

Less is More

*Written by Victoria Woo, Northfield Mount Hermon School Editor
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Expressing opinions on diversity is a characteristic NMH especially helps their students build throughout their high school careers. Encouraging excessive dialogue on the same subject matter, however, undermines the potent of having certain conversations. When I first enrolled at Northfield Mount Hermon School three years ago as a freshman, I was particularly excited by how much the school emphasized on diversity, whether that be related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or class. As a student who had never studied in America before, I appreciated that my summer reading book, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* by Heidi W. Durrow, dealt with the difficulties of a mixed-raced girl. I appreciated that I, as a freshman, was required to attend the first Diversity Summit of the year, in which a keynote speaker was invited to talk and answer questions for an hour, followed by student-led workshops about anything related to diversity, from introducing foods from different countries to more serious topics like body image and sexism. Within the first month or two of school, I was able to grasp that diversity was such a big part of the school, and I certainly valued this dedication to educate students about these necessary topics outside the realm of academics.

As sophomore year came by, however, discussion became more frequent than necessary. Especially after the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, talks about diversity in general slowly changed into talks about racism. Of course, building awareness of and talking about what causes and continues racial discrimination was and still is essential. With the numerous speakers coming to talk and the required Diversity and Social Justice course for sophomores, however, many students seemed to express their feelings about how they weren't excited for the next speaker, anticipating a similar talk to the previous one. Many rolled their eyes as they saw that the next required summer reading book was *Passing* by Nella Larsen, a novel set in the 1920s in Harlem following the experience of a black woman who passes as white. International students, which make up more than a quarter of the student body, kept questioning why these discussions seemed to focus only on relationships between whites and blacks, only to receive the response that those relationships were more prominent. Again, everyone was aware that racism is a crucial topic to learn about. But the frequency of these conversations about a topic that was necessary to learn about made them less effective.

Just last year, NMH started a new required, bi-weekly meeting called Student Life Seminars (SLS), in which groups of students from the same grade talk about recent events and diversity. Although each group tended to talk about different matters, some overlapping topics included racism in mass shootings, class, and sexism. Although students did explore topics related to race, a lot of focus was put on topics other than race, such as feminism. Students were exhilarated to hear that Gloria Steinem was visiting campus, not only because she is a renowned feminist, but also because her visit was a break from the ongoing speeches on the same issue.

I am not at all saying that conversations about racial discrimination are unnecessary. They are crucial for one to understand that prejudice is real and that we have to do something to help

create a more fair world, and NMH's curriculum helps students not only learn about racism and diversity in general, but to also embrace it and challenge actions in conflict with social justice. However, it is also true that schools' excessive encouragement for discussion on the same topic defeats the effectiveness of the conversation. Rather, it is the once-in-a-while activities that are more effective and compelling.

Last Friday (September 23, 2016), two seniors organized a black-out to raise awareness of recent police shootings of African Americans and racist events on college campuses in the midst of all the chit-chat about politics and the upcoming presidential election. A majority of students and faculty participated in the event to acknowledge this racial turmoil. The simple task of wearing black was more powerful than forcing an endless conversation on racism. This activity was followed by a class meeting on Monday, with the two organizers demonstrating their feelings of fear and encouraging thoughts from others, and in my opinion, this was far more tangible than any other race-related experience I've had here at NMH. Expressing opinions on racial discrimination is definitely essential in understanding and embracing reality inside and outside our NMH bubble, but ongoing dialogue may start to become ineffective. It is rather the small yet significant activities that have more weight.