

My Personal Bias Statement

Selma Hageleit (Smith)

Historical Context

My names is Selma Smith (married name) but still go by Hageleit. I was born in Burnaby, British Columbia in 1977. I am 43 years old. I am first generation Canadian born to immigrant parents. My father was a German refugee who came to Canada in 1958. He settled in Manitoba and later came out further west to work. He was a carpenter. He had a very short first marriage to German woman and they separated after a year. After my father came to BC, he met some other Germans who also emigrated to Canada and they would go on yearly road trips to Mexico in the early 1960s. He fell in love with Mexican music and culture and met my mother in 1964 on the west coast of Mexico. There is 20-year age difference between my parents, but they have made it for 55 years marriage thus far. My parents have no more than a primary school education. I feel so fortunate to have spent half of my childhood growing up in Mexico and when I was living in Vancouver, attended inner city schools where I received amazing care and wrap around support. I was identified as an Indigenous student and received a lot of teachings about indigenous cultures in a pull-out model. I did like the small group teachings but later on realized I was not learning about my mother's ancestry. Later towards the end of elementary school, the school realized that we were Hispanic from Mexico and my brother and were removed from being coded as Indigenous students. My father worked as a carpenter for his career and my mother stayed at home to raise us kids, she spoke very limited English and Spanish is my first language.

I have an older and younger brother. I am the only one to have gone to university. My brothers are both managers for large retail companies. They have had very successful careers without post-secondary and I think much of our success has been attributed to the values my parents instilled in us and that is to work hard, cultivate positive relationships and give back to our community. I am married to a wonderful partner who is also an educator, he teaches middle school grades. We have two adorable Yorkies who we over indulge.

Current Values/ Perspective

Many of my core values and perspective come from my experiences in adolescence. I began to train and compete in local tennis tournaments at the age of 12 and had great success and continued to compete provincially and internationally. I have to say sports provided me with opportunities to foster resilience and establish positive physical and mental well-being. I continue to value the power that education has in influencing change and improving quality of life for others. I became a teacher, a school counsellor, school administrator and now District Principal of Student Support. I hold a B.A. from Simon Fraser University (major Geography/ Anthropology). B.Ed. University of British Columbia, (UBC) Middle Years Education, Masters in Counselling Psychology and Special Education from UBC as well.

My teaching career began in West Vancouver School District where I taught for two years and then decided to return to my roots and moved back to Mexico to teach middle school. This was in my mid 20's and I feel so fortunate to have had this experience. I later returned to Vancouver and pursued my Masters degree in Counselling Psychology and Special Education. I joined the Vancouver School District,

with the intention of only teaching for a year or two while I was completing my Masters degree. I worked in Vancouver schools for sixteen years. I decided in the Fall of 2020 that I wanted a change as I was looking to further grow my skills and interests. I began a new role with the Surrey School District, the largest school district in BC in January 2020. A new job at the start of a new decade and I truly feel inspired and proud to be serving such a diverse and innovative school district. I do have aspirations to teach abroad and am beginning to look at some opportunities preferably in a Latin country. When I converse in Spanish I feel a complete change in my veins of immense joy.

Impact on What is Studied

My values impact what I choose to study as I am interested in topics that relate to systemic change that allow for all to thrive. I am also interested in intersectional approaches to topics of diversity, social justice and equity. I am still in the process of possibly changing my focus and as there many topics of interest to me.

Impact on Observation

My biases will likely impact my observations because I may choose to focus my attention on particular details at the expense of missing other information. My lens is based on my experiences as an immigrant family, growing up facing racism, discrimination and either being helped along because of others perceiving me as being an at-risk learner. After my Grade 8 year as a student I was asked to change high schools. I still do not know why but I was transferred to a school that was very affluent but had more support for my learning as I was told. My younger brother was also transferred to this school as he at the time had an undiagnosed learning disability. I have often resented this and I currently work for the same system that raised me and I

still see this happening. I currently oversee direct and indirect supports and services for students and schools and by the time kids/ families reach me there is often a complex issue or crisis. My approach is to facilitate collaborative problem solving with schools, students and families so that all feel valued, heard and respected in a process that sometimes takes time to work through.

As an educational leader, I try to be objective and empathic but realize that I too can have my biases. I can feel myself triggered by those who are marginalized because of language proficiency, poverty, or those who do not take the time to listen to others.

I continue to advocate, raise awareness and challenge prejudices. I am fortunate in my role that I have within my portfolio the staff support and opportunities to improve inequity and build connections and resources systemically in our urban district of over 74,000 students.

In my role as a District Principal, I deal with many competing demands. Each day, I engage with students, teachers, families and community groups who most often have faced an injustice or are unable to access learning. I listen, validate, support and work towards creative problem solving. I genuinely believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. In my work with others, I am always willing to listen, share thoughts if they are open to them and validate.

As a researcher, I will strive to be objective and neutral to the experiences of my participants. I do acknowledge that I have biases, but I will be honest if and when they might adversely impact my research. I see my research as a journey of curiosity and discovery. I am so proud and hopeful for the journey ahead. I love learning!

