
Preface

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going the other way.

—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859/1993, p. 1)

Change has come to America,” Barack Obama said in his presidential victory speech November 4, 2008. Those words asserted hope and dignity and invited the country to join in a contemporary state of compassion and tolerance. Like many Americans, I joined in the hope that this was a turning point. Having spent most of my life wishing for a fair and balanced nation, this moment in history seemed to signal change had indeed come.

Eight months later, the hope has not died, but brutal reality has returned. Within the month I begin to write an optimistic book about expanding cultural consideration in our school counseling programs, violence breaks out across the country, seemingly random yet deliberate in the message of hate spewed among the bullets that take the lives of dedicated individuals doing jobs in sacred places.

Topics of cultural diversity, ordinarily second nature to me, became leaden with the sadness and pointlessness of these acts of domestic terrorism. At the root of each, there was a commonality: *bias* and a disturbing lack of *consideration* of others.

So, I took a deep breath and a step back and tried to remember what it was like 30 years ago when I began this work. I took another breath and a few more steps backward and remembered what it was like when I was in my teens and another nonwar war was raging on the television each

night. One more breath and several more steps and I remembered my first day of school, holding hands with a little black boy as we skipped around a May pole on a California playground. He asked quite politely, "How come you have those scars on your face?" and I replied honestly, "I don't know." I asked him, "How come your hands are a different color on the inside?" and he shrugged and said, "I don't know." Those innocent, *considerate* questions bonded us. We may not have known the answers, but our nervous curiosity had been dissipated by stating the obvious, asking questions, and accepting that some things just are what they are.

Lately, we seem to have lost our capacity to be considerate, to be "thoughtful of the rights and feelings of others" (*Merriam-Webster's*, 1973). The word "empathy" has even caused dispute—as if it is a bad thing to be empathic in our assessment of judicial right and wrongs. While our counseling office is not a courtroom and we are not judges, we do make decisions each day based upon the evidence put before us by our students. If we lack a piece of evidence or the ability to ask the right questions, we cannot adequately do our jobs or make a judgment about what course of action to take or intervention to enact. Empathy is the basic tenet of all helping professions. Without it, we are robotic and rigid; with it, we are human and humane.

Culturally Considerate School Counseling: Helping Without Bias is written to impart a simple message of acceptance, consideration, and the importance of empathic understanding of student individuality. The obvious will often be stated, questions will be asked of the reader, and ways in which to be a more culturally considerate counselor will be shared through research, case vignettes, tested strategies, and a new paradigm for professional diversity development. Helping without bias also requires self-reflection, the willingness to grow personally and professionally, and a desire to consider our differences as a meeting point for considering individuality in our student clients.

Change has come to America, and change can come to the classroom, the counseling office, and the school community. As in *A Tale of Two Cities*, change brings the best of times and the worst of times. I choose to believe we have everything before us.