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## **Multiculturally Transforming Teaching**

Vivian Dalila Carlo, Judith Hudson, Ella Burnett, Mary Ann Gawelek and Mary Huegel

### ***Introduction and Rationale***

Colleges are struggling to address the needs of their increasingly diverse student populations to make the educational experience of all students more culturally relevant. Strategies include: making the campus climate more receptive to multicultural thinking, including an awareness of multicultural issues in teaching, addressing multicultural concerns in scholarship, and transforming the curriculum to be multicultural.

National demographic data indicate that the US population of persons of color and immigrants is continuing to increase. By the middle of this century, people of color as a whole will constitute about half of the US population (Banks, 2003). Regardless of these ongoing changes, however, the teacher corps of the US remains over 90% White and middle class, while the majority of public school students in several major cities is already Black, Hispanic, and/or Asian American (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Moreover, persons of color continue to be portrayed from a deficit perspective with emphasis be on their over-representation among the poor, unemployed and undereducated (Banks, 1995). Due to this deficit portrayal, White professionals too often overlook the nature of systemic oppression in the assessment of students and of clients referred for services to address educational, physical and mental health issues (Nieto, 1996; Sue, 1995).

The positive contributions of the rich and diverse cultures that comprise the fabric of US society continue to be overlooked. In addition, the narrow applicability of current theory and practice, most often developed for White, middle class males has been well documented. Higher education, therefore, needs to prepare professional practitioners to draw on the strengths of cultural groups and women in broadening the knowledge base in all disciplines. In order to provide a democratic, transformative and empowering education, professional training for faculty and administrators in the area of multiculturalism and critical pedagogy is imperative (Shor, 1992).

Although the current and future demographic data describe the emergence of a multicultural world, most faculty have been, and continue to be educated within monocultural frameworks (Banks, 1997; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). In order to foster cultural cohesion in our nation, curricula that is relevant to, and reflective of, the historical and current complexity of our society is essential. To this end, colleges are striving to respond by developing administrative positions, formulating new collaborative committees, encouraging faculty to examine curriculum initiatives, and by placing greater attention and importance on the development of a campus climate that is supportive of all students.

In 1993, the Graduate Faculty of Lesley University chose to participate in a project to respond to the challenges presented by these realities. This article describes this successful, three-year initiative to transform the curriculum and pedagogy of Lesley University.

### ***The Transformation Project Begins***

By the early 1990's, many faculty in the Lesley University community had become increasingly impatient with the lack of progress toward diversifying the student body, the faculty and the curriculum of the College. The general feeling of the community was that the culture was not welcoming to students and faculty of color, and that the curriculum did not sufficiently address issues of diversity and cultural inclusion.

By 1992, Lesley University, which hires new faculty infrequently, had a relatively small number of 100 faculty in three schools: the Undergraduate Women's College, the School of Management, and the Graduate School. However, in the Fall of 1992, nineteen new faculty lines were created, and of these new hires, seventeen were people of color. This new group of faculty formed a critical mass and provided a perspective that had been missing at Lesley until this time.

Coinciding with this influx of people of color into the community, the institution had received a sizable donation specifically to assist the school in the area of multiculturalism. The president of the University mandated that the community work together to change the culture of the school. Under her direction, the Diversity Initiative, a campus-wide group of individuals from every constituency, was assembled. This group considered every aspect of the school including: recruitment, admissions and retention; quality of life issues; the professional development of staff, administrators and faculty; curriculum development; and more. Surveys were distributed, workshops initiated, and the plan for a cultural audit of the entire community was underway.

In the Graduate School, the dean was personally interested in and somewhat impatient with the progress made in the area of diversity. He wanted to see a program that would address the issues of diversity comprehensively and effectively, and was prepared to dedicate substantial personal and financial support to the development of such a project, specifically within the Graduate School.

There were by this time, several senior and junior faculty and administrators in the Graduate School who had a great deal of knowledge and expertise in multiculturalism. In the Fall of 1993, a motion was made at the Graduate School Assembly meeting that a committee be formed to develop an ongoing professional development initiative to address issues of diversity in the Graduate School. The idea was embraced, a steering committee of faculty and administrators was formed and the Transformation Project began.

### *The Steering Committee*

The first task was to design a professional development project to address the limitations of the current knowledge and practice base. We wanted our work with faculty to result in the creation of a reformed curriculum, one that would prepare our students to respond to the changing demographics of our society. We knew that we would have to provoke our colleagues to challenge some long-held assumptions and perspectives if transformation was to occur. According to Suzuki (1984) and Hidalgo (1993), multicultural curriculum transformation must begin within an introspective process whereby practitioners are encouraged to examine the cultural realities of our own lives.

We, therefore, began by developing a common understanding about the dynamics of culture to guide our work:

“We define culture broadly to include race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, gender, socio-economic class, place of residence, sexual orientation and differing physical abilities. Our cultural identity is formed by the intersection of these cultural strands, which in turn, determines our position of social privilege and/or oppression and influences our professional practice.”

### *Objectives of the Project*

With this definition, the Steering Committee set about developing the objectives of the project:

1. We believed that it was imperative that participating faculty members pay important attention to developing an understanding of their cultural identities. We believed that by encouraging the exploration of each cultural strand, participants would enhance their awareness about the position of privilege or oppression they held, and/or how positions could vary depending on the contexts of their personal and professional lives. From here, participants could also begin to consider the effects of one's identity and position on one's teaching. This objective became the main thrust of *Year One* of the project.
2. Multicultural curriculum revision, including placing transformative attention on content, resources, pedagogy and student assessment, was considered essential. This objective eventually became *Year Two* of the project. We began by emphasizing the need to focus primarily on the revision of required courses, rather than on electives or special focus courses.
3. Finally, because graduate students take a series of courses in their studies, we acknowledged that in addition to the revision of individual courses, the project would assist faculty to develop the programmatic competencies that could more comprehensively reflect and affect students' experiences. This objective was the thrust of *Year Three*.

In order to encourage the greatest participation of faculty in the Transformation Project, we developed the seminars of the Project to coincide with Graduate Faculty Assembly meetings. Our plan involved monthly, hour-long working sessions enhanced by full-day professional development events.

### *Year One*

The main assumption underlying the rationale for year one emerged from the belief that instructors' classroom behaviors are shaped by the developmental levels of the various dimensions of their cultural identities (Hidalgo, 1993).

The study of cultural identity has been primarily focused within the field of psychology and was developed to assist human service providers to better understand cross-cultural communication patterns and interpersonal behaviors between themselves and their clients (Pinderhughes, 1989). In recent years, educators have expanded the application of identity theories beyond psychology to the field of education. Although various aspects of cultural identity have been acknowledged

within these psychological and educational settings, race, ethnicity and gender have been used as the primary indicators for understanding identity development. The Transformation Project Steering Committee moved beyond this limited definition and utilized a range of descriptors under the rubric of cultural identity that reflects the broadest definition of multicultural education. It was planned that in *Year One*, the participants of the Transformation Project would be guided to examine their cultural identities, and to move from viewing cultural identity solely within a psychologically interactional framework to one that acknowledges the sociopolitical dimensions that are so often the root causes of teacher/ student and practitioner/client cultural incongruity.

In the first year of the project, thirty-five faculty and administrators made a commitment to participate in one-hour monthly seminars and in two, day-long programs in January and May. Beginning with the first session, we asked all participants to form small cooperative working groups. Throughout the year we made a conscious effort to be both cognitive and affective in our process. We used a variety of pedagogic strategies to ensure this balance:referenced readings; small group discussions; lectures; panel presentations; movement; guided imagery; creative art activities and reality-based simulations and vignettes.

### *Monthly Seminars*

We began each monthly seminar with a culturally-based personal focus and through a variety of activities moved the discussion to professional implications. The first year's program began with a focus on power as a way of locating our multiple identities within our various realities of privilege and/or oppression. In the first session, we combined nationality, ethnicity and language simply because there were not enough months to cover each category, yet this integration of themes was problematic because it was apparent that each of these categories needed fuller exploration. One piece of feedback we received early on was that language as an indicator of culture needed much more attention.

As we proceeded it became clear that when we were discussing one aspect of our identity such as race, other aspects overlapped such as gender and class. We were constantly reminded of the complexity of this work as identity themes continued to evoke different responses. For example, faculty seemed reticent to discuss their own class background while they were able to articulate issues of class identity in relation to their students. The discussion of religion, too, was difficult; we found very few people willing to speak in public about their religious beliefs and practices. The topic of sexual orientation challenged us as well. This session had the least attendance.

White faculty expressed a lot of fear initially: fear of being perceived as racist, sexist, classist, etc. and fear of not knowing how to handle emotional conflicts with colleagues and with students in the classroom. White faculty often commented on how the personal identity explorations were so emotionally charged. Even before the program started, one faculty who chose not to participate gave the following reason:

“I work really hard to separate my personal life and my professional identity. If I make myself vulnerable I may lose credibility as a younger faculty member. I may not know how to relate to people the next day”

Early on, it became apparent that faculty of color were impatient with the amount of time some White faculty needed in order to process their identity issues; many White faculty were just beginning to enter into such a dialogue. Some faculty of color quickly gravitated to groups with White colleagues who already had a systemic analysis of oppression. Our flexibility in honoring these shifts was important.

### *Full-day Professional Development Events*

In January we presented a day-long program examining the challenges of teaching courses which focus primarily on racism, sexism, homophobia and other oppressions as well as courses with specific cultural content. Faculty and administrators from across the college community participated in a panel discussion on these topics. Several issues arose:

1. More women tend to teach such courses; there are varying opinions as to why this is so.
2. Faculty credibility can be an issue in different classroom contexts. For instance, faculty of color and faculty who speak with an accent have to establish their credibility *No matter what they teach*, and this reality brings its own stress. White faculty are also challenged in terms of whether or not they are credible in content areas where the cultural focus is not their own. (It was acknowledged that students need to see White faculty taking the content of these courses seriously.)
3. In co-teaching situations biracial faculty teams report that they often experience the denial and anger of White students directed toward the instructor of color and/or toward students of color when difficult racial-based issues are being addressed.
4. Courses on oppression and cultural specialization have a distinct tension because of the emotional impact of the course content. Students do not expect the confrontation with the self that results from having their world view challenged. Thus there is no neat tie-up at the end.
5. Finally, faculty of color note that their evaluations often show that they have been misunderstood or misinterpreted. One African American faculty member discussed receiving evaluations that commented on her anger. She shared that she had not experienced herself as being angry. She acknowledged expressing both intensity and a sense of urgency for students to understand the content of the course, but this perspective is quite different from the anger the White students reported.

This year of identity development ended in May with a day-long focus on power, privilege and oppression. We could tell that faculty relationships had changed because professional connections had deepened as a result of the personal sharing that had taken place throughout the year. While faculty gave testimony to the importance of working together, they were able to appreciate how their world views varied. Throughout the day's activities we heard how enriching each participant's own self discovery had been. In spite of our many differences we became more aware of our shared commitment to the development of an effective teaching/learning community.

## *Year Two*

*Year Two* witnessed the transition from personal and professional identity development to the theory and practice of curriculum and pedagogy. Our goals for the year were to develop transformed course syllabi which reflected an infusion of multiculturalism. The steps toward that goal were articulated as themes for the monthly, one-hour seminars and for the faculty development days in September, January and May (see "Full-day professional development events" below).

In the beginning of Year Two, the project experienced an increase in the participation of faculty. In order to accommodate the transformational needs of the 50+ participants, small work groups were organized around shared programmatic goals and/or practices.

### *Monthly Seminars*

The monthly meetings for Year Two were structured to follow a progression for course and syllabus transformation. Topics, readings and tasks were developed to provide faculty with step-by-step procedures for changing their pedagogy and practice in their classrooms and for reflecting those changes in their syllabi.

Our goals embraced the development of multicultural objectives; the inclusion of readings, resources, and materials that place the voices of marginalized groups in the center of the curriculum; the utilization of culturally relevant assessment strategies and assignments; and the expansion of pedagogy that acknowledges the historic and sociopolitical dimensions of power, privilege and oppression (McCarthy, 1993; Nieto, 1996).

In October and November, faculty worked in peer groups to write multicultural objectives that would reflect the development of multicultural competencies. Additionally, faculty worked together to critique existing and suggested readings, resources and materials for inclusion in their courses.

Although the Steering Committee had asked for a first draft of syllabi in December, it became apparent that faculty needed more time to reflect on and discuss the process for transforming courses. We, therefore, shifted the agenda to a discussion of the impact of this work on students.

The Spring semester began with an exhilarating full-day faculty development program which brought powerful speakers to the campus. We spent the day in conversation in large groups and in small interest groups developing better perspectives of the transformation process individually and institutionally (see "Full-day professional development events" below).

In February, March and April, the one-hour sessions were devoted to the discussion of classroom vignettes which emerged from the real-life stories of colleagues. The Steering Committee's objective was to provoke participants to come face to face with the realities of implementing a multicultural curriculum. An important purpose of the vignettes was to provide the faculty with experiences in learning to tolerate the disequilibria that comes from addressing issues of

diversity in the classroom. This was a preview of the real test, i.e., guiding students, who might be critical of multicultural education, to explore issues that could still be unresolved for the instructor as well. The vignettes challenged us to anticipate the complexity of multiple perspectives among our students and among ourselves.

In April, forty-five faculty handed in drafts of their transformed syllabi. The Steering Committee developed a grid based on the objectives we had set forth in September, and used the grid to assess and evaluate the efforts of our colleagues (figure 1).

### ***Full-day Professional Development Events***

In addition to the two, day-long professional development seminars, we added a third, in September, following a similar format from the previous year. The September and January day-long events featured consultants noted for their work in curriculum and pedagogical issues related to diversity. The May day-long event provided faculty with an opportunity to reflect on the important issues raised throughout *Year Two*.

In September 1994, Dr. Carl Grant, the Hoefs-Bascom Professor of Teacher Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and a Professor in the Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, joined us as our first professional development consultant of the year. His task was to set the tone for Year Two by assisting faculty to consider their own belief systems in relation to the five approaches to multicultural education which Dr. Grant and Dr. Christine Sleeter had previously identified from their research and analysis of multicultural education practices within the United States (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 1994). Their five approaches are:

- Teaching the Culturally and Exceptionally Different
- Human Relations
- Single Group Studies
- Multicultural Education
- Education that Is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist.

Based in part on our own teaching experiences, we felt it was important to validate what continues to be reflected in the literature, that in order to create an education that is multicultural, people must begin “where they are at” (Suzuki, 1984). Therefore, it was our intention to assist our colleagues to define their transformation efforts within the context of their own belief systems as they might be reflected in one of Sleeter and Grant's five approaches.

### **Transformation Project**



Syllabi Review Sheet

Criteria	Changes/Comments
<p><b>Course Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear</li> <li>• Related to all aspects of diversity</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Course Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required readings representative of marginalized persons</li> <li>• Address of multiple experiences of marginalization</li> <li>• Readings which reflect controversies in your subject area</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Course Resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect discipline standards (i.e., developed competencies)</li> <li>• Software available in your topic area</li> <li>• Simulations and case studies</li> <li>• Video tapes</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Assessment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are multicultural objectives assessed in course assignments?</li> <li>• Have assignments been designed to easily reflect a variety of "ways of knowing"?</li> <li>• Is assessment of affective (personal) and cognitive (subject) domains?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Pedagogy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any reflection of power/oppression issues</li> <li>• Recognition of faculty's and students' cultural identity</li> </ul>	
Other	

**Figure 1.** Syllabi Review Form

*January Professional Development Day*

In planning the January day-long event, the Steering Committee invited consultants whose expertise and experiences would reflect curriculum development within the three broad disciplines in the Graduate School: Educational Studies and Public Policy; Counseling, Psychology and Expressive Therapies; and Liberal Studies and Adult Education. The consultants we brought onto campus for this event were renowned in their respective fields:

1. Dr. Sonia Nieto is a Professor in the Cultural Diversity and Curriculum Reform Program in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her work centers on the effects of education on all children, in particular, those students most marginalized by educational systems.

2. Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum was at the time an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Education at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. She is known for her expertise on the psychology of racism and for the extensive research she has done on the effects of anti-racism education on the identity development of White students and students of color.

3. Dr. Derald Wing Sue is Professor of Counseling Psychology at the California School of Professional Psychology and Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at California State University, Hayward. His major contributions have been in the field of cross-cultural communications and minority mental health.

All members of the college community were invited to attend the morning presentation, during which each of our eminent scholars addressed the pedagogical concerns that arise when faculty raise issues of diversity, i.e., students' anger, resistance to concepts, guilt, denial, etc. Additionally, our guests were asked to discuss the ways in which faculty members' own cultural identities can affect classroom dynamics. Prominent in each consultant's presentation was important attention to White identity development.

In the afternoon, participating faculty brought their transforming syllabi with them and joined one of three groups facilitated by the visiting consultants. Participants were encouraged to discuss faculty's specific concerns, with a focus on developing both individual and collegial supports for problem solving. Dr. Nieto worked with those faculty who were transforming education and content specific courses. Dr. Tatum guided faculty working on specialty courses across disciplines, i.e., racism and courses designed to specifically address multicultural concerns. Dr. Sue's experience with clinical training issues was directed toward faculty working on psychology based courses. This session allowed faculty to have individual needs in relation to syllabi transformation addressed.

### ***May Professional Development Day***

At the May day-long event, 45 faculty and administrators attended the closing seminar of Year Two. This was a significantly high turnout considering the end of the semester pressures that members of college communities experience at this time of year. The program for the day included a combination of large and small group discussions and affective exercises which emphasized the connections between the cultural identity work stressed during *Year One* and the process of curricular transformation which was the focus of Year Two. Participating faculty and

administrators were encouraged to discuss the important links between collegiality and conflict, provoked to engage in an analysis of power in relation to their roles in the college community, and impelled to acknowledge the power dynamics that occur in relation to individuals' identities as racial/cultural beings. The process designed for the day resulted in a powerful and compelling experience for participants and facilitators alike. We closed the day with a commitment to continue this hard work. The words of a faculty member underscored the importance of continuing the work into *Year Three*. She said,

“...I see the importance of cohort groups...formed around dialogue and truth-seeking...and change... We need to set up our own projects investigating each other's pedagogy and teaching spirit...”

### *Year Three*

It was apparent to us that a number of issues had to be attended to in *Year Three* of the project. Through our efforts, we had established a learning community. We could already see the effects of the project in enhanced collegiality throughout the Graduate School. The opportunity for faculty to share their work, their experiences, and their concerns about teaching had become an essential support to faculty life. We knew that this form of collegiality needed to be affirmed and continued.

Still, the faculty had maintained a relatively safe stance regarding the discussion of diversity. They had attitudinally accepted that curriculum transformation was important, but as a collective body, they had not yet engaged in the depth of dialogue which can help to establish the alliances of ongoing collegiality. Outcomes of vignettes and discussions at the close of *Year Two* had provided us with a sense that faculty were now eager to work more closely together.

Additionally, the fundamental approaches to curricular transformation were now taking on greater meaning. Some faculty were clearly interested in creating “anti-oppressive” curricula with an emphasis on social change; these individuals were ready to engage in cognitive and affective as well as personal and professional change. Yet other faculty were more comfortable with a more traditional inclusion of multicultural content and strategies from a theory to skills application. Although there had been an attempt in the beginning of *Year Two* to have faculty position themselves within Sleeter and Grant's approaches to Multicultural Education, and although there was some evidence of this in some syllabi, faculty had not specifically referenced these frameworks in their syllabi revisions. We, therefore, thought it imperative to begin *Year Three* by underscoring our belief that curriculum transformation would be more successful if faculty positioned themselves in relation to these approaches.

The training design for *Year Three* was to be essentially the same as it had been the previous year: three full days of faculty development in September, January and May, and monthly, hour-long working seminars. As *Year Three* was to begin, Lesley University was thrust into a difficult institutional restructuring process. The circumstances surrounding this new initiative were such that we were delayed on our start up, and the pressures of the change precluded the participation of several faculty. As a result, we did not get underway until January and participation fell to a committed cohort of about 35 faculty participants.

In the January faculty development day, the faculty discussed what it was like to receive feedback from their colleagues, engaged in alliance building by sharing their transformation efforts within very small groups, offered a critique of the work of the project to date, and disclosed insights gained through the process thus far.

### *Monthly Seminars*

In the February and March seminars, participants met in discipline and program groups—teacher education, special education, literacy/reading, clinical practice, creative arts, and independently designed program—and were given the task to identify discipline-based multicultural competencies in relation to course objectives and professional and state equity standards. Utilizing a structure developed by the Steering Committee (figure 2), faculty in work groups generated multicultural competencies and considered the cognitive, affective and skills domains that would need to be addressed in courses. In March, participants also considered the notion of multicultural standards in relation to admissions.

### *Transformation Project Discipline Competencies*

Directions: In discipline and specialty groups, your task is to focus on the programs/disciplines and identify the multicultural competencies needed by your graduates to enroll in ethical professional practice. Consider professional standards articulated within your discipline.

Competencies	Domains		
	Cognitive	Affective	Skills
<b>Example:</b> Understanding your cultural identity	X(defininig culture)	X(know self/impact)	X(appreciation)
<b>Example:</b> Understanding stereotypes	X(why exist)	X(impact of)	X (can identify)

**Figure 2.** Discipline Competencies Work Sheet

The Steering Committee then compiled the results of these efforts and generated a list of multicultural competencies that we felt should be considered for every program (Figure 3). In April, participants were asked to work in dyads, and to articulate the relationship of these generic competencies to programs and disciplines, and to consider the integration of multiculturalism throughout program expectations and assignments.

In the May seminar, faculty extended the discussion of competencies to include the assessment of students on both their cognitive and affective multicultural development. Should we graduate bigots, and how could we deal with the students who would choose to distance themselves from the philosophical agenda we had been, for three years now, attending to?

In May 1996, the last formal session of the Lesley University Transformation Project took place. It was a day for both reflection and for determining the personal and institutional supports that would need to be identified in order for the impetus of the project to continue. It was a day of sharing experiences, a day of modeling transformation efforts, and a day to plan for the next steps that would encourage the institutionalization of the work of the Transformation Project at Lesley University.

In our estimation, the Transformation Project was very successful. In the ensuing years, student feedback has consistently underscored the multiple perspectives of diversity that they receive throughout their program of study. Nonetheless, the lesson to be gained from this initiative is the importance of creating comprehensive and collaborative, practice-based professional development activities for faculty in the area of multicultural education. As the demographics of our society continue to change, it will be our responsibility, as an institution committed to the belief that “people matter” (Lesley University Mission Statement, 2002) to prepare professionals who can respond to the multifaceted issues of concern in our contemporary society, and whose presence in that world will be as change agents for social justice and equity.

<i>Transformation Project Generic</i>	
<i>Multicultural Competencies</i>	
1.	Understanding cultural identity (multiple identities) - teachers and students, impact on practice, relationship to macroculture (privilege, oppression)
2.	Understanding historical perspectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural groups</li> <li>• disciplines,</li> <li>• multicultural theory</li> </ul>
3.	Understanding the culture and the power structure of institutions and the embedded discriminatory practices
4.	Understanding the intersection of the individual's world view with historical and institutional forces and realities
5.	Able to critique existing knowledge base, pedagogy/skills, and materials/resources for appropriateness for diverse populations
6.	Development of pedagogy and skills to meet the needs of culturally

	diverse learners and systems (real-world application of knowledge)
7.	Expansion of communication skills, i.e., using arts, knowledge/comfort with various languages (ASL, verbal/non-verbal) and dialects, understanding affective and behavioral expressions
8.	Ability to tolerate ambiguity, conflict and development of conflict resolution skills

**Figure 3.** Generic Multicultural Competencies Work Sheet

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