The purpose of the learning experience in the social justice class is to broaden our frame of reference for the multitude of social injustices facing many groups of people and to think critically about the information provided. This is done through learning about various forms of privilege and oppression, familiarizing us with current social justice issues as well as possibilities for advocacy. Each week a different topic is shallowly discussed providing us with a brief exposure to these areas and the theories and practices behind them. The learning experience also serves to buttress our ‘critical thinking’ as we begin to ‘analyze reflectively,’ processing the experiences from each class. Issues are presented, and topics are discussed, while the learning experience is implored by reflective writing on the topic presented. Those writings are not only our thoughts about the discussions, but also our reasoning behind those thoughts.

If there is one thing I can take away from this class away, it would be that I have learned what it means to think reflectively. Prior to commencing this program, my extent of reflecting was a few activities post service-learning projects; I have never ‘reflected’ on my life or my thoughts or about why my thoughts are what they are. I have never been intentional about thinking, or cared really to critique my own values. Reflecting is almost as strange a concept as metacommunicating, talking about talking, I’m just thinking about thinking. Throughout the past 12 weeks I have continued to solidify previous concepts and ideas. I have learned that because of the differences in background, many will not share my same frame of reference and that my idea of success is not necessarily that of others. I cannot force others to see the way I do not do nor should I expect others to conform to my ideals, I need to accept and respect the views and goals of others. I have learned that we are simply all vastly different, and that you should never assume a person’s ideals by the way they present themselves, dialogue surrounding these topics will be the only way to truly understand someone else’s perspective.

Reflecting seems to change its definition for me daily. As with the learning outcomes, I feel that understanding reflection is a process. With every experience, more insight is gained; insight into my thoughts and myself, insight into my actions, and insight into the actions of others. With each experience my comprehension and depth of what it means to reflect, grows, and in turn as do I. As a result of the learning opportunities in class, I have become more reflective and intentional, I have been exposed to theories behind practices in multiple areas of study, and I have discovered the areas of study I would like to explore in more depth. I have also learned about the areas with which I no longer want to dedicate time to, I have learned that I am privileged and that I need to not be so critical of others, and that I need to spend more time developing my own authenticity.

Since the first reflection we’ve covered socioeconomic status/class, disabilities, gender issues, and spirituality, with a little bit of race in every class. Although we may have covered these topics, I have yet to feel that we have come anywhere near gaining a substantial education on these issues. Yet I do feel that we have exhausted the topic of race. The class two weeks ago was the first time I have felt disengaged. I usually look forward to the social justice class every week, yet in the past few weeks with each passing class, I become more and more frustrated. I am tired of talking about race! I know this might be surprising to hear coming from a ‘person of color’, but I really just want to learn about/discuss about something else. I anticipate a rebuttal to that statement to be something along the lines of – well imagine the people that have to live race every day, and don’t get to just say I’m tired of it. Thus, my intention behind that statement is different than what is presented. I feel that other topics in the class are being overshadowed by individual’s constant desire to bring the discussion back to race. I want to learn about other elements and identities; I want to explore other areas in more depth, yet in almost EVERY class, that potential for learning is hindered by a constant need to talk about race. I understand that there is intersectionality with many forms of oppression, and I understand that it is important to realize that intersectionality is ever present, however when it hinders the potential learning that could be done in a given time frame, I feel that it is too encompassing and the facilitators responsibility to lead the discussion back to the topic at hand.

I look forward to the topics in the syllabus. I walk into class excited to hear new things, and actually feel like I’ve learned something. That has yet to happen for the past few weeks. I have learned though, that not everyone will be in the same place, or have the same mindset, as I will. And having the ability to say, to myself at least, which areas I would like to learn more about makes me privileged in numerous ways. I’ve thought of others in the class to be so self-centered, never thinking outside of themselves, their experiences, and what they have or don’t have. But I have yet to point the finger at myself. I’ve caught myself having thoughts of “I’ve struggled so much to get to where I am, why can’t you do the same,” “if you work hard enough you can get where you need to be,” or “if I can do it why can’t you?” But then I remember that I am privileged, despite what I may look like on paper (ethnic minority, woman, single-parent household, low SES family…etc.) and regardless of if I feel that way or not. I have had so many more opportunities than others around me; others who fit the same profile as I do, and are considered disadvantaged on paper, or even those “better than me” on paper; I am Lucky. I am privileged.

The new insight I’ve gained, and new learning in general doesn’t necessarily have to replace old learning; a balance simply has to be made with both. That’s not to say there isn’t dissonance between the two ideals, simply that it’s possible. Utilizing a concept from my Counseling Ed class, dual-authenticity, explains my current thought process. Dual authenticity is the idea that a person can be authentic with others yet remains authentic with them. On one hand I am in a very different place right now than when I arrived 12 weeks ago. I am thinking critically, analyzing my thoughts and actions as well as the thoughts and actions of others. The situations I am presented can be analyzed through a different lens and I am consistently challenging my beliefs and myself. Yet the other side that continues to remain authentic to upbringing is still very much a part of my life, one that will never recede and is in direct conflict to my life here. I’m not sure if it’s possible to incorporate both worlds, but I am doing my best to find ways where they can be complimentary to each other.

I have learned that it is possible to live with two conflicting lifestyle ideas, but that eventually I will have to learn how to incorporate and merge both of those ideals so as not to continue a dissonant struggle in my style of living. I have learned that you should also not criticize others perspectives simply because they do not align with your own and although you may feel frustrated by the thoughts and acts of others, those feelings are owned by you, and you are the only one who needs to adapt to the surroundings. I have learned that my idea of success may not be similar to the ideas of my colleagues or students and that I need to be able to provide objective advice, not attempting to incorporate my own values or push my agenda on others. I have to think about my background and how it may differ from those I work with and advise. That should be a constant in the back of everyone’s mind. All these items I have gained from the learning experience thus far. There are a few more weeks left, and many ideas to be formed with the finalization of my first semester at Penn State. Unfortunately, (as I shared in my blog) I am still counting the remaining weeks, maybe that will be a change for next semester but we shall see.