMaine?
Not yet.
“Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged”
— Rumi

Before I started UMDLI, I liked to think I was pretty open-minded. I still do, but UMDLI made me realize I have farther to go. I can develop a more inclusive language. I can make fewer assumptions. There is more to diversity than meets the eye. Passive acceptance is not enough.

However, the discussions that struck me most were those around privilege. I think I had only intellectualized it until then; I didn’t really connect to the concept on any visceral level. Hearing how others struggled with (or processed, depending on where one is “at” in any given moment of development in life) was compelling, but it didn’t move me emotionally. What did was recognizing my own unique privilege.

I had always been told growing up how lucky I was to be born in the U.S., and as an adult I have felt this myself at times when comparing the opportunities I have had with those of women in other countries. During UMDLI I realized that I have a great privilege within my own society as well. I am incredibly fortunate to live in a place and exist in an atmosphere where I do NOT categorize myself as a “targeted identity” because I am female. Although I recognize that there are still so many inequalities faced by women, in our society and around the world, I do not personally feel the weight of them. I do not feel targeted. This is an amazing privilege, and one I think everyone deserves.
Consideration  Critic  Community

Courage  Cool  Certainty

Circles  Corrections  Community

Counsel  Conversations  Community

Caution  Change  Community

Connections  Convictions  Confidence
John Mascetta

Being apart of the 2014-2015 UMDLI cohort has been an enlightening and enriching experience. Prior to attending the retreat back in May 2014, I hoped I would have the opportunity to learn from university peers that might have similar questions and challenges in regards to where they fit within the puzzle of social justice and how to make positive change. I was pleased to learn quickly that my fellow cohort were not only open to hear my fears, questions and frustration but also to share their own. Early on within UMDLO, I felt I was heading in the right direction in defining what diversity and social justice meant to me and what contributions I could make.

The first lesson I learn is that no towards positive social change can be too small. I had shared much of my frustration and anger of how I have often remained silent when I am amongst other people that share insensitive comments that discriminates someone’s ethnic, religious, sexual and/or racial identity. I often hear the words I want to express inside my head, but too often fail to say out of the fear of conflict, especially with friends and/or family. I realized early on I was not the only one within UMDLI that experienced such struggles. Furthermore, I realized that I didn’t need to convince someone to change his or her outlook on diversity to make a positive impact, but rather providing an alternative lens is a success because it encourages empathy and other ways of thinking. Making a small splash can cause larger ripples.

I am thankful for the challenging questions that were posed to me and to evaluate my own philosophy of diversity and social justice. What areas do I need to further develop and more importantly, challenge my own biases? The fact that diversity was defined so broadly allowed wonderful and powerful conversations that helped push us outside of our comfort zones. It allowed me to ask myself and other questions that I might have had a difficult time doing before. This would not have happen if it were not for my fellow cohort members, teachers, and guests that participated in our training.

UMDLI has left me not only more confident is sharing my views in a compassionate and respective manner, but most importantly, has allowed me to take steps as a father to teach my children about diversity and social justice at a young age. These topics were somewhat taboo and misunderstood when I was a child in a lower middle class family. We were distracted from our own adversities to recognize the unquestionable privileges that were provided to us by our appearance. But now as a father and a husband with a supporting partner, I feel comfortable having conversations of privilege with our children in hopes to share ways for them to realize where they fit within the social justice puzzle.

Borrowing from Melissa Ladenheim’s 2013 reflective statement, I would like to share my views of who I am and who I will be after completing UMDLI:

Who Am I?:

- I am white
- I am straight
- I am privileged
- I am thankful
- I am spiritual
- I am doubtful
- I am a friend
- I am sibling
- I am a husband
• I am a very grateful parent

Who Will I Be?”
• I will be more vocal
• I will be an ally
• I will push myself outside of my comfort zone
• I will encourage change
• I will advocate for others
• I will teach
• I will learn

Paige Mitchell

I fully enjoyed my experience in UMDLI- which is not to say that it was a comfortable one. What I appreciate most about UMDLI was the reflective opportunity it gave us to not only look at, discuss, and question a multitude of societal injustices, but in order to really appreciate these issues UMDLI created many spaces for me to look deep within myself and uncover a myriad of issues that I’ve unwittingly internalized. This ability to be critically aware of my perspectives, and why they exist, enabled me to consider why others behave in the ways they do, and to accept other people’s faults as part of being fully human. Rather than just blindly rejecting and reacting to what I label as negative in someone else, I now know that I was projecting my own lack of understanding about my self onto others because I was not aware enough about myself, and why I respond and react the ways I do. The immersion program in the beginning was the most useful in this aspect. I came out of it a new person. I was able to notice things about myself that I have been avoiding for a lifetime. I was then able to look around me and appreciate how fully human and beautiful everyone else is.

I felt that this self-awareness/excavation was one of the greatest gifts of UMDLI. I also appreciated the many lessons and workshops about difficult subjects. The peace and reconciliation workshops were one of my favorites. It was very useful practicing looking at issues from someone else’s vantage point. I also enjoyed discussing class issues and patriarchal white privilege.

Lastly, I enjoyed my cohort very much. I’ve made many lasting friendships through this experience, and it has changed my life in many unexpected ways.

Thank you!
Debra Wright

diversity

noun  
\( \text{di-\text{ver-si-ty}} \ "\text{da-\text{vər-sə-tē}, di-"} \)

: the quality or state of having many different forms, types, ideas, etc.

: the state of having people who are different races or who have different cultures in a group or organization

I am remembering the wonderful experience of last year’s immersion into the Diversity Leadership Institute. It was exciting and a little scary to be locked away for three days with people I did not know. I also did not know what to anticipate for an experience. It was fun to stay in a dorm here on the campus where I have worked for twenty-seven years.

Then the adventure began. We began learning about each other and sharing experiences. We delved into thoughts, ideas, and cultures in depth. Our eyes were opened to new issues and other points of view.

The experience that impressed me the most was the trip to the Mosque. I was enthralled to actually be in a Mosque; to listen and learn what the people there had to tell about the Muslin religion and their way of life. Without this immersion I would probably live my life without ever going to a Mosque. I would continue to think it to be a place I should not enter or not be welcomed. Perhaps now I will search out an invitation to someday enter a synagogue, another religious place I know nothing about.

I am inspired by the prospect of becoming an “Ally as an Agent of Change.” As we are all simultaneously “dominant and targeted,” it is in everyone’s best interest to be “consistently conscious” of diversity issues. It is a privilege to celebrate the many positive advantages of living in a climate of diversity and to protect rights to be different. A college campus is the perfect place to put these practices into motion.

UMDLAC offers this campus community a wonderful opportunity. It opens eyes and minds enough to loose the fear and embrace the difference for those willing to take on the challenge and celebrate diversity.

“There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in the world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” John Calvin
Marc Cryer

My experience with the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute brought the subjects of diversity and discrimination into sharp focus and made them real in a direct and personal way. One of the unfortunate results of my years of work as a labor side attorney is that I when someone mentions a subject like sexual harassment or racism my mind naturally begins to calculate the legal strategy. What can the other side really prove? Were any laws actually violated? Are there witnessed for each element of the purported offense? I begin to calculate the likelihood that the event transpired as reported and who has the most advantageous position in terms of proving their version of the events. At the end of a day at work I come home to my own world where, of course, such things as discrimination and diversity don’t exist or are at least largely ignored. In fact, as I think is probably true for many people, my life is purposely filled with people whose opinions and values as well social standing reflect my own. For example although my wife and I do not share the same national origin or skin tone I dare say you could divide us into separate rooms and interrogate away for hours without coming up with very much in the way of serious disagreement concerning a subject that touches on any real emotion, you know things like religion and politics; the serious stuff you aren’t supposed to talk about with strangers at parties. My guess is that this is normal for any two people who are together for two or more decades. Friends with whom I have more than a passing knowledge are also very likely to have opinions, tastes, and social status similar to my own. They may or may not be white but if they are not white they are likely to Asian probably Korean and share a clearly defined set of values and social norms concerning everything from how long to stay when invited for dinner and what are appropriate subjects of discussion at work or at a social gathering.

UMDLI made me aware of the diversity and discrimination that was always right in front of me but I could choose to ignore, and do, because I did not experience it myself, it did directly relate to my job, and I am in a privileged position that does not require me to get down into the thickets of class, race and gender unless I choose to. It was especially interesting and valuable to work with other UMDLI participants and see and hear from them about their own experiences. If I had passed them unknown in the hallway I would have assumed that they were essentially like me in most ways or place them in that large category of people I see every day that is essentially “the other.” Not the dangerous other that’s another category but my race and wealth pretty much keep my out of close quarters with dangerous others. So most people I pass are assumed to be like me, perhaps minus some particular attribute like race or gender, but never the less pretty much like me “reasonable, generally knowledgeable, minding their own legitimate business” everyone else is just “other people” best avoided unless work or commerce requires otherwise. UMDLI brought out the vast landscape of subtle differences in my fellow participants that I would not have guessed existed and which added greatly to my understanding of just how different and interesting people around me probably are had I the time or inclination to know. I made human the subject of difference and opened up the possibility of positive dialogue beyond mere legal calculation or academic argument. UMDLI is an invaluable tool for fostering understanding of differences and discrimination a great training ground where participants are motivated to learn and to apply their understanding to their work and personal lives.
Kat Johnson

Writing this reflection has been difficult for me. I find it hard to believe that another year has passed so quickly… hard to give the multitude of experiences, thoughts, and feelings associated with UMDLI the attention and value they deserve… hard to quiet the noise that distracts from reflection and pause. But I am so grateful for those I have met, what I have learned, and how I have changed in such a short amount of time. I will not shy away from the challenge of trying to make sense of it all.

I joined UMDLI because I have long considered myself someone who is on the side of justice and equality. I have educated myself on issues of discrimination and stood up alongside members fighting for their rights. I wanted to know how I could integrate my passion for justice with my station here at the University.

I didn’t expect to be as shook up as I was. I didn’t expect to confront parts of myself that I am less than happy with, feeling guilty for, embarrassed of… I didn’t know I would meet such kind, diverse, open, complicated, diligent individuals who all desire to work and live in a kinder and more just world. I didn’t think forgiveness and compassion for oneself would be such a large focus of the education and work we would be doing… but what journey can begin that does not start within?

I am grateful that I can come to work and know there are people here that care. Not just for their paycheck or retirement, but to help create an atmosphere in their work and personal lives that fosters kindness. To know that there are people with whom I, in some ways, feel closer to than some of my friends that I can contact and talk to and troubleshoot with on these large issues.

I’ve been reminded of the importance of storytelling. Of having a voice and sharing it. Of the ramifications that follow the stifling or muting of a voice. How the people with power are the loudest, and how we can empower others by sharing those stories.

It’s easy to get distracted today especially for me - a white, American woman with a master’s degree working on a college campus. My privilege has allowed me to focus on bills, what I’ll eat for lunch, family and friend drama, entertainment – all of the distractions that surround us to keep us from really engaging with the struggles that others cannot avoid. UMDLI was a reminder to stay present with these injustices that I do have so much passion for. A reminder to listen to these important voices and stories. To help lift them up without co-opting for my own advance – how ever well intentioned I may be. It has given me a network of amazing individuals whose counsel I trust and will seek to remind me of the agreements we made as a cohort – which should extend outward to those outside of our fortunate group.

I am rambling, but there is so much to think through, so much to be grateful for, so much to say. I would do it again in a heartbeat – and I’d make sure I’d attend ALL the workshops (as they are all invaluable). I’d be even more open during the immersion, more venerable. I’d be less afraid to speak to my guilt and bias and privilege. I keep coming back to the quote from Nelson Mandela that was shared:

"...Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

I think UMDLI has taught me that we need to be open, venerable, available, honest, kind and compassionate – as much and as often as we can – because then and only then can we achieve our goals.
Erin Wight

When I first heard about UMDLI, I was excited at the thought of joining a group whose focus was on learning about and exploring issues of diversity. In some ways, having worked with international students everyday and lived several years abroad, I felt like I already was really open and educated about diversity. But I know that this kind of education is a lifelong learning with many facets, and there are still so many ideas and concepts that I have not yet been exposed to. It’s the kind of education that we can never get enough of, and so I felt honored to have the opportunity to be part of the group and continue my education in-depth in a safe, intimate environment.

I feel that when we learn something about the world around us, when we see things from other points of views, that we carry that knowledge like a torch and we see the world more clearly. And even though I am not always bold in conversation with others, I do feel like what I have learned will ripple out to others, benefiting those whose lives I touch and whose lives touch mine. I feel that I am able to show more sensitivity and caring to others with my broader knowledge.

As I said though, learning about diversity is a lifelong process. There are still many kinds and levels of diversity, many personal stories yet to hear with my heart as well as with my brain. UMDLI has been a good stepping-stone for me and I look forward to what the future has to bring for my personal growth.