

Jan Muto

Board Member Summary Report, Attendance at Equity and Human Rights Conference

March 3-5, 2017, San Jose

The opening evening session Keynote speaker, Matika Wilbur, focused on Project 562—an effort to visit every Native American tribe, photograph the people, and learn the stories of the tribes. The ultimate goal of the project is to advance curriculum so that it includes the role of the native people.

Session 1: White Privilege. Excellent session on the definition of White Privilege and how it plays out in our everyday lives. Included video example from Joy Degruy getting questioned about a check at the grocery store when her light-skinned sister-in-law was not. Engaging discussion among the diverse attendees on not just noteworthy historical events but consistent and recurring events to this day. Great resources provided. Well managed discussion which, at times, became quite emotional.

Session 2: Learning Is Not A One-Way Street. Began with a Tedtalk video of Chimamanda Adiche who cited John Locke on initiating the “African” story as a single story and the people as beasts. Emphasis on the role of power—the ability to tell the story over and over, which ultimately robs people of their dignity—and how we should embrace the variety of stories of a people. Discussion focused on what we learned from the Tedtalk, our personal experiences of not being acknowledged, and if our students have unacknowledged stories. Second part emphasized Economics and distinguished between the GDP and introduced us to the HDI, reflecting the importance of diversity in the marketplace. The use of a single yardstick defines what is important (reflecting cultural values) and ignores other variables. The HDI is from 1990 and part of the United Nations Development program. It includes people-centered policies, and ranks countries and regions by development indices. Third section focused on language and the great linguistic diversity of the world. Noted that the “colonial narrative” includes linguistic inferiority, limited intellectual capacity, lack of social complexity, and sanitation issues as important and defined by the colonizers. Common misuse of terms in the areas of: what people call themselves, inaccurate expressions, terms limited to a particular group, and insulting words or expressions.

Session 3: Learning is Not a One-Way Street, continued. Consider history from both a linear and cyclical perspective (not just one or the other) and how the propensity for linear thinking has emphasized progress versus the cyclical emphasis on balance. Concrete recommendations provided: integrate topics with relevance, meaning and significance to students; validate knowledge and understanding brought to the classroom by students; understand and honor student values; seek out indigenous mentors for self and students; become involved in the community you teach in; serve as a role model to the community by modeling what you want learned.

Some recommended resources from Session 2 & 3: “Education for Empire”, “Teaching Indigenous Students”, “Reversing Sail”