

First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 2

Episode Transcript: Taryn Dipman on “Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference”

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Welcome back to “This I Believe,” on today’s episode, we are going to be hearing from Cottey College first year writing seminar student, Taryn Dipman. For her essay, Taryn is going to be discussing Cottey’s third dimension of global awareness, demonstrating empathy and respect for difference, and how choosing to enact this dimension can open your world to new cultures, friendships, and opportunities by sharing with our audience further information on global awareness and a few firsthand experiences concerning that third dimension.

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The document *Four Character Traits Associated with the Four Dimensions of Global Awareness*, created by Cottey College’s first year writing seminar, illustrates four specific character traits which a person who is globally aware possesses. These character traits include cultivating self-awareness and integrity, striving to learn, demonstrating empathy and respect for difference, and collaborating and contributing to a global society. I believe that dimension three, demonstrating empathy and respect of difference, is the most important of these traits. Not only because having empathy and respect for differences is the polite thing to do, but because it can ensure that you have access to experiences and opportunities in life. I have seen a multitude of situations in my life where empathy and respect for difference has not been shown. Today, I would like to discuss two specific instances from my life that illustrate the damage that can be done when you choose not to show empathy and respect for difference.

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My first experience with being discriminated against occurred when I was in the fifth grade. To make sure all students were being included during lunch socialization, my elementary school decided to arrange a lunch-room seating chart. Unfortunately for me, this seating chart made things much worse. I got sat next to a group of kids from my class who had experienced a vastly different upbringing from mine. My mom was a young, free-thinker who scared off our neighbors with her bookcase full of novels over witchcraft. The kids at my table had been raised in Churches and conservative households. Because of our differences, I suffered through relentless bullying. The kids told me I would go to hell and that my family was going to burn for eternity. This was hard for me to wrap my head around, because with my family, being non-religious was the normal. Eventually, the bullying came to a head when I said something offensive towards one of the Christian girls at my table. She always brought her bible to lunch with her to preach the scriptures to me in hopes of changing my mind, but today she chose to use the book for other methods. She picked up the bible, and smacked me in the head with it. I felt angry and isolated for many years after the incident. It hurt to be judged for something that, to me, was so unimportant.

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However, it has not just been on religious terms that I have witnessed discrimination. Seven years after the first example, I witnessed another incident where empathy and respect towards a difference was not being shown. I was working at a busy restaurant in my hometown with my coworker who had ADHD. One night, we were remarkably busy, and my manager, who had a history of yelling, was on another tirade aimed at my coworker. After my manager was finished yelling, my coworker went to take an order over the phone. I was standing at a table behind him helping the owner of the restaurant cut vegetables, when suddenly my boss said, "I hate it when he does that. It just grinds my gears." I looked up to see that my coworker was shifting back and forth on his feet while taking the order. I said, "oh the shifting?" looking for clarification. My boss began going off on a rant, saying that he should go over and slap my coworker and show him how to stand straight like a real man. I was in shock. I went back to my work and politely explained that my coworker was neurodivergent and that he was more than likely stimming to relieve stress from all the chaos. My boss promptly snapped and said that he did not care; that it annoyed him and my coworker should just learn to not do it, because ADHD was a made-up disorder anyway. I could not believe what I was hearing. I suddenly had an epiphany that I was helping to support a business where the management did not have empathy and respect for differences. So, that night, after my shift was over, I told my manager to find someone to cover me for my next shift, because I quit. I left and never came back because both mine and my coworker's differences were not being respected. After I quit, all but one of my former coworkers followed suit within six months. Today, the restaurant is in dire need of help, but nobody in my hometown will work there because those of us who experienced discrimination like what my coworker did made sure to tell our friends not to apply.

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These two examples, although over dissimilar differences, display why it is important to have respect and empathy for others' differences. In my example from my childhood, by choosing not to have empathy for one another, there was a wedge driven between myself and my classmate, but also between our cultures. Because she chose not to have respect for my difference, she limited herself to her own culture and missed the opportunity to learn any of the other important things about myself. Within the example from my teenage years, by choosing not to have empathy and respect for the differences of their employees, the restaurant I worked for not only lost the opportunity to learn about their employees, but they also lost their reputation, a substantial portion of their long-term staff, and profit. These examples illustrate that not only is it best to have respect and empathy for differences for the sake of other people's feelings, but eventually, choosing not to have empathy and respect for difference will lose opportunities for yourself. These examples and more are why I believe dimension three of the Four Character Traits Associated with the Four Dimensions of Global Awareness, showing respect and empathy for differences, is the most important dimension of global awareness.

Sound Attributions

Night Light, Anchor transition sound

McCarthy, Anchor transition sound