



Transcript

Episode 08: Diversity Isn't Just Skin Colour, with Rev. Dr. Timothy Tang

Intro

[intro music plays]

Hi! I'm Rosie Yeung, your host on Changing Lenses. In this podcast, we change our lens, to change what we see. Because seeing differently, lets us live differently.

[intro music ends]

Guest Welcome and Introduction

Rosie: Hello. I'm glad you joined us for this episode of Changing Lenses. Today, we'll be talking to Reverend Dr. Timothy Tang, Director of Tyndale Intercultural Ministries, or the TIM Centre for short. His undergrad degree is in kinesiology, but his career has been focused on people's spiritual health, more than physical.

Rev. Dr. Tang was a pastor at East Toronto Chinese Baptist Church for over 15 years, during which time he obtained his doctorate in leadership, specializing in intercultural development. He's now the Director of the TIM Centre, which is part of Tyndale University in Toronto. Just some of the services that the TIM Centre provides are: intercultural resources for networking, training, and research, a certificate program in ministry and organizational leadership, and intercultural assessment, training and coaching for teams and individuals. Rev. Dr. Tang, welcome and thank you for being here today.

Tim: Thanks for having me.

Rosie: So full disclosure to you our listener. East Toronto Chinese Baptist Church is also the church I attend, and I came to know Tim as both a friend and a pastor in that context. Or at least I would call him a friend, I don't know what he calls me, but let's just say that we're friends for the sake of this podcast.

Tim: This is, you know, partially podcast, partially a confession time for Rosie.

Rosie: That's right. That's right. [laughs] Thank you. We'll have the wine and the bread afterwards.

Tim: Absolutely.



Rosie: So for the sake of this podcast, I'm just going to drop the Rev. Dr. and call him Tim. No offense intended. I still respect him and he's still my friend.

Intercultural-whatchamacallit?

So today, Tim will be talking to us about intercultural differences and increasing our intercultural intelligence or awareness, or actually that's one of the things I'm going to ask him because I'm not really sure what to call it, but he's going to be helping us be more intercultural.

But before we get there, there is something that I want to share with you, our listener and our guests on every episode. Some of what we discuss might be sensitive or challenging for us to say, or for you to hear. But I really want us to have an open and genuine conversation. One goal of Changing Lenses is to be a safe and brave space for these conversations, and for us to be our real selves. So I welcome you, our listener; and you, Tim; into this safe space. And I invite you to call me out if I say anything inappropriate or use the wrong terms.

Okay. So. Tim, what is the right term actually, then, for me to call, like, I've heard people refer to cultural competency, intercultural training. I also want to get to what culture even means, but how would you describe it?

Tim: It being culture or it being like intercultural competence.

Rosie: What are we talking about today?

Tim: Yeah what are we talking about? Well I mean, so all of that. Sorry I'm thinking through everything that you just said, introduction wise. Great to be here. Thank you for inviting me on.

Yeah. I mean the whole field of intercultural competency is young enough as a field that it's still slightly a moving target. So I find that in some fields, they like the name, cultural intelligence. You know, those are the same kind of groups that liked using IQ tests and then move to EQ tests, emotional intelligence.

So it just made sense, intelligence quotient, emotional quotient, cultural quotient, and whatever. There's a whole bunch of other Qs that are being used these days. What I don't like about it is that it sounds like it's just intelligence. It's just like something you know, right, and how smart you are around culture.

So I don't tend to like using that term. I know in other fields they like using global competencies or something like that, or just cultural sensitivity. But we've kind of landed on intercultural competency as a term that we mostly use. But we're okay with the other terms. I'm not offended if other people use other terms, as long as people know that we're somewhat talking about the same thing.

Cultural differences re: titles

So, let me draw the parallel to, I mean, you kind of asked it but you kind of didn't, mixed in question there about what is culture, right? I mean, just early on, like for you introducing me and saying, I hope nobody's offended or that I'm not offended by not calling me my full title and name, right? But that in



itself on many levels lends itself to what culture we are. I mean, in the years that we were in a faith community together and still are, and I was in an official role. Even in that I think because of our generational culture, I was never stuck on, "Oh, why aren't people calling me Reverend", you know? Because for our generational culture, titles are less important for you and I. Whereas, some of the older cultures, they would be offended, and they are offended, when I ask them not to call me Reverend Tim or Pastor Tim kind of thing. So it's a very cultural thing that, that makes sense to them.

And even my role now as Dr. Timothy Tang, I mean, am I Dr. Tim? Or am I Dr. Tang? And I find that much more of an ethno-cultural dimension. So if I'm in communities that are collectivistic and where last names and family matter, they will call me Dr. Tang. Whereas I find much more individualistic cultures and communities, which I'm okay with. I'm okay with either one. They'll tend to call me Dr. Tim and only stick to that. No matter how much I say to them, "Hey, just call me Tim." They'll keep coming back and say, "Oh, Dr. Tim, Dr. Tim, Dr. Tim."

Rosie: So interesting. And this is all in Canada, I'm assuming. Like these different ethno-cultures -

Tim: Absolutely.

Rosie: We're all in the same country, but to me, it doesn't even make sense to call you Dr. Tim. If I'm going to call you Tim at all, I'm just calling you Tim. If I'm going to use the word doctor, I would just call you Dr. Tang.

Tim: Right, which on some level, just exposes a little bit of your own biases. Which is not wrong or right. I mean bias is not always bad, right. But that's just how you look at it.

Cultural differences in names

So even in that, I find names really important. As much as I know you as Rosie, I very much know you as a Yeung.

Rosie: Like my last name, Yeung?

Tim: Your last name. Sorry. So I -

Rosie: Also as a young person. [laughs]

Tim: Yeah. Well that too, yeah, very much, right.

Rosie: Yeah.

Tim: Like last names to me are very important, and I didn't understand why for a long time, until I did more of my own research and more of my own learning. And realized, well, that's a very collectivist way of thinking about things about family names. And I'm very proud of my last name Tang, but that's just kind of been ingrained in me. Is it that special? I don't know. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. But how you identify and see people based on naming them reveals some of the bias you may or may not have. And that's cultural. So I haven't actually answered any of your actual questions.



Rosie: now I have a whole bunch of other questions for you. Because, I mean, intersectionality is a word that has come up a lot in 2020. Ethnicity is not necessarily the same as race and you know, your citizenship, obviously not necessarily the same. And so, when you talk about names, ethnically you and I are both Chinese. I was born in Hong Kong. I think you were born in Toronto, right Tim?

Tim: Yes, I don't think I knew that you were born in Hong Kong, but anyways, go on.

Rosie: Oh, yes. I'm an actual immigrant, I'm not just a child of immigrants. But I came here when I was like one.

Tim: You're a first generation immigrant.

Rosie: Yes, that's right. And the idea of names, I mean, as a Chinese person, I think I can relate to what you're saying about the importance to you of your last name. Because in Chinese culture, Chinese tradition, if you were to say your Chinese name, your last name comes first, right? And then it's your, maybe in Western culture, they would say it's your first name, but that's not how Chinese people look at it. So your family name or your last name in Canada, North America, always is said first.

And I don't fully understand, but I have friends who are from, say Sri Lanka or, other cultures where I think their father's name is either included or repeated in the son's name. So there's ways that people name themselves and their families and different cultures that has significance that has meaning. But when you bring that or kind of impart that into a Western cul- a White culture, a North American culture, then things have to get adapted. And I don't think we have that full appreciation for how that is.

So like even what you say about Tang meaning something, you know, even as a Chinese person who kind of relates, I'm like, yeah but I would still only call you Dr. Tang. When I'm addressing you as a friend, I'm going to call you Tim, I'm not going to call you Tang Tim, right?

Tim: Right. No, and you're right in that, you know, I mean, adaptation is not bad and having to adapt into North American official papers or at the visa office or whatever it is, is what I was kind of thinking about. It's not a bad thing. But I think the awareness of the fact that that's there is something huge. You know, great example about certain communities and certain ancestral names. I mean, it's not even a first and last issue. I often think about some Egyptian leaders that I've worked with. They typically don't think of first and last. They think of first, second, third, and fourth. And so we've kind of put people into this box of, well, tell me your last name. And so if you ask somebody who has four names, what their last name is, they're like, okay, are they asking me for my formal fourth name? Or are they asking me for my second name, which I typically will put on my records?

And that's not even bad necessarily to talk about. But I've definitely witnessed at the visa office where somebody is applying for a visa and, you know, getting into an argument with the officer because they'll be like, "Well, why did you write this name? But you wrote this for your child name?" And it's like, "Oh, that is our name." " But you said your last name was this."

And to the person applying, they can't figure out what they mean by "last", because that doesn't make sense to them. So, I mean, just in that interaction, and the fact that it boiled up, and I watched it kind



of boiled up, but knowing that I couldn't really interject - was difficult to watch because it was obvious that neither one of them knew that they weren't talking about the same thing. And yet were talking about the same thing.

So sorry, so to relate this to your initial question.

Rosie: What was my question? I don't even remember. [laughs]

Tim: Well, something around intercultural competency, cultural intelligence is at least knowing that it's a skillset and a behavior and a mindset and an orientation we'd say, around interacting with people of difference than you.

So, on one hand, it's not that you have to become an expert at every single culture. But are you even aware that, hey, maybe our disagreement is more than just confusion. Maybe there's a cultural element. And, if say, that example I gave up the visa office, if the officer or the, I don't know if they're called an officer or not, but the person taking the papers was trained in a little bit of intercultural competency, then I think they would at least say, "Hey, hold on here. Maybe this disagreement is more than just confusion over the paperwork." Or "Are they trying to lie to me? Or are they honestly interpreting things different?" So if they pause for a moment, saying I'm getting frustrated at this client, but maybe I'm being frustrated because I'm imposing my expectation, or we've imposed our expectation on them, in a way that doesn't make sense to them.

So cultural competency - sorry, I don't think I'm reading the definition of it all - but, you know, is just a behavior, a mindset, an awareness. It's an orientation. It's emotional intelligence. All kind of wrapped together to understand, hey, where are you working from in terms of navigating other cultures and people of difference.

Rosie: You know what? I really like what you're saying, because it touches on something I am coming to believe in very strongly. Because I mean, as you know, Changing Lenses is about appreciating people's diversity, certainly. But my primary thing I think is around inclusion and belonging and welcoming. And it's complex, but I find that if people were, I think if people were to be more open to not having things in boxes, right? Like if you want to talk about cultural, what you're describing to me, is about respecting the other person. So rather than focusing on, well, what would a black person want, or what would an Asian person want, or how should I not speak to someone, or speak to someone. If people took the time to really, I guess, care about the other person, and think about, well, how might they perceive it?

And then the competency part comes in for me when it's like, well, to know that I have to get to know the person, and know about them. Some of that might be their ethnicity, or it might be their race, or it might be their gender. But whatever the standard or the stereotypes, like what I might know in general about a woman or a man or a transsexual or a white person doesn't necessarily apply to this individual, right? So it's not about, well, cause you're an Asian person, this is how I'm going to be culturally competent with you. Cause I have to learn about Asians or something. I don't think it's about that. I think it goes to more human level than that.



Tim: Yeah. There is always a danger of over-generalizing things. I think it was what you're kind of alluding to a little bit there too. And when you were speaking, and I totally agree with you and I think you're totally on the ball that it's layered and complex. And there's so much to talk about in that.

But if I were to sum up intercultural competency, I mean, there's a lot of different analogies that people use, but the analogy that I really like is, typically the golden rule that many people have tried to live by is treat others as you would like to be treated yourself, which is a great rule. I think it's fantastic. I think it's biblical on some level, right?

But there's another way of looking at that. And people have said, well, what's the platinum rule? And the platinum rule is actually treat others as they would like to be treated. Right? And exactly what you said. You don't even know what that is until you get to know them. So you can't just say, "Oh, I'm going to treat Rosie because that's how I'd like to treat", you know, but really, Rosie's not you. So why would you have that expectation of what and how they want to be treated? And you're going to make mistakes because you won't know until you know. Until you get to know them, which talks about relationship. But then it also, at the same time, what I would say is, it also forces an individual to re-examine what are they expecting or the lens by which they're looking.

The biggest challenge is realizing that you have a lens to start with

So taking your analogy of Changing Lenses, right? I think the biggest challenge that I find in the work that we do around training and development and teaching, is to help people realize that they actually have a lens that they're starting with. Right. So you're talking about changing lenses and that's great, but do you even know the lens that you're using right now? And you know, I'm not saying that just to you, but to everyone. That I find is sometimes the biggest challenge.

It even relates to, when we talk about, ethnicities, right? I mean, for a long time language around ethnic communities was terrible. Why? Because it assumed that if you're not talking about those new Canadian communities, that you don't have an ethnicity. And that's a terrible way of thinking about it because we all have an ethnicity. We all have a cultural perspective that we're coming from, that we learned from the day we were born. And we all have a lens. And part of changing that lens, to take your analogy, is figuring out what lens you need to change, right? So you can't just adopt somebody else's lens without knowing, hey, where are you starting from? And I think that's huge for a lot of people.

Rosie: Hm. I think that's a really excellent point. Maybe I knew that intuitively, but I never really explicitly thought about it that way. So I'm really glad that you put it that way, on this podcast. And to me, that's also a little bit like a phrase I've heard before where, a fish doesn't know that it's wet, right? a fish has no idea it's swimming in water. So even to think of how would I describe my lens? I don't know. I guess I'm an only child. I'm Chinese ethnicity, but I'm also Canadian. And as a culture, I think there's a unique Canadian Chinese culture. Yes, I'm Chinese, but my culture is not the same as my parents' culture, right?

Tim: No, absolutely. And that's the thing with culture, I mean, cultures are constantly morphing and evolving. But part of our journey as leaders, as individuals, as a people, is to identify, hey, what is the



framework that I'm working from? And it could change, right? So 10 years ago Rosie, to today Rosie, you're probably working from a different framework. And that's okay. But are you even aware of that, right?

There's a significant amount of writing around what they'll call cultural empathy as well, and cultural empathy is exactly that. It's learning to understand another person's culture, whatever it may be, ethno-cultural, socio-economic, whatever it is. As you understand their culture, you are forced to look back on your own culture and to be critical of it. And critical whether it's the good or the bad. But you're able to see yourself, hopefully, with genuineness. I mean, if we can become more empathetic to where other people are at, and it may be just the fact that we're not there yet. But the more we can learn that skill of asking better questions, of being curious, of self-examining our own biases and perspectives - Wow. That's the kind of world that I want to be a part of, right. Where people are constantly asking those questions.

Applying cultural competency at work and in leadership

Rosie: So let's talk about how we can be culturally more competent in our interactions with other people. And specifically, cause I mean, I come from a corporate workplace background, your work and your research has been very much around, leadership and working in teams.

So thinking about how do we apply, like in what ways has cultural competency make a difference? how has it helped a team to better understand each other? Or how has it helped a leader to be a better leader?

Tim: Good question. We do a lot of training around this. We have assessments to understand where people's cultural intelligence and competency may be. And good question in terms of how does this apply to the workplace or a leader or a manager. And this is as simple as at least realizing that there may be different ways of doing work, or different ways of leading a meeting.

Cause At the end of every meeting typically, or at the end of every little segment on the agenda, there's a - "Any questions?" And in some cultures you can't hold people back from interrupting or wanting to say something or ask a question or give you feedback. But in other cultures you could wait 10, 20 minutes and no one will say a thing. Because culturally, they will not speak up in the meeting. They will not raise a question. They will not raise their hand.

And on one hand, some leaders will be like, "Well, they didn't say anything. So either obviously they all agree with what I've done, or B they're not good team members, right? But culturally, if you took a time to understand that, hey, maybe people are coming from different perspectives, especially if you have a diverse group of leaders in the room. Then you realize, okay, maybe you don't just open it up. Maybe you need to say, "Rosie, do you have any questions?" And not put you on the spot and call you out in a group, but how do you at least acknowledge an individual in the group, but as well, perhaps even after the meeting say, "Hey, Rosie, we just had that meeting. Do you have any feedback that maybe I missed?" And that one-on-one interaction sometimes becomes way more fruitful.



So knowing that there are different lenses that people are seeing the meeting, and the purpose of the meeting as a leader, that's huge, right? Cause then you'll get honest feedback. Hopefully. If you've built some rapport and relationship with them.

But it would be so simple for us to come into meetings and say, "Okay, well no one said anything, so we're good. We're golden." Right? And then, something happens two weeks later and like, "Well, they never sent anything two weeks ago." And that would be the wrong reaction to whatever happened at that meeting. So from a leadership perspective, how do you become aware that, hey, people in the room might act differently or expect different things from me because of their cultural perspective.

Rosie: I actually really like that as an example, because I think it's a really good way of illustrating just how complicated this thing is. And my personal opinion, why diversity and inclusion is not going to be solved by hiring a Chief of Diversity and Inclusion and have them roll out a whole bunch of programs. Cause even in this very fundamental example, you say, culturally, somebody might not want to speak up. And I'm picturing a white man leading a meeting with, you know, different colored people in the room, or maybe different gendered people in the room. But when I think of that meeting culture, I also think very much about workplace culture, which transcends your race or anything else. It's, well, have you created a culture in your environment? And it's not just about the workplace, any environment. Could be your friends, could be your family.

Is there a culture in that environment, which invites people to actually speak up safely. Or do they not speak up because they know that if they say anything, they're just going to get shut down? Or it doesn't matter what they say, because they've seen evidence that you only listen to person A, and they're person B. So why not just let person A speak, and then we can all get out of this meeting faster. Or something like that.

Diversity is skin colour, but it's not just skin colour

Tim: Right. Diversity is skin colour, but it's not just skin colour. So that's where it's the both / and, right? I mean, I've heard people say, well, you know, we all look like Asian females around the same age bracket, so we have diversity. Check mark. We've got our diversity, right? But how much more could the group be enriched if there was an entirely different perspective there?

So if it's a work group and performance and working together is the reason why they're together, well then, wouldn't it be even more enriching to have a different perspective? So where somebody really sees things completely different than you. Sure there's difference between the group that looks homogeneous. But yeah, for the most part, everybody in a group may have all been educated in North America. And so that's huge compared to somebody who is educated in Europe, or educated in Asia. And that perspective, at least to even invite them into the conversation, would be incredibly impactful, I feel like.

Conversely though, sometimes we'll see organizations or groups or communities, say, "Oh, we're going to hire for diversity." And they have all the colors of the rainbow out there, which is great. But then really, internally, they kind of like, "Well, we hired you for your colour, and we know that you come from difference, but now it's time for you to fit in." And that, I find, is often masked behind,



"Well, we need you to act professional." But what does professional mean? Professional from organization to organization, to Western to Eastern, from Northern to Southern culture, is going to be different.

And so are we really being inclusive to invite them, having a different voice in a different way of doing things, which might rub you the wrong way, but, well, why does it rub you the wrong way? Is it that they are just simply more expressive than you are? Some of it may be personality, but some of it may be actually cultural. So are you able to navigate that, and work through that, and work together with the belief that you could be better together?

Rosie: This has been a really interesting discussion. And I've been trying to figure out what I got out of it. [laughs] I'm not sure. And it just -

Tim: [laughs]

Rosie: - I don't mean that from a, "Well, what did you add to this, Tim?" It's more, how do I process this? Like how do I condense this into, like - You know what actually, I think the one thing I'm taking away from this right now is how much work there is to do, right? Like this is not a, Oh, let's watch some webinars and talk to some people or start a committee. This is every day, every conversation. Thinking about your perspective, questioning your lens, right? Like really doing some self-awareness work, as well as other awareness work. And yes, certainly there's tools. And actually, maybe you can tell us about some of the tools and speak a little bit about what you've seen helps make a difference.

Yeah that's kind of what I'm getting from this and I'm hoping that, you who are listening are kind of taking from this is - We knew there was no easy solution, but I think this highlights how much individual and group work there is to do. And it's not something from the "C" of whatever to bring down to us.

Tim: And that, I mean, [chuckles] thanks for sort of saying, "What am I getting from this?" Um, but, no, I totally get it. I mean, the number one message that we often say to people is that this is slow work. It's not going to be overnight. This is slow and it requires intentionality. So as much as you want to be intentional about it and put effort into it, you're not going to be able to say, "Oh! [snaps fingers] I get it. I get what marginalized people feel like, because I read these three books." Right? And it's not to say that you shouldn't read these three books. But don't think that because you've read this book and studied it and now you're teaching it, now you're the master of it.

Don't pull a diversity muscle

And this is where 2020, where there's a rush, I feel like, oftentimes to move into these discussions, people are - the analogy I heard recently was, "Are they going to pull a diversity muscle?" Like when you work out or whatever it is, it's easy to jump in and say, "Well, I'm going to become a runner!" But if you haven't warmed yourself up, if you haven't built up towards whatever, I mean, very few people in the world can say, "Well, tomorrow's Saturday, let's run a marathon." Right? And you may be the fittest person on earth, but if you haven't built yourself up to a certain ability or level, then you don't jump in and start running a marathon. And that's where you will pull a muscle.



So we, more and more found that there are leaders who are becoming aware of this conversation. If I were to borrow a term, I'm going to say people have become "woke" to this conversation, but I'm saying that giggling inside because every time I hear it from other leaders, I kind of say, "Do you know where that word comes from?" Anyways, um, who are becoming more aware of the conversation and diving headfirst into it, and really pulling a diversity muscle, because they're not fully ready for the full conversation of it. Not that I know everything, but are they ready for the journey? And the journey entails a personal commitment to it and a personal change.

So, I think our greatest fear is that people are jumping into it just because it's good opportunity, or it's good PR. As opposed to knowing, and thinking, and believing that this could actually make us all better as a people.

Rosie: As a human race.

Tim: Yeah, as a human race, right? I mean, we could be better the more empathetic we are, the more we try to understand others, the more we try to understand our own biases, both conscious and unconscious. And that applies everything to family, life dynamics, to your parents, to your children, to marriage, to workplace, to a church community, to living in an apartment building, right?

Rosie: Yes. And I think for people who maybe are further along the cultural competency path can help people along and hopefully be patient with people like me, right, who's starting on the journey. Cause it is, it's a path.

Tim: No, yeah, and I mean, all I was thinking about with that was, I mean, and this is where I think the physical sports analogy is not great because, you know, at times people will feel like they're competing with others. But this is a field where we really need to be collaborative. Because what's more important here? Is me just beating you important? Or is it, hey, a real opportunity for us to work together on something larger.

So in this realm, don't pull a diversity muscle, but really lean on and listen to people who have been in the field a lot longer. But it doesn't mean that your input doesn't count. But how do we really work collaboratively? Which, you know, so let me take this to this podcast. I mean, I'm appreciative of your podcast because you're not just coming out and saying: Changing Lenses, here's my five how-to's, I'm Rosie Yeung and listen to me. Right? So I'm very appreciative that you've brought guests on, and kind of advocate for, showcase what they're doing. Because especially, I feel like in Canada, not enough Canadians know what other Canadians are doing, and I think there's a lot of great leaders, organizations and people doing things. So how do we help each other, advocate for one another? Not just to say, hey, we're not American. Because that's part of the Canadian culture. But how do we say that, hey, we're doing some pretty significant things. And we want to collaborate together in a genuine way.

Rosie: Yes. [chuckles] I feel like standing up and applauding that because it's true. And I think as Canadians, in a way it's part of the Canadian culture is to not be as proud as we could be, of what we've done, of who we are as a Canadian people too, right.



Practical ways to start your intercultural learning

And maybe the last thing as I reflect on our whole conversation. What I've also been hearing a lot and you probably have too, is people saying - "Oh, but I don't know how to do it. Like, I don't know how to be inclusive. I'm not qualified for that work or, I need some training first." So people might actually not get started. They're maybe at risk of being paralyzed because they are understandably afraid, right. Making a mistake or looking foolish or offending someone. But also that like, "Well, I'm not ready yet. I need this, this and this."

So, for someone out there who wants to get started, but is nervous, doesn't know where to start, doesn't feel prepared. Is there one thing that they could do today to just start that journey?

Tim: Well, describe to me the person. [laughs] Cause it matters.

Rosie: Okay so take me. Take me as an example, maybe. I'll represent that person, if that helps. Or if it doesn't, then -

Tim: Yeah no, that's good. That's good. Because I mean, this is what I'd say. First I would ask the question, how do you learn best?

Rosie: I learn best by myself. So like receiving information and giving me time to process it and think about it and reflect.

Tim: Okay. Does that include studying on your own, reading on your own, going to class on your own? You know what I mean?

Rosie: Mm-hm. I don't know if this is answering your question, but I learn best through real life application. I've never been good at reading textbooks. And even listening, I'm not good at audio only. I need visual cues. Is that what you're getting at?

Tim: Sort of, I mean, that's helpful even just for you to say that I've never been a great reader, I've never been a great listener to certain things. So that's where I wouldn't necessarily say to people, "Oh well go read these 10 books", right? I mean, there's so many lists of resources right now about diversity inclusion and equity out there.

Rosie: Oh, sorry. I don't like reading textbooks, but I'll read books.

Tim: Got it. Okay, yeah, no. So even finding out which style of books works for you in terms of reading, but another thought I had was - this is not the be all and end all, this is just for you - I do think that there's a prescription for oftentimes watching certain movies. And not that one movie will change everything, but hey, what would it look like for you to watch a certain style of movies, that are different. Or certain movies that start bringing awareness around diversity. So what was that movie, recently, about a girl whose grandmother has cancer, she goes to Asia, yada, yada, yada...

Rosie: Oh, "The Farewell"!

Tim: The Farewell. Okay. So movies, like The Farewell, I mean, there's a lot of movies like that.



Rosie: Yes. I actually just recently watched that.

Tim: Did you? Like to me, watching movies like that, I mean especially as an Asian North American, we can relate to many things in there. But I think watching stuff like that doesn't change everything, but it begins you on that journey of asking, well, what's right, what's wrong? What's the perspective I'm working from? I mean that's a relatable one because you and I are both Chinese. But what would it then look like for us to be watching movies that would stretch us beyond the Asian perspective? One thing that we sometimes say to people too, in terms of development is okay, what if you spent the next six months only watching Bollywood movies. And the way they storytell is different. It's not just that they dance a lot. I mean, sorry to stereotype Bollywood movies, but, you know what I shouldn't -

Rosie: But it's true. They dance and sing a lot. That's different from -

Tim: They do, right? But their storytelling is different. And so, I think watching a significant amount of movies that are different than what you're normally watching changes your perspective. And if you can intentionally start talking about that I think that's one way of stretching, an easy access way.

At the university, I know at the graduate level, we have been very big on, hey, don't just read North American texts and resources. But hey, are you looking to the Global South in terms of academic writers and thinkers that have a very different perspective? Or for a lot of people, they realize that, oh, I've only been reading male writers. And there's nothing wrong with male writers, there have been significantly great male writers. But what if you spent the next six months just reading female authors and writers, how could that stretch your thinking to become much more empathetic? To realize that, oh, I've only been informed from one dimension for a long time?

So I think those are easy access ways, but of course there are courses and programs and training to the extent of even just internships. Like what would it look like to really - I know that you've worked overseas before, right? But what would it really look like to immerse in that scenario? I mean, those are two ends of a spectrum. On one end, just watching movies is pretty easy, but good, you know. Good in terms of exposure, if you really spent six months watching Bollywood movies, I think it'd be significant to actually debrief and talk about it, and to really talk through it with people. But on the other end, yeah, what would it look like to work and live in a different place for like - indefinitely, or five years or whatever it is, right? I think that that really does stretch people to at least ethno-cultural conversation.

For other conversations it becomes, yeah well, what would it look like for us to, to live in a certain community in Toronto. So we're both in Toronto, but you know, what would it look like for us to live in a certain community that we wouldn't immediately have identified that's where I'd like to be? Or that's where my quote unquote "people" are. Cause that then influences where you shop. It influences the communities that you're a part of. Now in Toronto, we're all commuters. So sometimes people will say "It doesn't matter where I live, cause I'll just still drive, you know, an hour, to get across four kilometers in Toronto."

Rosie: [laughing] And two traffic lights, yeah.



Tim: But I mean, with the movement towards more local neighborhoods - we see that a lot with urban planning now - how do we embrace certain communities. Beyond just "I'm visiting Greek town this weekend." But "Hey, what if I really immersed myself in Greek town or in Jamaica town or in China town?" And became part of a community that's there. Beyond just, I'm there to help out at the food bank on Wednesday morning and then I'm out. Like, that's not what I mean. I mean, getting to know a community, being part of them, getting through the rhythms and the heartbeat of what's happening in that group that's different than you.

And so we'll call "people of peace". So how do you find some people of peace who understand that you're an outsider, but that you're earnestly here, not as a voyeur, to just watch people, but because you earnestly want to learn. So how do you find some people who are advocates that could help you bridge into that community? I think that's another kind of a middle step for people that could be huge.

Meeting people where they're at – through movies, food, dance

Rosie: Thank you, Tim. I think those are actually some really good ideas. And I honestly never really considered before as very realistic and doable things. So I'm just thinking of what can we do now during COVID, right. Cause really, it's not safe to go out or please don't go to other people's neighborhoods and hang out and try to meet people and all that stuff. Like not right now, right? [laughs] Maybe down the road once we all have been vaccinated, but not right now.

But in the meantime, like what you said about watching movies, maybe it'd be a bit easier. Cause movies, I don't know how to access necessarily international movies legally. But maybe there's music we could listen to. Even if we don't understand the language, but it is, it's a different sound. It's a different rhythm, a different style.

I'm thinking about a course I took at Waterloo university. I was an accountant, but I was an arts accountant. So I took a dance class because I really didn't want to be an accountant. That was my way of not - I took a dance class -

Tim: You were able to take a dance class?

Rosie: I had electives.

Tim: Got it. Okay. Got it.

Rosie: Yeah. I had electives, and I was like, I'm going to take the least accounting elective I can find. And that was dance. And I've always loved dance. I like ballet and I like - call it very Western, is what I considered beautiful and artistic. And in that class, I was exposed to different Indian dance, Korean dance, Japanese dance. And it was as much about the masks that they wear or the costumes and stuff. So it's a very different style. And I think it would be a good challenge for people to go and watch different dancing, listen to different music, eat a different type of food. And just be even aware of what you think about it. Like, Oh, this food is too spicy or too salty or too something else. But compared to what? So I think that really helps then realize the lens that you are wearing.



Tim: Yeah. I like what you're saying about, you know, you've always liked to dance, but you were kind of challenged to think, well, what have I considered good dance and bad dance.

So typically in intercultural competency, we also say meet somebody where they are. So meet them where they are and move from there. So if you're somebody who loves watching movies, that would be the prescription. And Netflix actually has a good amount of international content there. I mean, it's all dictated by Netflix, so that's a whole other conversation.

But if somebody is a foodie, great! Then in our COVID situation, go and do a curbside pickup of a bunch of food that you've never had before. In a place like Toronto, where there's a huge amount of diversity in terms of foods and flavors. Don't just eat it and say, "Ugh, yeah, that's too salty." But, well, why is it salty? You know, well, why is this food like this? And obviously one restaurant will not epitomize and represent the entire culture. So what would it look like to eat a whole spread of different dumpling restaurants, because you want to understand Northern Chinese cuisine, right?

And then start asking the deeper questions. Well, what does this represent? Why do they eat dumplings? And why don't they eat rice? I thought all Chinese people only eat rice, but they actually don't. You know? So why did this cuisine only have lamb? It seems like all they do is eat lamb all day, but I think lamb is stinky. I personally don't, but you know, those are the reactions.

So, find out what would you be interested in. If you love reading books, if you love reading fiction books, great. Why don't you read some fiction books from a different perspective than you've normally? So I think that's, yeah, I think that's great in terms of how you related that to that course you took.

You need to take more dance classes. There you go.

Rosie: Clearly, yes. I'll join your daughter. Yeah, we can do dance together.

Tim: There we go. I mean, and that's a great example.

And so take this too. Sorry, I don't know how long this podcast was supposed to be, but, [chuckles] um, you know, in terms of what we have epitomized, or taken for granted as good or bad dance... And in our society, it's not just a cultural thing, but even in our education system. So this is a quick plug for the work my wife is doing in one of the school boards where there are certain schools that have more specialized programs. And the only entry way into it, for the dance program, is to do ballet. But that's basically saying that ballet is the epitome of good dance, but it's not, right?

And I'm so not part of the dance world, but because my daughter is, realizing that African dance, and all the different kinds of African dances, are just as beautiful in different ways than ballet. But why are we only, especially in a really diverse community like Toronto, only putting money into programs that have only ballet? Which ballet is a very, it's a very Western -

Rosie: It's very Euro-centric.

Tim: It is, and there's nothing wrong with ballet. This is not to say that we need to get rid of ballet, but it's how do we add to it? Especially in a context like Toronto, where there are so many diversities here.



So that becomes part of the conversation. And again, that conversation isn't to criticize or to throw out what's already being done, but how do we add to it? How do we add to those systemic things that start at a personal level?

Rosie: Awesome. Thank you, Tim. I think there are some really good ideas there. I think there's a lot of food for thought. I've got a lot to take back and reflect on. And I hope that, for you, who's been listening today too, that there's been some new ideas, or new ways of thinking that you can reflect on as well.

And Tim, I really appreciate you being so generous with your time, and you've got lots and lots of stuff on the go. So I really appreciate you coming here and being very open with us and sharing and educating really. You know, bringing some awareness to the reality of cultural differences in Canada and what we can do to start our own intercultural or cultural competency journey.

Contacting Tim, and intercultural resources

So thank you very much for being here today. If people have questions for you or wanted to follow up, is there a way that they could get in touch with you or anything that you want to point us to in terms of resources?

Tim: Yeah, I mean the easiest way is - we do have a website, and the easiest way to get to it is TIMcentre.com. T-R-E, not T-E-R, for some people who -

Rosie: Oh, Canadian centre, not U.S. center.

Tim: Yes, Canadian centre. So TIMcentre.com. And that site will lead you to a number of different resources that we have, whether it be courses, training, we do intercultural assessment as well. But I'd say, you know, another website that I may point people to is ureachtoronto.ca.

So "u", as in, just the letter U. And then reach. So U-R-E-A-C-H toronto.ca. And on there is not just some research, but just some information about the different diversities in ethnocultural diversities in Toronto. And you can look up by people group or by region. So we have different maps, different resources there. And different things that we have going on. So those would be some quick, easy places for people to go.

Rosie: Awesome, thanks. Is there something for people not in Toronto? So, I mean, TIM Centre - Tyndale is a university that's in Canada, so it's not just for Toronto students. So if you're not from Toronto, that would be the best place to go to? Or, any other suggestions?

So UReachToronto, we are hoping to expand that to become part of a website that's already there, UReachCanada.ca. And that isn't to say that we're - so we're part of that as well. But the hope with that is that we can expand this conversation across Canada. And this kind of conversation is already happening, but how do we unite more of our voices? Kind of like, you know, podcasts, uniting things in Canada, right? So our website and that network of leaders are trying to gather together across Canada to say, Hey, how can we work together more to be collaborative about these different conversations?



Very cool. Thanks. And we will have that in our shownotes too, the links to this stuff. So if you missed it and just listening to us on the podcast, don't worry. We will have the links on my website, which is changinglenses.ca, as well as the full shownotes and the transcript.

So again, thank you, Tim. I really enjoyed chatting with you. It's always fun, and love your sense of humor. So, very thankful that you could come and be with us today.

Tim: Thanks Rosie.

Outro

[outro music plays]

Thanks for joining us – I hope today's episode helped to change your lens and expand your worldview. If you enjoyed listening, please rate and subscribe to Changing Lenses, available wherever you get your favourite podcasts. For more about how I'm changing my lens, please check out my website at changinglenses.ca. You'll also find the shownotes and transcripts for each episode, and you can leave comments or questions, or send me a message – I would love to hear from you!

I'm Rosie Yeung, inviting you to join me for the next episode of Changing Lenses. Until then, take care!

[outro music ends]