Part 3. The Hole in Racial Justice: Alloys of Social Justice

This is Part 3 in a series of articles designed to encourage community dialogue regarding cleaning up our own house with regards to racial/ social justice education so we can be more effective and compassionate, both within justice-based communities and society at large.

This follows:

> *Part 1. The Hole in Racial Justice: A Love Letter*
> *Part 2. The Hole in Racial Justice: The Master's Tools Won't Build the Bridge*

Deep Diversity: An Alloy of Social Justice
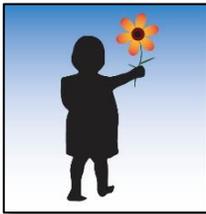
The organization I co-founded over a decade ago, Anima Leadership, became the workshop in which we experimented with retro-fitting anti-oppression principles with a psychological foundation, integrating research from emotional intelligence, social neuroscience, as well as systems change, conflict transformation, mindfulness practice and, more recently, trauma therapy.

This holistic framework—an example of what could be called a social justice *alloy*—is outlined in my book, *Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them* (2015). We've had great impact with learners through the Deep Diversity methodology both anecdotally and through actual assessments. In spite of being a small organization, we've been testing our methodology and have data[1] from work teams—over 150 leaders and 750 staff members—from organizations in both Canada and the US. The very promising results include:

- Increased buy-in as well as reduced resistance on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Enhanced ability for people to talk openly about issues related to race, identity, and exclusion.
- Improved employee engagement and positivity
- Increased willingness of organizational leaders to commit resources and develop programs to support the advancement of historically marginalized groups.

As a side note, this is another area of weakness in social justice education—there is very little rigorously tested educational methods. Although there are many accepted *beliefs* about what *should* be taught, there is very little actual *data* that demonstrates what teaching strategies are effective and in what context, how to reduce resistance, etc.

Furthermore, with Deep Diversity, we are seeing the rise of critical awareness coupled with on-the-ground behavioural change. The following chart outlines some common issues I've directly encountered in organizations, with poor interventions that maintain the status quo compared to what has actually happened following Deep Diversity interventions:

> "With Deep Diversity, we are seeing the rise of critical awareness coupled with on-the-ground behavioural change."

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[1] If you are an academic or foundation interested in advancing training/ teaching methodology, we are always looking for collaboration partners.

Poor Intervention that Maintains Status Quo	Anecdotes Following Deep Diversity Intervention
Team Member A makes a stereotyped comment about a client in front of Team Member B, who is bothered by it but does not say anything. There is no impact from diversity, bias or anti-oppression training.	Team Member A makes a stereotyped comment about a client. Team Member B overhears it and challenges their colleague's bias in a way that is clear, invites dialogue yet provides boundaries.
In spite of training on unconscious bias, the manager does not feel comfortable applying the learning to themselves and does not really raise the issue with their team of direct reports.	Taking the Deep Diversity principle of leading through vulnerability to heart, a manager goes to her team and tells them what she's learned about unconscious bias. She also asks them to help her identify biases she may have but can't fully see. A staff member comes back a few days later and invites the manager to also give them feedback about biases they possess but may not be able to see.
A racial incident in an organization hits the media, drawing public criticism. The team limps through the controversy but very little is actually debriefed as an organization. As a result, hurt feelings go unaddressed, diversity and equity polarizes the organization and no lessons are learned for next time.	Racial controversy gets into the media and the team has a very difficult but important conversation. Critical issues are raised, hurt feelings are expressed and apologies are made in the same team context. They use the opportunity to strategize about what to do differently next time.
An executive team participates in an anti-racism session with a well-regarded trainer who delivers a standard 2-hour anti-oppression session. The message received by the leaders is that their organization and team is predominantly white and therefore racist, with a script provided about how they should apologize for, and acknowledge their privilege. The executive team is both offended and triggered. No more equity work is done for the following two years.	After a Deep Diversity training, the executive team is reflective and open, beginning to understand the ideas related to systemic racism, privilege, and white fragility. They give clearance for a longer-term training program that involves all managers and leaders lasting over three years and directly impacting staff. Pre/post assessment indicates significant improvements in attitudes behaviors and outcomes of leaders and staff. Employee engagement results go up.
The person willing to identify barriers and hidden assumptions within organization that contribute to discrimination, is labeled a "trouble-maker}, and is seen as aggressive and uncommitted. The process for constructive dismissal is put into place or the situation becomes so dire that the person has to take a leave of absence / apply for long-term disability.	Organizational leaders are taught to *befriend* the voice that troubles them. As a result, steps are taken to examine how the problem might be the organizational culture, not the individual who has the courage to identify the gaps.

Deep Diversity: Critical Success Factors

We've identified 8 teaching factors that are critical for success from Deep Diversity:

1. **Build Trust:** Trust-building with educator is critical to learning.

2. **Model Vulnerability:** The educator models mistake-making and non-judgment when engaging with social justice issues.

3. **Community Container:** Relationship-building between participants is crucial to learning about identities, taking risks and being uncomfortable in order to learn as well as navigating boundaries.

4. **Psychological Literacy:** Designing learning processes that promote social/ emotional literacy, including the development of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and perspective-taking. This includes directly teaching about the brain/mind phenomenon as well as recognizing and managing one's triggers.

5. **Political Literacy:** Designing learning experiences that enhance political literacy through awareness of social identity, power and privilege.

6. **Macro-Micro Zoom:** Learning to toggle between the common human experience *and* the differential impacts of social power on groups. Both educator and learners need to develop the *emotional fluidity* to shift from individual to systemic levels, and back again.

7. **Scaffolding Learning Strategies:** The learning development model has to meet the experience and needs of adult learners, and be customized to their context. The learning should be scaffolded, building on the learners' lived experience and insights. Teaching methods should be experiential in nature with activities that engage the cognitive (head) and affective (heart).

8. **Conflict Friendly:** The educator has to be equipped with conflict transformation skills in order to host brave conversations and maximize learning for all participants. To support the conversations between learners, the educator needs to model how to befriend conflict while being self-reflexive. This can only be done if the educator has done the inner, psychological work that supports healing and wholeness.
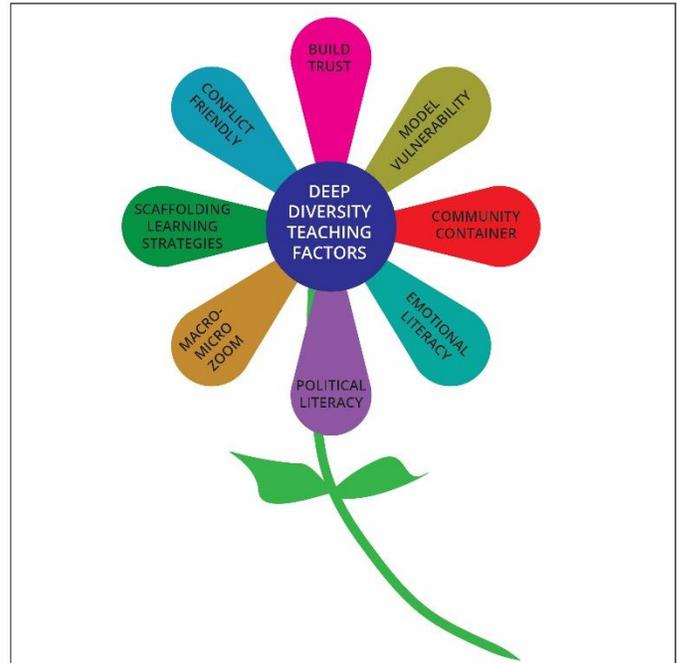
In the next post, I'll go into these factors in greater detail. I'll describe how integrating psychological literacy into the context not only benefits learners with privilege who may be resistant, but is especially important for learners who come from marginalized backgrounds. Psychological tools are critical in supporting people who most need support in the present moment, as they cannot wait until social change happens in the unspecific future. People need tools *today* to deal with the experiences of oppressive social systems in the present moment, helping nurture resilience and healing. I'll also discuss how these same psychological tools can help us help reduce another chronic problem: burn out in our ranks.

Until then,
Shakil Choudhury
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