

# Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

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## Being Global Means More Than Traveling Around the Globe ... So, What Does It Mean?

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### Abstract

Being global means more than traveling around the globe. Being global means having a culturally proficient mindset. Having a culturally proficient mindset involves celebrating and advocating for diversity and being willing to face our own conscious and unconscious biases while also accepting the fact that some of us are born privileged. I know I was born in and with privileges. I accept that I have biases because of cultural and familial values and beliefs.

This reflection is a product of teaching a course for future school leaders on diversity in schools, my own educational and leadership journey, and my passion and desire to help create socially just educational systems and societies.

*Keywords:* cultural proficiency, diversity, equity, bias, privilege, education

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Globalization is defined as the way countries and people of the world interact and integrate. In education, we often hear or see mission statements that would say something to this effect “The mission of [institution] is to educate global citizens who...” But are we truly educating global citizens?

To me, being global means more than traveling the globe and/or superficially interacting with others from varied cultures. I believe that being global is to know and accept ourselves first and to genuinely accept and advocate for everyone else regardless of their place of residence, race, gender, age, abilities, socioeconomic status, religion, and other social identities. To get better acquainted with ourselves, we must spend time identifying our biases and work on managing them in order to create authentic relationships with people of diverse cultures (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009; Samuels, 2018; Singleton, 2015). It is essential to recognize our biases because biases trigger emotions, and our emotions initiate our actions. Authors such as Samuels (2018) and Singleton (2015) offer a variety of ways in which one can work on their biases. Please do not stop here and say, “I do not have biases!” If you are alive, you have biases whether you are conscious of them or not and whether you are willing to admit you have them or not.

When teaching the class *Leadership in Diverse Communities*, I have engaged students in talking about racism, microaggressions, as well as the concepts of whiteness and white privilege. These principles allowed for rich conversations and the realization that we are not born equal, and that from the start, the system has not been set up equally. Not being aware of these realities is perpetuating inequalities. These are challenging conversations to have

with anybody, let alone people whom you do not know well. But these conversations are crucial. As educators, we must model them and “walk the talk” if we are to serve all students, staff, and faculty/teachers.

As I reflected upon my biases after I took the Harvard Implicit Bias Test (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/>), I realized some of the biases I had prior to my first trip to Ghana years ago. I remember wondering why local people moved slowly about their day. I remember being impatient, confused, and frustrated with them. But, I soon realized that the locals were merely saving their energy, because they did not know what and when they might eat next. Moving slowly was a way to last longer while selling in the streets under the unbearable heat. Moving slowly helped the locals walk miles daily to fetch water or to go to school. Since then, I have been fortunate to work in five countries in anglophone and francophone Africa, namely Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. The countries and people that I once considered “poor” based on my exposure to media and the fact that I had never been in the field with locals, I now consider them rich. They are rich in love, faith, amazingly resilient, giving, and community-oriented. Spending a large amount of time in these five countries has been the best part of my life, and the African continent has become my adopted home.

I also had the privilege of taking graduate students to Sri Lanka. We lived in a village with local families and helped them build a community center. We did not speak the language, yet we ate, interacted, and understood the locals. I witnessed students being judgmental at first, criticizing the locals body language to being deeply touched by their kindness, hospitality, and community spirit. I witnessed students being

transformed just as I had been transformed the day I first set foot in Ghana.

Being from France, I am generally well accepted in the world, because when people hear me speak, they associate me with great food, wines, and beautiful scenery. I had encountered, however, a few unpleasant experiences—particularly when the socioeconomic climate between the United States and France was tense when France opposed going to war against Iraq, for example. At that time, the House of Representatives cafeterias stopped serving French fries. They served “freedom fries” instead. It is also at that time that a few people made fun of me and my native country, calling me “freedom fries.”

I also lived through some hostile moments when I was the principal of a school and had to make controversial decisions to serve the interests of the children. Angry parents ridiculed my accent and told me to go back home to France because I was not from the area. Although I will never claim that these experiences are comparable to what other people go through, they hurt me. Being the victim of biases *always* hurts. A few years ago, when I met my husband in Ghana and announced to relatives that we would get married that summer, very few people were supportive of my decision. Rather, friends and family, without knowing him, would warn me that the only thing my future husband wanted was a visa in order to get out of his country (my husband loves his country and his family). I was hurt and amused by these biases: hurt that people would not trust my judgment and amused by the fact that love is not black or white—it just is. Love and understanding can overturn educational, language, economic, race, and cultural differences. Unchallenged biases cause pain to others.

From my local and global lived experiences, I would like to share a few reflections for your consideration: How you view people is based on the prejudices you hold due to education, media exposure, beliefs, and norms that you have adopted consciously or not. So, change your lens! Be curious and adventurous, be courageous, be open to learning, and vulnerable to challenge your biases.

For those of us in education: Get to know and confront your biases so that you can better work with your students, parents, teachers, and staff. Be an advocate for differences. Plan field trips to serve in a neighborhood, short trips to understand another North American culture, and I urge you to consider global trips so that students can start their journey towards becoming true global citizens. One Kenyan colleague shared with me that *safari* means “journey” in Swahili, the lingua franca of eastern Africa. Being culturally proficient and becoming a global citizen is a safari. Like a safari, it requires patience. Understanding ourselves takes time. Unpacking our biases is a journey, but it is an essential one to embark on to create socially just societies, peace, and justice.

*Ubuntu* means “I am because we are.”

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