**Facilitated Discussion – The Notion of Privilege
March 25, 2015**

Ms Hill: You were all given the same task, the same amount of time, but you had different materials. Did the task change?

Aaron: No.

Ms Hill: So even though you all had different materials your end goal was still the same. So talk to me about how that was an experience of privilege.

Aaron: Maybe sometimes privilege comes from your background and sometimes, I dunno, let’s say your mom works at a fast food store and there’s another mom who is the Queen of London, you all obviously would have different privileges. It depends on where you are on the pyramid.

Ms Hill: The pyramid of…

Aaron: Social…things…

Ms Hill: A social hierarchy?

Rishab: Like the medieval times pyramid, like that.

Ms Hill: So you think our society has a social hierarchy. Let’s talk about that a little bit! What does that social hierarchy, for you guys, look like? Take a second to buzz in your groups and then we’ll come back.

(Students discussed the idea of a social hierarchy with the others at their tables)

Ms Hill: So it was interesting to me, this idea of a social hierarchy, so I wanted to unpack that a little bit more. Grishma, did you want to talk a little bit?

Grishma: A social hierarchy goes by your job, your wealth too, and it also goes by, like, who you are. Like, are you an immigrant? Are you a born Canadian? Are you a male? Are you a female?

Ms Hill: So talk to me a little bit, how do those things affect one’s position in the social hierarchy?

Grishma: Well, if you’re someone that has a lot of power, obviously something that you do could impact a lot more people than someone who doesn’t have as much power. And also, with your power you are also given a lot more opportunities; that is your privilege. A lot of times we don’t see those opportunities and we don’t see our privilege to understand how other people feel.

Clarke: I just have a few examples of who would have great power in a social hierarchy. Okay, so, like, pop stars, and then Youtubers, and then game designers, then like company managers.

Ms Hill: Can you explain that to me a little bit?

Clarke: Because, like, pop stars, like so many people always follow them, and then Youtubers have so many people subscribe, and then one of them makes a certain action and everyone follows them with a reaction.

Rishab: An example is, I watch a lot of Bollywood movies and in India there is this thing called a caste system or something, like how if your parents are of a certain affiliation or job what happens to you most of the time is you follow in their footsteps. So, if you’re not living, I wouldn’t say “good class”, but like a high class life like other people in India like Bollywood stars and stuff, say I was, like, a truck driver, then my son would probably become a truck driver because he wouldn’t have the opportunities to actually try for something other than a truck driver, say, for example, a doctor. But, say, a pop singer’s son, he could try out for a doctor, he could try out for a lot of jobs but maybe, like Grishma said, they don’t really realize that they have, like, a million opportunities coming by them and while that happens, the people who don’t have as much opportunity, when there’s, like, one single opportunity out there for them, they can see their goal right there because they don’t know what it feels like, they don’t know what it feels like to have an opportunity, kinda like how we always say we don’t know how lucky we are to have something until we actually lose it. It’s kinda like what happens with people of a lower caste in India. But the rich people, they don’t even realize there’s something valuable right in front of them.

Emma: It’s kind of like what Rishab said, but, like, if our parents had a kid it wouldn’t really matter, but let’s say Selena Gomez had a kid. It would be, like, this big thing that would go around the world because she’s, like, famous.

Jordan: Just like Rishab said, if you grow up in a rich lifestyle or if your parents are famous for something then before you even know what’s happening people will be like, “I wonder what so-and-so child is gonna do. I wonder if he’s going to be like his father.” But if you were born into a lesser of a privilege, like your dad works at a convenience store and your mom works at a fast food restaurant or something like that, then you’ll have sort of a smaller chance of getting, I dunno, a bigger opportunity.

Ms Hill: Am I hearing you say that there may be certain groups or individuals that have more barriers to overcome or more obstacles to overcome than others to get to that end goal?

Jordan: It goes back to, I think, what your parents do and how they grew up.

Ms Hill: Is it just about wealth?

Lexton: No, popularity.

Ethan: I kinda disagree with Jordan because, I don’t know if most of you even know but there’s a professional hockey player, one of the best in the world who is in the NHL, his name is Alexander Ovechkin and he’s one of the best and he grew up on a farm in Russia, his house was like the size of this classroom, and his parents were, like, no ones, and he turned out to be one of the biggest hockey players.

Ms Hill: So when thinking about his pathway to the NHL, Ethan, do you think that Ovechkin’s path to the NHL was really clear, or do you think he had lots of obstacles?

Ethan: I disagree with…like, his parents didn’t even have a job.

Ms Hill: So my question to you is, do you think that there would be hockey players in the NHL whose pathways to the NHL were different than Alexander Ovechkin’s?

Ethan: Yeah. Some of them, like, in the age groups a couple higher than me, some of their dads are in the NHL.

Ms Hill: I’m thinking about Keith Acton. His son, Will Acton, he plays hockey. So do you think Will Acton’s journey to the NHL is the same as Ovechkin’s?

Ethan: No, Keith Acton is a really good hockey player so his son has a better chance because of his dad’s connections.

Grishma: Just like what Ethan said, if you want to think of something even more closer in you could think of Justin Bieber. Well, he used to go to the food banks and his mom also used to go to the food banks because they couldn’t find enough food. But then, if you think about it, he probably had to go through a lot of struggles just to get to where he is right now. And now, if you think about it, how much of a privilege he has at this point, he has so many opportunities in front of him but at that point he didn’t have so much.

Aaron: So Alexander Ovechkin? He was a nobody, right? He had to overcome everything. He had to learn, he had to practice every single day of his life…

Ethan: On a farm in Russia.

Aaron: Learn English, and all of those barriers. Think of, like, the Sutter family. The father was an NHL player, and six of them went to the NHL. They already knew, “Oh, he’s your father. You must have genetics to be a great hockey player so come into our college and then you will play hockey for us and then be an NHL player”. But Ovechkin, he had to earn it. He had to go through all those obstacles, like what we did before, the chair thing where there was a garbage can, like, the people in the front, it was so easy for them to be like the Sutters. But people further and further back had, like, the biggest challenge, but then you had people blocking you so it was almost impossible to get over there. That’s what privilege is, it’s how many barriers you have in your life.

Ms Hill: That’s a great segue, Aaron. I’m going to ask you something, a hypothetical question. I’m going to show you three different courses, and think of it kind of like a race path or a course, but here’s the goal: the goal is to complete the course as fast as possible. So, it’s not about you wanting a challenge or you enjoying a certain task; you want to get from the start to the finish as fast as possible, so you want to be the quickest. If the goal is to complete the course as fast as possible, which course would you choose and why?

(Students looked at each graphic and discussed with their tablemates which course they would choose)

Ms Hill: Okay, so which course would you choose? Remember, the goal is to finish the course as fast a possible. It has nothing to do with whether or not you want an athletic challenge, or whether or not you think the fire-breathing dragon is friendly, or whatever, the goal is to have the absolute fastest time and there’s no super human powers.

Emily: I would choose course number three, the last one, because there’s no obstacles in the way so I wouldn’t have to jump over anything that would slow me down, I could just go right through and accomplish the goal.

Maya: Well, me and Andrew, we were both thinking the same thing. We would both choose number one, because it’s not really fair for other people to choose the last or the second course; I’d prefer to take the first course.

Andrew: If you complete the last one, you got it but you just, you didn’t accomplish anything and you’re not trained for anything.

Ms Hill: But it’s not about training, it’s about the fastest time.

Andrew: If you do the first one then it’s going to be better.

Maya: The thing is, if you do the last one, it’s too easy. I would choose something more complicated; the last one, you haven’t really accomplished anything.

Ms Hill: But what’s the goal of the task?

Maya: To be the fastest to the finish line, but it still wouldn’t be fair.

Ms Ecclestone: I’m going to put up a definition here, take a minute to read it. The way that you all used “privilege” in your sentences was correct, and you all alluded to this concept, but I wanted to make it really explicit. Take a minute to read it, think about it, and try and make a connection to the courses. Specifically, the part about “world views, experiences, cultures, values, are recognized as the norm or the standard”. You could connect it to the images but also to the conversations we were having.

(Students are shown a definition of “privilege”)

Emma: I was kinda thinking that since we were choosing from three courses we are kind of privileged, but other people who weren’t so privileged would only get the choice of, like, one.

Andrew: About what Emma said, we get to pick from three but other people only get narrowed down to one because other people are, like, discriminating you, making you think that because I’m this or I’m that I can only do this one. Also, what other people were saying before when we had the conversation, your family line sometimes makes that decision.

Aaron: Connected to the obstacle you would choose, it’s kind of obvious, I would choose the last one because there are no obstacles, but I think where I am and the best privilege I can have is, like, two and a half because I have a little bit of barriers but I have fewer barriers than other people.

Lexton: To add on to Aaron sort of, is that a lot of times people have obstacles that, you know, they don’t get past, but when you do you can say you’ve accomplished something and that, in the end, it turned out to be something good or beautiful, it wasn’t all this bad stuff. So I think it just depends on what you do with your privilege and how you use it.

Elsa: Kind of like Emma and Andrew’s, I would choose the first course because I know the goal is to get to the finish line first but if you think about it, some people have to go through that and we don’t know that because that’s not us.

Ms Ecclestone: I’m hearing you say, “I would take that course to build empathy for other people”. Is that correct?

Elsa: Mhmm.

Ms Hill: I think that goes along with what Maya and Andrew were saying, this whole idea that someone might have a different course than you and that you would want to try to advocate or have empathy, recognizing that not everyone has the same course.