



The World as All We View It: Teaching Diverse Perspective-Taking

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Important to creating an inclusive workplace among faculty, staff, and students is to teach how to value and routinely practice **diverse perspective-taking** (i.e., to value, be open to, and consider incorporating the perspective of others from backgrounds different from one's own). To make the most impact, begin with knowledge so reflexive and well-learned from childhood that it wouldn't even be considered as 'eligible' for a diverse perspective-taking exercise.

For example, the below exercise teaches diverse perspective-taking using (1) how we were taught the world looked and (2) how many continents there are. *Note: It is advantageous, although not necessary, to conduct this exercise with faculty, staff, or students from several different countries. Also, this exercise will be accompanied by a PowerPoint (or I'll hold up colored pictures) of the maps and Continental.gif mentioned below to help illustrate points.*

Instructions

Ask everyone in the room to do the following on a blank piece of paper:

Your task is to draw a rough map of the world in the next few minutes. First, label the continents. Second, add detail to each continent until I call "time's up." You can add whatever details you know (countries, regions, states, cities, landmarks, etc.) ...just keep writing until I say "time's up."

Reassure everyone in the room that you know it has been a long time since they've done such an exercise, but to try to invoke their middle school selves. This will lessen their anxiety if they know very little geography. After 3-5 minutes (precisely how long is up to you), tell everyone:

Now find a partner and show each other your maps. After explaining what you each drew, reflect on doing the exercise....talk about the process of drawing your map of the world. For example, what about the process was easy? What was difficult? Why did you end up with the representation that you did?

Give the pairs a few minutes to share and reflect (usually there will be a great deal of laughter, as well). When the talk dies down, ask everyone to come together as one group to share.

Facilitate a Group Discussion

1. Begin by asking each pair to "report out" about what they discussed. In response to what is said, call upon your knowledge of diversity (e.g., the literature on how ethnocentrism influence what we put on our maps, as well as how it is represented).

Often what is observed is that we put as central on the map is where we are from; often it is larger than it should be, too (i.e., Americans frequently draw North America in the center of their paper and represent it as bigger than it is).

2. Show the *Mercator* map and explain how it influences the way that we see the world. Give as a specific example how it makes us believe that South America (6.9 million square miles) is smaller than Europe (3.8 million square miles). It also makes Africa very small. Because the *Mercator* map was for navigation, it distorts the size of land masses.
3. Show the *Peters Equal Area* map and ask how it looks to the audience. They will often remark that it looks very odd because they grew up with a different map of the world. And, although the *Peters Equal Area* map gets the relative size of land masses correct, it still distorts—just the shape of land masses vs. their size.
4. Show the *McArthur Universal Corrective* map. Australia is at the top, refuting our assumption that north always has to be up. Discuss the implications of seeing this map.

The Real Continental Divide

Ask everyone in the room how many continents there are. Especially if there are international faculty, staff, or students in the room, there will be a *real continental divide* in what answers are given (often ranging from 4 to 7)!

Then, show the online *Continent.gif*:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continent#/media/File:Continental_models-Australia.gif

The gif makes it clear that there is, in fact, ambiguity over answering a question about the number of continents. What we learn from this debate is that sometimes what we believe is an absolute fact isn't always the full truth of the matter.

Reinforcing the Need to Teach and Practice Diverse Perspective-taking

In closing, stress to the audience that what we learn as factual as children can affect how we view the world, making it difficult to value, be open to, and incorporate diverse perspectives. In the final amount of time that you have, challenge the audience members to think of other information learned as absolute fact that might not be the sole 'truth' if considered from diverse perspectives.

End by reminding the audience to value, be open to, and consider incorporating the perspective of others from backgrounds different from one's own. If we all practice *diverse perspective-taking*, it typically leads to a better understanding of the world that we all live in.

Reference

Vujakovic, P. (2003). Seeing through maps: The power of maps to shape our world view. *Cartographic Journal*, June, Vol 40 (1).