

What did you learn?

What is the place of inquiry in the rhetoric of making a difference?

Student Reflections /The Rhetoric of Making a Difference/ Linda Flower

"Initially, I was skeptical..."

To

be honest, at first I didn't think that intercultural inquiry would be an effective way to make a difference. My first take on the process was that we were going to hold a think tank, get a bunch of different ideas on what "the problems" might be, but by the end nothing would have really changed. It seemed like a lot of talk, but no real action. But, over the course of the semester, as we did more and more work on the Lemington project, my attitude toward intercultural inquiry started to change.

By the end of the process I was sort of surprised at how excited I was by the work we were doing. It seemed like it had so much potential, but that we were just getting started.—Rob Cullen.

How

was I, someone who had never been involved with a community based project and had never even worked in this particular sphere, going to offer any useful advice that could possibly change the working conditions for nursing assistants?

But as we worked with the Lemington employees I saw that my inexperience with such endeavors really didn't matter. So when you ask me what I found, I can tell you what I truly believe to be more important - that the mere act of taking interest in someone's life can help you break through any barriers that block communication, even those created by differences of race and culture.—Jon Bogush.

"The most important thing I learned..."

When I first began this class, I vividly remember being intrigued by the "hands-on element" of learning to rhetorically make a difference. I think at the same time, I underestimated how difficult and often frustrating it is to really get a root of this concept, to-in some way invoke change in whatever it is that you believe in. But what this course was able to accomplish that no other class has ever taught me, is the process of applying what you read, what you know, and what you think about to a real life situation.—Joanna Smiley.

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believe the most important thing I learned about the inquiry process was that I knew nothing about the problem. While I prepared for my interview, I took for granted that the C.N.A. I interviewed would be unhappy. I assumed that problems of low-pay, high turnover and a lack of teamwork would affect their job satisfaction. Having envisioned interviewing a dissatisfied employee, I was both shocked and somewhat unprepared to find myself conversing with someone who loved their job. It seemed incomprehensible to me that someone who worked for slightly more than minimum wage would openly declare that they love their job. Yet, this C.N.A. repeatedly declared that love.—Nick Kinsey.

*“I just feel like there isn’t much hope,” I said to Jen, my wife.
“Well, I think you should change your attitude,” was her reply.
“Start small. Try cleaning the bathroom.”*

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As I sat down to write this reflection, I was brimming with cynicism. What good is activism, I thought, when all the righteous indignation in the world doesn’t do a damn bit of good? Angry or not, most American activists are too comfortable to take to the streets.

But leave it to your spouse to put things back in perspective. “I just don’t feel like there’s much hope,” I said, face-to-face with a blank computer screen, thinking out loud about the value of intercultural inquiry. And this is what Jen meant by her response: Maybe there isn’t much of a place these days for transformational, revolutionary action. But progress isn’t out of the question. It *can* occur—in small, incremental steps; like those we took by visiting Lemington; like that I might take yet by cleaning the bathroom.

Bringing about significant changes—in, say, the working conditions of thousands of health-care workers—depends on the aggregate of several approaches: Lobbying, consciousness-raising, shrewd bottom-line appeals to executives and administrators, and empowerment from within. It’s this last item on the list that intercultural inquiry engenders. .—Alan Friedman.