

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGREEMENTS

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This is an excerpt from my book, *Ethics and Dispositions in Teacher Education*. The chapter describes the importance of disagreements and conflicting views.

### DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTING VIEWS

Disagreements are good. Differing points of view are healthy for any organization or group. Conflicting ideas provide a broader view of situations and more potential possibilities. You see more sides of the problem and generate more potential solutions. Questioning new ideas or proposals allows them to be fully vetted. This is how programs, policies, schools, institutions, and teacher preparation programs grow and evolve.

Embracing a variety of ideas, philosophies, and viewpoints has always been healthy for any organization or institution. Repressing conflicting ideas, allowing only a single viewpoint has always led to extremely unhealthy situations. Sadly, idea repression occurs too often in societies, religious organizations, churches, political groups, schools, and yes, even in schools, colleges, and universities. Imagine that. And nothing good ever comes from this. Uniformity creates a stagnant unhealthy petri dish where bad things can grow and fester.

#### *Uniformity is Not Possible*

As well, it is not humanly possible to have complete uniformity of thought. Even in the most regimented group, military organization, religious order, sect, or church - people have slightly differing views on things. Even people in groups who try to follow a literal interpretation of a religious doctrine, holy book, or political document, have slightly different interpretations. The only case in which you would find uniformity of thought would be if you project all moral and intellectual authority onto a leader or group and pledged blind allegiance. But here, you would be giving up part of your humanity. So, it is not *humanly* possible to have complete uniformity of thought.

#### *When Conflicting Views Turn to Conflicts*

Disagreements means there are conflicting views. Conflicting views are good. However, conflicting views turn into conflicts on if one party insists that the other party should have *their* point of view, or when people demand that others think about things exactly the way *they* do. Conflicts occur when one group just cannot abide a different view, so they set out to convince the other of their utter wrongness. They try to stamp all the wrongness out of the other. However, this type of wrongness-correcting exorcism is rarely successful. Why is that? It is because of the neurons.

Let me explain. When we encountered stimuli as prenatal and newborns babies, neural pathways were established and neural networks began to form. As we grew and experienced, neurons connected and formed an ever-expanding neural-dot-to-neural-dot picture of reality. We have 100 billion neurons in our human brain, so you can imagine the infinite possibilities. Every time we have experiences and gain new knowledge, these neural networks continue to expand. New learning physically changes our brain (at the neuron level).

These neural networks provide the lens through which reality is viewed. You are using them right now to make sense of what I am writing. Some might be thinking, “*This little bald man has a point. He is brilliant!*” Others might be thinking, “*This little bald man is nuts! This is nonsense!*” And still others might be thinking something completely different.

However, there are two big ideas here:

1. We each create our own view of reality based on our neural networks, which are essentially an accumulation of all our experiences. Which creates a bit of a paradox: Our experiences determine how we perceive and interpret reality, yet our perception of reality determines what that experience is. If you only have certain types of experiences, over time your perception of reality becomes increasingly data-resistant.

2. This vast tangle of neural connections forms a complex series of neural networks that will not be changed by a single pithy argument. Established wrongness is rarely corrected simply by pointing out the wrongness of it all. Yet people try. Why is that? The collective conscious and lack of alternative strategies.

### ***Collective Conscious***

Consciousness is that of which we are aware. The collective conscious is based on Carl Jung’s description of four types of consciousness: the personal unconscious, personal conscious, universal unconscious, and collective conscious. The collective conscious is our awareness of the things, attitudes, and thought frames available to us through our exposure to or experience with the collective, in this case, all the human interaction to which we are exposed.

So on the collective level, how do we experience humans dealing with disagreements today? Too often it reflects the conversations with the wrongness-correctors who try to stamp the wrongness out of others. Instead of looking for points of shared agreement or offering alternatives, the difference is called a disaster, a disgrace, a failure. The people expressing differences are called crazy, bad, unintelligent, or worse. They are isolated and demeaned. They are exposed to unpleasanties in order to leverage them into agreement. This way of handling disagreements is seen as the way to do things. People who disagree with you must be brought into line. They must be made to think as you do about things, whether it be politics, religion, racism, or phonics instruction. Differences will not be tolerated. As was said in a Star Trek movie, “*We are the borg. You will be assimilated.*”

### ***It is All we Know***

Sadly, most people do not know any other way of doing things. Some religions tell their adherents that their way is the only true way. Some groups send out hordes of official wrongness-correctors and mind-changers to convince people to stop believing the wrong thing and start believing the right thing. Some educators are led to believe that there is one specific method, program, or approach that is effective for teaching reading. They are told that research has shown that any other views on the matter are not to be tolerated. Anything else is wrong, wrong, wrong. In matters of racism, the dominant white majority culture and corresponding views and values are often thought to be right. Anything that deviates is wrong, wrong, wrong.

## **WHAT WE SHOULD DO**

How should we handle differences, disagreements, and conflicts? This will be described in the next chapter.

### **PODCASTS**

#### **[How we Should Handle our Disagreements](#)**

#### **[Respectful Academic Discourse](#)**

#### **[Meetings, Muting, and Muzzling](#)**

#### **[Soft Bullying and Microaggression Within Organizations and Academic Institutions](#)**