Inclusion Again

Sherri Spelic

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I'm thinking about inclusion again. Now that *diversity* has been shunted as the desirable term to describe the aspiration of drawing people together who reflect the variety of identities and backgrounds which more closely represent society at large, some ([myself included](#)) have said what we really need, seek and should be working towards is *inclusion*. Opening doors, offering invitations, seats at tables, a mic on the stage, a space on the panel – centering those in prominent public forums from whom we have traditionally, historically heard less. OK, I can get with that.

I read [a post](#) in response to the #EngageMOOC: [Engagement in a Time of Polarization](#) which is happening for two weeks now in the middle of February. Kay Oddone argues that we can in our own small and sometimes larger circles, insure that marginalized folks who are at the table experience true inclusion, rather than serving as placeholders for someone's good intentions.

Sherri Spelic
@edifiedlistener

"But it's not just taking a seat. It's feeling confident and competent and comfortable enough to join in with the conversation that is happening at that table." Thinking about all the ways we make it tough for marginalized folks to dare speak their truth. #engageMOOC

> **Sherri Spelic** @edifiedlistener
> Engagement, participation and creating a space at the table: #EngageMOOC linkinglearning.com.au/engagement-par… via @kayoddone

♡ 11   12:56 AM - Feb 13, 2018

👤 See Sherri Spelic's other Tweets   ›

The rest of the above quote speaks even more to me and my experience: " …comfortable enough to join in with the conversation that is happening at that table. *And knowing, when the talking stops, and the faces turn expectedly, how to share one's opinion in a way that makes it able to be heard.*" (emphasis mine) Those expectant faces, yes. How they turn to you as the one brown face in the room (or the only queer, native, or poor person), hoping that you will grant them both grace and an easy way out of whatever discomfort may have arisen in the conversation.

Putting it succinctly:

Lindsay Kruse
@lindskruse

"There is a difference between inclusion and being welcome. I can be included without being welcome." Thank you @DenaSimmons for powerful talk today!

♡ 17   11:05 PM - Feb 12, 2018

👤 See Lindsay Kruse's other Tweets   ›

Allow me to broadly generalize: It happens all the time.

Kay Oddone's post reminded me of what is at stake for marginalized folks who come to the table:

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Think of all it requires of a person to feel "confident and competent" in a conversation to which they were perhaps invited but not expected to speak or contribute meaningfully. #EngageMOOC

♡ 4   12:56 AM - Feb 13, 2018   ⓘ

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Replying to @edifiedlistener

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When @KayOddone suggests that we have a real power to change the dynamics of inclusion at whatever table we are seated, she is right. And it may require going against the unspoken, yet dominant grain. #engageMOOC

♡ 5   12:56 AM - Feb 13, 2018   ⓘ

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That constitutes engagement. That constitutes changing the script. Yielding the floor to those who have not yet spoken. Listening carefully to what is then said and thinking first before responding. That's engagement. #engageMOOC

♡ 6   12:56 AM - Feb 13, 2018

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We have the power to counter the ticked box form of diversity, we can and need to practice real inclusion wherever we are. For us as educators, we can begin by incorporating more student voice and choice into our practices. We can listen to our young people when they tell us what is working for them and what's not. We don't *give* them voice; we learn to ask and listen and act on what we learn as a result. That's what inclusion looks like. It's responsive, open, ready to learn.

We tend to think of engagement in terms of output, as external actions that are readily observable, measurable even in some cases: speeches, reports, demonstrations, coursework. I want us to also recognize the power of staying quiet when someone else finally finds the courage to speak; for stepping aside when a leadership post comes open and nominating the better candidate who might easily be overlooked. Those are forms of behind-the-scenes engagement we need more of.

Maha Bali writes compellingly about the dilemma of reproducing marginalization even in our attempts to be inclusive:

> In open online spaces, opening doors is not enough.
>
> In open online spaces, an open door means easy exit just as it means easy entry.
>
> In open online spaces, we are not there on equal footing.
>
> In open online spaces, we are not equally fragile.
>
> It is everyone's responsibility to listen and care and support marginal voices. Whether or not they wish to speak. Whether or not they wish to be present. Whether or not they like what we do.
>
> It is everyone's responsibility to recognize their own privilege and to use it with purpose.

I know, I know, we're working on it. Sometimes it pays off to think small. Think next door, down the hall, at the next meeting. Act large in small spaces. Notice who's speaking and who isn't. Practice not knowing and being curious. Be kind. Welcome warmly and mean it.

We can do all those things and still run a meeting on schedule. Let's try. It's worth the effort.