A Response to Privilege and the Social Model of Disability

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Privilege is an incredibly complex topic. There are individuals who have been born with greater privilege than others. There are those who use their privilege for selfish gain, and there are those who use it to try to understand the lives of others. It may be tough for me to recognize racial privilege as a white male, but my goal is to use whatever privilege life has granted me in order to understand the lives of others.

Unfortunately, a world in which all individuals have equal privilege is far from realistic. There are many things broken in our world, and it can become a heavy emotional burden to believe the burden of responsibility to fix every issue of the world rests on one individual. However, it is important for us to discover which issues of privilege we are most passionate about, whether ableism, classism, gender bias, racism, or others, and be well informed and active within our area of interest.

As music educators, we have the opportunity to cultivate the emotions and motivations of the individuals in our classrooms. I do believe it is our responsibility to create spaces for our students to share their voice, even if that means submitting much of our time and attention to this cause. In this way we are partnering with them in their learning of who they are and how they engage with the world around them.

Cultural deficit theory is the belief that minoritized groups do not achieve in society because they lack the appropriate cultural values or because their culture is deficient in some other way (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 82). If our general standard of achievement is based on income, social status, and education, then cultural deficit theory is partially true. If our general standard of achievement is based on less

quantifiable qualities of life such as joy, purpose, and relationships, then I see many minoritized groups that have achieved in life.

Using this second definition of achievement, there are plenty of people in majority groups in the West that have a very difficult time achieving. If we hold to this second definition, the positive outcomes may include time for rest and opportunities to pursue dreams and passions as a hobby or form of employment. I would say even the wealthy lack some of these things because of their own selfishness. Whatever our belief about achievement, part of our task is to partner with our students in pursuing the goals that they want to achieve, whether wealth, better lifestyle for themselves and others, or perhaps both.

In reference to our treatment of the impaired, it is impossible for those with no impairments to know exactly the changes needed in our infrastructure to help, rather than hinder, the lives of the impaired. We need to be listening to those with impairments. They will guide us to what their communities need. Why would the unimpaired make decisions on what is best for those who are impaired? Let's give them a strong voice in our cities and communities.

References

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