

Lost in translation: Multicultural competencies in graduate training programs and professional practice

Kelsey Moore, McGill University

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"I have nothing but my dignity, and with good intentions, they take it away"

— *English Proverb*

With these words, I began to understand the implications of social interventions and the magnitude of our actions. As the owner of a fair trade coffee collective in the Dominican Republic, this weathered worker spoke of the benefits and repercussions of social interventions- of our attempt to do "good" in this world. Foreign volunteers had entered his country and attempted to initiate new coffee harvesting practices and the building of new facilities, neglecting years of harvesting traditions and establishments he had struggled to preserve.

As a member of a social justice group from Prince Edward Island, I was given the opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic to learn about its current social and economic conditions from the country's native people. As I engaged with people in the Dominican Republic, I began to recognize the importance of interventions informed by an overriding acknowledgement and understanding of people's humanity – of the effectiveness of interventions that also take into account factors, models and evidence through the eyes of the people themselves and the cultural context in which they live.

Similar to these volunteers in the Dominican Republic, our hope as future psychologists is that our interventions will result in better solutions, in a greater public good. However, at times we hurt as much as we help and unintentionally chisel away at the dignity of the very people we seek to uplift and empower. As future psychologists, we must recognize that our practices and methods do not always translate from one setting, or culture, to another.

To preserve human dignity- the intrinsic worth of every human person, we must offer services to our clients within the context in which they interact. But how will we know that we are not unintentionally doing more harm than good? As a result of my experience in the Dominican Republic, I have realized the importance of dissolving my preconceived biases and assumptions about members of a particular cultural community and embodying a willingness to view the world through a foreign lens.

The goal of any social or psychological interventions is to help recognize and realize our common human dignity. Through making multicultural issues central to graduate training programs and professional practice, we can begin to nourish, defend and preserve human dignity across the globe, and within our own multicultural country.