



Dr. Valerie Michaelson
Department of Health Sciences
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
Brock University
St. Catharines, Canada L2S 3A1

September 16, 2021

Dear Social Justice Research Institute,

I am writing to communicate my strong appreciation for Dr. Norris and Mirror Theatre and their work with my Health Sciences class over the 2020/2021 academic year. Under Dr. Norris' leadership, Mirror Theatre developed an entry level participatory theatre experience in which they were invited to examine their own assumptions and biases. Facilitated by Mirror Theatre (leaders? ARTors?), students were invited to examine the way their own assumptions and implicit biases shapes the ways that they interpreted first pictures, and then a scene that they were involved in creating. Our goal was to heighten awareness that we have all been shaped by our own lived histories and experiences, and that we all make assumptions and hold biases. Because of COVID 19 guidelines, this entire initiative took place online.

This project was critical to my goal of training my students to address health inequities. This is because on the Applied Health Sciences, unexamined biases and assumptions render already at-risk populations at increased threat of inequitable access to health care services and to the determinants of health. Implicit bias displayed by health care providers can translate into missed or inappropriate diagnosis and treatment decisions, and disparate and or privilege levels of care. Research and reported experiences demonstrates the emergent problem of implicit biases held by health care providers in Canada, and the moral imperative to address this in our training of students in the health sciences in the strongest way possible. And so, working in partnership with Mirror Theatre, my hope was to open a dialogical, reflective space in my classroom in order to engage my students around this topic in a way that would be transformative. I believe that happened through this project.

Larrissa DellaVentura was a third year medical sciences student who was in one of the classes, and she was interviewed in the Brock News following her experience of this activity. The experience "really demonstrated how we have our own biases and our own unique perspectives" she told the reporter. She continued: "Even as we were looking at the same pose on our screen, some interpreted it as embarrassed, while others believed the person was praying." I invite you to read more about her experience in the Brock News story that was written by Mr. Doug Hunt at the time. <https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2020/10/health-sciences-students-learn-to-confront-personal-biases/>

I received many unsolicited emails about the importance of this initiative and how transformative students had found it to be. I am grateful for this partnership with Dr. Norris and Mirror Theatre and looking forward to our continued collaborations.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "V. Michaelson".

Dr. Valerie Michaelson, Assistant Professor Department of Health Sciences, Brock University
vmichaelson@brocku.ca