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*“What do you want to play with? What do you want to do?”* – Professor Mike Baizerman

I feel I’ve taken this statement by Professor Baizerman and run with it this semester in both classes I have had the pleasure to take part in. However, this paper will not reflect on the class with Baizerman, but instead, how his class and *Baizerman Theology* influenced my time spent in the new YDL Seminar with Jerry Stein. The purpose of the seminar was to serve as an introduction to the YDL program by connecting us with fellow YDL students and staff, serving as an avenue to ask logistical questions about the program, and develop a sense of camaraderie within the new cohort. I will reflect on the class readings, pros and cons of the class, as well as how I will use my experience moving forward in my graduate career at the University.

While reading *Adaptive Leadership*, I was constantly reminded of the work I am currently doing with 4-H. Honestly, it was like reading about my job. Every illustration directly correlated to my work. The history of the organization, along with its roots in rural agriculture, keeps it from evolving and changing to meet the needs of a larger population of people. Those families that have been involved for generations would like it to look and feel like it did thirty or fifty years ago. There are of course, new families that don’t have history with the organization, and who have new fresh ideas that they would like to see come to fruition, but are often faced with opposition and rigidity. Additionally, as a staff person, I often face the same challenges. The organization is ever-evolving. My job encompasses putting in place and carrying out the

new policies, procedures and ideals of the larger organization, while trying to honor the history of the local organization. This is often a lengthy negotiation that leads to hurt feelings and people not feeling valued if not done in a very methodical and appropriate manner. I realized after reading that I have been actively engaged in adaptive leadership for many years; first, with my work in the Lutheran Church and now with Sherburne County 4-H.

Developing a mission statement was not an easy task for me. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* workbook asked some deep questions that were difficult for me to articulate answers to. I had a very hard time coming up with a list of ten things that are most important to me that I live and love for. I also had a hard time reconciling the fact that my work with 4-H rarely fills my soul, except in situations where I get to work directly with kids...which is few and far between. The mission statement I came up with is very simple, and I think will help carry me through grad school.

*I will strive to fulfill my creative voice and use that creativity to positively influence the lives of those around me. I will strive to be up-front and honest in order to help others reach their full potential. I will always be who I was created to be and not be influenced to be someone I am not.*

The *Strengths Based Leadership* reading and assessment was not my cup of tea. I have taken the assessment previously while working in the church, and there was a lack of follow through. The knowledge wasn't used. Additionally, the assessment feels sort of like a horoscope; very general in order to work for a broad audience, and I feel like it stuck me in a box with boundaries, which often feel very claustrophobic for me.

*Salsa, Soul and Spirit* addressed an interesting enough topic about sensitivity to diversity and cultures, but I felt like it took a simple concept and drew it out much longer than it needed to. It did, however, help to get me in the right head space to actively participate and feel very engaged in our session with Dr. Ross, which was one of the highlights of the class for me. I don't claim to be all-knowing, or an expert on diversity and inclusion, but it is something that resonates in my soul. So much of our existence can be traced back to the "class" we grew up in. As a white, middle-class male, I am afforded many rights and privileges that countless others are not. The fact that I am in graduate school can be traced back to my roots in a white, middle-class suburban home, with two parents who worked to provide for me and valued my education. I feel very lucky to have this new opportunity, and feel like it is my responsibility to make sure that others are allowed the same privilege, no matter their background. The activities with Ross helped reinforce this idea, and further motivate me to do something to "change the world". Sounds like a cliché, I know, but I think I am on the road there! I have never been afraid to dream big to make change for a more just world.

The greatest value of the seminar for me came through the development of relationships with others in the cohort. It was wonderful to come together and learn about each other. It was moving to be a part of a group that was willing to share some intimate life details and feel comfortable enough around each other to be vulnerable when sharing. The authenticity of this group will be an asset to us as we move forward in the program. When I started, I knew that I would have my fellow 4-H colleagues to lean on for support, but this seminar helped develop relationships with so many others that I couldn't have imagined. It has been enlightening to hear about Youth Development in contexts that I am unfamiliar with.

The other component I feel was most valuable were the speakers. The two I most connected with were Dr. Ross and Anne Phibbs. Dr. Ross' activity about diverse backgrounds was very engaging. It was very surprising to see where people placed their dots when identifying their influences. Again, the "class" I was raised in was very prevalent in my mind during this activity. I feel like what class we are born into is paramount to any other influence we have because it determines what exposure we have to the world, religion, education, etc.

As a gay man, Anne's presentation hit home for me. It was wonderful to hear more about the Office of Equity and Diversity, and that I am part of an institution that places value in equality and inclusion for all people. One of the stories that resonated most with me was one she told about being a support to someone dealing with their sexuality in outstate, rural Minnesota. I realized it could do the same for me given my geographic location. I have since been in contact with the OED as I work on my research on accessibility of rural gay men in MN to support programs and systems.

The only real criticisms I have of the seminar are minor. While I understand the idea behind the Friday afternoon time frame, as a commuter who works, all I want to do on a Friday afternoon is go home and veg out. I also would have liked to participate in some of the field experiences that were discussed initially. I learn better when I am immersed in a learning experience, rather than in a classroom setting listening to a speaker. More discussion about the portfolios we are to create as well as our final field experience would be areas I would have like to delve into further as well, and are still somewhat ambiguous for me.

Overall, I feel like the seminar was extremely valuable for me as a new graduate student. The development of relationships with colleagues, fellow students and faculty will serve as

useful tools during my tenure. Helping define some of the course requirements has helped me feel less stressed, and being ushered in to the program and graduate school with an experience where it was okay to ask lots of questions, and not be the only one who felt lost and in need of guidance was comforting.

The seminar and Everyday Lives of Youth class have given me a lot to “*play with*” and have helped me refine the focus of my educational course. I feel motivated and energized to “*do*” a lot while I’m in grad school. I am excited to see where the journey leads!!