

Preparing Future Faculty for Multicultural Teaching and Learning as Everyday Philosophy & Practice

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GRAD 8101: Teaching in Higher Education

■ COURSE PARTICIPANTS:

- graduate/professional students and post doctoral fellows from multiple disciplinary backgrounds
- 50% no teaching experience; 50% wide-ranging teaching experience, including "instructor of record"
- domestic & international diversity
- bring across the classroom doorway varied teaching traditions, social perspectives & communication styles

■ COURSE GOALS:

- practice engaged / deep / student learning strategies
- discuss educational theory and practice
- study, act & reflect to develop teaching skills to promote learning for diverse student body across disciplines via "co-facilitation" process
- consider how personal / social /cultural contexts inform teaching choices, especially about what constitutes learning, what teaching / learning practices foster understanding, what effectively measures learning

Cultural Diversity [becomes] Multicultural Teaching and Learning

- 2002-2004
 - stressful administrative turnover
 - evaluation of diversity component - drop it or do it better
 - incorporates 2 diversity segments - learning & learners
 - introduction of co-teachers - faculty paired with PFF staff
- Spring 2005
 - co-teaching teams intentionally “diverse” – eg, international faculty & working class staff; both allies to GLBT and domestic communities of color
 - focus on infusing MCTL discussion & learning
 - weekly “active reading assignments” - aka ARAs
 - strategic base groups, random groups with specific tasks & assigned partners for syllabus development
- Spring 2008
 - more MCTL readings & cases across course
 - next class session” “unsettling” tenure and classroom cases
 - penultimate session focuses on “ally” theme

Pre- / Post- Confidence Survey: Support / Address Student Diversity Item

	N	Mean (pre/ post)	Standard Deviation (pre/post)	Gains Score	Co-facilitation
Spring 2005	21	4.0 / 5.63	1.58 / 0.90	1.63	Yes: by teachers & students
Spring 2006	24	4.0 / 6.0	1.01 / 0.73	2.00	Yes: by teachers & students
Spring 2008	20	4.0 / 5.0	1.54 / 1.07	1.0	Yes: by teachers & students; discussion of “necessary skills” for divergence & dissonance
Summer 2008	11	4.4 / 5.4	1.68 / 1.43	1.0	Yes: by teachers

• 8 sections will be in final analysis (total N = 170 students)

Mindset : Legacy

- *Integration* operates "person-to-person, and person-to-group, and person-to-group-to-institution relations. In this sense, *integration* is not achieved through command performance alone....[.]Integration is **not achieved through spontaneous combustion alone, but involves attempts to stimulate, test, and perhaps experience new understandings and social, personal configurations.**

- Ira De A. Reid. "Integration: Ideal, Process, and Situation." *Journal of Negro Education*, 1954

Mindset : Legacy

- **Effective group work means working in a group – not on it....** When we use group work, we become members of the group as quickly as we can. We invite students to share the planning with us. We seek the establishment of common purpose. We develop an organization through which students can participate in the administration of the class. We stimulate the emergence of other leadership. We encourage each member to accept other members and to feel a responsibility for helping them. We bring all members in on the evaluation of activities and accomplishments.

- Margaret Courts, Elementary Education Master's Thesis, Mankato State College, 1958 [incorporating paraphrased material attributed to Kimball Wiles, 1952]
- My first grade teacher, 1963-4

Mindset : Framing the Work

- Diverse teaching requires recognition of meaning attribution and the power that emotions, values, and personal experience have in shaping / interpreting information.
- The professor, therefore, becomes responsible for engaging students in three skill sets:
 - first is separating facts from cultural assumptions and beliefs about those facts
 - second is teaching students how to shift perspective
 - third is perhaps the most difficult to learn, that of differentiating between personal discomfort and intellectual disagreement

• Fried, "Bridging Emotion and Intellect."
College Teaching: Fall 1993

Mindset : Everyone's Work

- The first conclusion that I want to draw ...is that several *alternatives to our traditional ways of teaching* have been shown to lead to stunning improvements in student achievement...and that *massive improvements are fairly easy to attain, even if one does not deal directly with diversity.*
- My second conclusion is that these non-traditional approaches *usually produce large gains by the groups of students who have been hardest to reach with standard pedagogy.*
- These two conclusions together make it hard to justify offering any course that uses largely passive results...**This raises the question of whether it has already become immoral to teach without extensive use of the active learning techniques that so enhance performance.**

• Nelson, "Student Diversity Requires Different Approaches to College Teaching, Even in Math & Science" 1996

Student ARA Comments: 2005

- **I am really concerned about social norms for behavior in class and how this affect the degree to which I feel students are prepared:** Do I notice the girls with headscarves more so that their absences are more apparent? Do I assume that students that avert their eyes aren't prepared? I think the best way to deal with this is having multiple grading methods....
[RL, political science, white woman, GLBTA community]

Student ARA Comments: 2005

- I would like to learn how to more sensitively negotiate students' personal boundaries as well as their personal reactions to each other. For instance, **some students are visibly "marked" as culturally diverse**....Even among that "average" Minnesota student, a wide range of diverse experiences also exist.
- **My questions then revolve around how to create a classroom environment** where everyone is invited to speak and participate, without focusing upon those students why may appear to have more cultural expertise in the topic at hand (the Muslim women in discussing the Israeli-Palestinian debate, for example) and yet also de-escalating tense or hostile sentiments when the topics of discussion are particularly heated and personal.

[EM, geography, Asian American woman]

Student ARA Comments: 2005

- I myself am from the minority group, **I really feel the presence of cultural difference.**
- I think a good way to improve teaching and to help student learning is to tell them there are such differences [in teaching and learning styles that they will need to understand] **and, more importantly, to listen to their concerns and give response.**
- **If a teacher is** nice to everyone, responsive to everyone, available to everyone, probably there will be not many minority students who still have the uncomfortable feeling within or beyond the classroom.
[YQ, plant biology, Asian, female, international student]

Student ARA Comments: 2005

- As a white heterosexual woman **I am in the majority on most campuses....I feel a greater responsibility** to take into consideration the diversity of students I am teaching. As a professor I hope to integrate diversity into the entire curriculum and not spend just one lecture on it. In this way diversity is given the important place it deserves in psychology.
[JP, psychology, white woman, midwest raised]

Student ARA Comments: 2005

- I will conclude by saying that this topic caught me off-guard because I feel...conflicted as to the professor's role in reducing prejudice in the classroom and *how* to go about doing that, yet fully supportive of a multicultural education because I myself learned a great deal from my multicultural interactions in college. In some ways this is a good lesson for me as to how our own personal experiences, emotions and politics might block a critical evaluation of readings and block the ability to complete an assignment with as much rigor as is required by the assignment. **For some reason, I had not connected my interest in prejudice and racism to teaching to a classroom with diverse perspectives.**

[MS, political science, white woman, campus leader]

Student ARA Comments: 2008

- It is important to first realize that **there is incredible diversity in every classroom even if this isn't evident on first inspection**....Once you get the student to start talking and listening to each other (and you), the doors would start to open. I think once you can create a structure in class for students to work together in diverse groups, this can be carried outside the class for students to study with each other. Looking back, the students that really helped each other along did well, and those students that were struggling got through too. I think it's a huge thing to make those students that wouldn't necessarily do well to actually succeed.
- **I was one of those kids** that went through college without these "higher education" skills and I still struggle sometimes with these skills....But I guess without struggling, you can't teach the "do's and don'ts." I am very good at the "don'ts."

[GH, immunology, white male, dual citizenship]

Student ARA Comments: 2008

- Like Dr. Nelson, I at first struggled to see how cultural diversity can have an impact on the scientific fields. However, his article points out some cultural differences in learning styles of which I had previously not been aware. The view of some cultures that only weak students study in groups was not something I had considered. I work better on assignments independently rather than in groups and therefore do not seek out study groups, but **it had not occurred to me that someone who would benefit from group work would avoid joining a group for fear of looking weak.**
- *As for the course content itself, the subject of biology seems mostly independent of culture.*
[LB, biology, white woman, 1st semester after undergrad]

Student ARA Comments: 2008

- In order to engage cultural diversity through discussion, **students must be comfortable with each other and feel that they are in a comfortable and accepting climate in your classroom. This, I imagine, is hard to do.** I think I harbor many misconceptions or assumptions, and may unintentionally show bias towards certain groups of people. Therefore, I wouldn't feel comfortable addressing cultural diversity overtly.
- *What are some good ways to address cultural diversity without conforming to misconceptions or unintentional biases that you may have?*
[JB, biology, white woman]

Student ARA Comments: 2008

- Diversity in the classroom may lead to greater knowledge and understanding of the concepts and problems discussed. Why? Because different perspectives and points of view on how to solve a specific problem can greatly enrich the learning experience of a class. **Variability among students' backgrounds can be positively used by directing healthy discussions where different perspectives on how to approach the topic can lead to a better understanding.**
- *How to avoid sensitive social issues such as race that will lead to a heated and uncontrolled discussion?*
[RV, engineering, male, Spanish speaking international student]

Student ARA Comments: 2008

- Page also raises another point, however: He treats diversity as an accidental, emergent feature. Pull a random sampling from a large enough pool, and the group you wind up with will naturally have a bunch of different skills and characteristics that will turn out to complement each other. That's fine as far as it goes, but it doesn't quite get at the very real issue that Nelson raises about students from groups that have been subject to systematic discrimination and exclusion. The sad fact is that until one's gender or skin color is no more significant than whether one likes jazz or grunge or British girl singers from the 60s, we can't simply treat that as one of the many nifty facts about a person.

What does this mean for setting a tone in class?

[CG, political science, white male]

Mindset : Climate

- The critical ingredient [of a multicultural classroom] is a supportive learning environment fostered by a teacher who appropriately recognizes and values different cultural styles and perspectives and effectively engages students in the learning process. **It is the environment of multicultural valuation - not just the presence of students of different characteristics and backgrounds - that makes a classroom multicultural and creates the potential for a fully effective learning climate.**

- Schmitz, Paul and Greenberg
"Creating Multicultural Classrooms" in *New Directions* #49

Mindset : Philosophy

- Multicultural Learning must be cultivated. Learners need practice and guidance to become active listeners, readers and writers striving to understand what others are saying *and* meaning. **Sustaining Multicultural Learning involves creating classroom climates in which students and teachers can acknowledge and address the discomfort of working across boundaries, learn how to respond to difference, and grow intellectually and personally as a consequence.** To make multicultural learning both possible and effective, instructors must structure classroom interactions to be respectful and challenging, creative and meaningful, engaged and transformative. **In such an environment, inaccuracies, mistakes, hasty generalizations and intolerance are addressed with honesty and care.**

- Ilene Alexander and Carol Chomsky, excerpt from *Driven to Discover* poster answering "What is Multicultural Learning?"

Mindset : Practices

■ Teaching for Learning

- view disequilibrium and dissonance as significant catalysts to higher levels of learning

■ Writing to Learn

- use forward looking informal writing to integrate higher level reading skills (purpose, audience, synthesis) with perspective shifting, analysis and self-assessment
- this supports/scaffolds formal writing assignments and peer / teacher feedback

■ Active Learning

- incorporate authentic assessment, contextualizing, interactive teaching & small group learning
- participants engage new, unfamiliar and ill-defined cases / experiences alongside – and to extend, deepen, provoke perspective-taking viz prior learning & life experiences

■ Integrated Course Design

- interconnect triad of learning goals, teaching/learning strategies & assessments
- develop teacher & student understanding of human development in social, psychological, identity and communication realms

MCTL Resources

- Alexander, Ilene D. "Multicultural Teaching and Learning Resources for Preparing Future Faculty in 'Teaching in Higher Education' Courses." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 111 (2007): 27-33. Special Issue: Scholarship of Multicultural Teaching and Learning.
- MCTL Resources Page: <http://tinyurl.com/cupn39>.
- Nelson, Craig. "Student Diversity Requires Different Approaches to College Teaching, Even in Math and Science." *American Behavioral Scientist*. 40.2 (1996):165-175.
- Page, S.E. "Prologue: How Diversity Trumps Ability: Fun at Cal Tech." *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*. Princeton UP, 2008.