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“Here?” Strategies for Teaching about Cultural Diversity in Non-Diverse Settings

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Abstract

How can educators motivate people in ethnically non-diverse areas to learn about multiculturalism? The roadblocks people may encounter in this process are explored and ways instructors may address multiculturalism in the classroom are presented.

As we approach the turn of the century, demographers have charted increasingly diverse populations in many countries. In both the United States and Canada, people from minority ethnic groups compose an increasingly larger percentage of the population. Women, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and other non-European ethnic groups, for example, will continue to increase in their share of the U.S. labor force whereas those of European descent are expected to represent nearly 82 percent of those who leave the labor force but only 65.3 percent of those who enter it between 1990 and 2005 (Kutscher, 1992, 1993). Canada is experiencing similar changes. According to Kelly (1995), nearly 10 percent of the adult population in Canada are visible minorities and this figure is expected to double in the next 20 years. From these figures alone, it is clear that diversity is already well established and will only increase (Reinemer, 1995).

In Canada, an explicit policy of multiculturalism has existed since 1971. The key elements of this policy, according to Berry and Kalin (1995), are that “all Canadians should be able to maintain and develop their own cultural identities if they so wish, that they should be willing to share their cultures with other Canadians, and, that they should be free from prejudice and discrimination” (p. 302). In recent years, however, as a result of the social and demographic changes taking place across the United States and Canada,

ethnic relations in both countries have become strained. This strain is evident in the resistance to affirmative action in the United States, tension between French Canadians and English Canadians, and, anti-immigrant sentiments which are increasingly common in both countries.

When we examine demographic changes in the population, it is important to understand that these changes are not uniform across all regions. For example, in the United States, Levine (1989) reported that coastal states like Texas, Florida, California, New York, and New Jersey will become home to increasing numbers of members of diverse ethnic groups whereas fewer members of these groups will choose to settle in states such as Delaware, Kansas, or Vermont. Esses and Gardner (1996) found similar uneven regional representation in Canada.

Cumber and Braithwaite (1996) found what they termed a "backyard orientation" toward what it means to be multicultural. When they asked college students to reflect on multiculturalism on their own campuses, they found that students' views of multiculturalism were influenced by the ethnic makeup of their own state and university. For example, students attending a university in the southwestern United States where one-third of students were Hispanic, with a small percentage of African American and Native Americans, viewed multicultural issues from an *internal* perspective, focusing on how these groups interacted with people of European descent and with one another. In other words, they looked at the concept of multiculturalism as it affected them personally. In contrast, students at a northern plains university, where 95 percent of the students were people of European descent, had a much different view of multiculturalism. Their ideas about multiculturalism focused *outside* of the majority student body and on adaptations international students, faculty, and administrators should make. In other words, the concept of "multicultural" referred to issues that affected others, or that others should attend to, but were not issues that affected them on a personal level (Cumber & Braithwaite, 1996). The researchers concluded that although both southwest and northern plains residents understood the applicability of multiculturalism in their locales, they had notably different understanding and experiences with diversity in their midst.

This "backyard" view of multiculturalism, coupled with the regional variation in demographics, provides some explanation for the fact that not all are in agreement with the increased prominence of diversity issues which some see as irrelevant to their communities (Ayalon, 1995; Cumber, 1992; Shanker, 1991). In urban areas, where individuals are more likely to interact with large numbers of people from differing backgrounds on a daily basis, the need for diversity education and training is more apt to be understood. Many times, the incorporation of diversity issues in the curriculum has been a long-standing issue in these settings, resulting in increased tolerance for diversity. This is reflected in the results of a recent national survey in Canada which indicated that attitudes toward ethnic groups were directly related to their ethnic presence (Esses & Gardner, 1996; Kalin, 1996). The underlying resistance to teaching multicultural issues in more non-diverse settings, however, may be exacerbated by a lack of motivation and access to "diversity" in non-diverse areas. In other words, if people live in an area of the country or within a large city that is not ethnically diverse, why should they be concerned with issues of multiculturalism?

The majority of people in ethnically diverse areas understand that they will be *encountering* persons of different cultural groups in their professional and personal lives. Although there are certainly those who are resistant to this notion, the need to study issues of cultural diversity is more readily understood by more people in ethnically diverse regions and educators have more resources upon which they can rely. There is a wealth of literature and other resources concerning multiculturalism and the needs of diverse communities within and outside the university setting. Very little of this literature, however, addresses multiculturalism from the perspective of relatively homogeneous or ethnically non-diverse communities. University-level schools of Social Work and Education have long been leaders in providing diverse cultural experiences to their students, even those in non-diverse areas (Beckerman & Burrell, 1994; Sanders, 1975). While this is encouraging, we believe the need for studying multiculturalism and its pedagogical implications pertains to *all* academic disciplines in all communities. Therefore, in this article we have chosen to focus our attention on issues of multiculturalism within ethnically non-diverse communities.

Certainly, we believe that institutional efforts to address multicultural issues are necessary in the university. However, we also know that diversity needs are not created equal, that is, the approaches to diversity must be relevant within particular geographic areas and communities in which students live and work (Ayalon, 1995; Cumber & Braithwaite, 1996; Tatum, 1992). Given the explicit multicultural policy which has existed in Canada since 1971 and the urban mandate, it is likely that there are many institutions and individuals who have been committed to, and successfully working with, diversity issues in their classrooms for years. Conversely, there are those who still reject the need for diversity or those who work in areas where they might be prevented from incorporating diversity issues in the curriculum, as a result of community or administrative indifference or resistance. We are not speaking to either of these groups. Where we believe we can make a contribution is to those who find themselves in institutions that do not have a history of incorporating diversity issues in their curriculum or classrooms: for example, an individual who has moved to a region where these issues have been neglected; or, a teacher who has discovered that they would like to start to incorporate diversity issues but has little experience or resources to do so. Thus, our *purpose* is to provide an understanding of the roadblocks to incorporating diversity issues in non-diverse settings and to provide practical strategies for teachers and trainers working who wish to bring these issues into their classrooms.

Roadblocks

We will explore two reasons residents of ethnically non-diverse areas may resist efforts to incorporate diversity issues into the curriculum: (a) homogeneous population and (b) access to diversity resources.

Homogeneous Population

It is not surprising that resistance to multicultural education often comes from rural or otherwise non-diverse areas where residents do not frequently interact with individuals they perceive to be very different from themselves. As Harris and Wingett (1993) point out,

multicultural education is often viewed as an urban concern. Because many people living in homogeneous settings equate “culture” with ethnicity or skin color, they may not feel that cultural diversity training or instruction is a necessity when most, if not all, the population comes from a similar ethnic background. In fact, after a ten-year review of literature concerning education in rural schools, Ayalon (1995) found few articles concerning multicultural education, particularly in the context of white majority schools.

Access to Diversity Resources

Instructors in homogeneous, often rural communities who may wish to incorporate multiculturalism into their courses may find their efforts thwarted by the fact there are few, if any, people of diverse ethnic backgrounds represented in their classes. Opportunities for guest speakers or incorporating regular interactions with members of other ethnic groups into classroom discussion may also be limited or otherwise discouraged. When they are present, minority students may feel reluctant to speak up or feel pressured by the expectation that they must present “the minority perspective.” Educators may also be unaware of appropriate films, assignments, or experiential-based resources which would increase the relevance of many diversity issues. Faced with limited human and/or financial resources and, in some cases, community resistance, the educator may simply give up trying to incorporate diversity issues in the traditional college classroom.

However, even in largely Caucasian rural communities, the opportunities for cross-cultural interaction may be greater than many have imagined, as we will later suggest. More importantly, as both Harris and Wingett (1993) and Ayalon (1995) point out, even residents of rural areas may find themselves working with people from different backgrounds as a result of the increased economic dependence upon prisons and other forms of institutional employment, the shift from farming to manufacturing and services, and the overall demographic changes in North America. In one example of demographic changes, Harris and Wingett (1993) documented that many rural school districts in Nebraska are experiencing changes because of an influx of Latino families into their communities. Similar influxes throughout the country by people of color have led to what some have called “the browning of America” (Byrd, 1995).

Though these population changes may not be immediately evident to residents of rural areas, the increasing mobility of the population and selected city-to-country migration patterns may bring these changes to light in the near future. Byrd (1995), for example, observes that “not only is the landscape browning it is also graying, becoming more feminine, more representative of diverse sexual orientations and more accommodating of the differently-abled” (p. 3). Thus, despite the current perception of homogeneity and limited access to resources, it is imperative that diversity issues be examined in traditionally non-diverse educational settings.

Facilitating the Teaching of Diversity Issues in Non-diverse Settings

Because of this imperative, the four authors, scholars at institutions with differing levels of diversity, have come together in a collaborative effort to facilitate the incorporation of multiculturalism in classrooms located in ethnically non-diverse regions. As Ayalon (1995)

points out, "multicultural education does not refer to a single set of methods nor to a single curriculum" (p. 2). Our research and experience leads us to suggest three steps which educators can take to address multicultural issues in our classrooms. First, we discuss preparations individual instructors must take to make sure they are prepared to teach about multiculturalism. Second, we suggest that instructors take on an expanded definition of culture. Third, we present a variety of classroom strategies and approaches that instructors can use to teach about diversity in non-diverse regions.

Instructor Preparation

The successful teachers of multicultural issues enter the classroom as more than just a reliable source of information. They also teach from a perspective which will allow students to identify diversity in their own experiences. We suggest that it is crucial that teachers increase their personal knowledge about diversity and make sure they are very clear about their own feelings on diversity.

According to Goodman (1995), an important step an educator can take to incorporate diversity in the classroom setting is to develop his or her own personal sensitivity and knowledge. Several scholars have argued that teachers must understand effective multicultural education begins with their own awareness, attitudes, and cultural knowledge and not by relying too heavily on textual material presented to students (Bright, 1995; Broome, 1991; Harris & Wingett, 1993; Koester & Lustig, 1991; Tatum, 1992). Tatum (1992) noted that when race-related content is included in the curriculum, often the students will experience a range of emotions ranging from guilt and shame to anger and despair. Often the discomfort associated with these emotions can inhibit the learning process and this difficulty is compounded when the instructor is also visibly uncomfortable (Bright, 1995). As a result, it is important to develop one's own intellectual and emotional awareness about cultural diversity before teaching about or within it. Schmitz, Paul, and Greenberg (1992) argued that the critical ingredient to effective teaching in a diverse classroom is a supportive learning environment fostered by a teacher who recognizes and values different cultural styles and perspectives and uses them to facilitate learning process. The more informed about, and comfortable with issues of diversity, the more effective the instructor will be in guiding discussions, answering questions, clarifying misconceptions and challenging stereotypes.

We recommend several recent books which may facilitate the learning processes of both instructors and students. Portions of these books also make suitable reading assignments. Among the books are: *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks, 1995); *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Banks & McGee, 1989); *Intercultural Sourcebook: Cross-Cultural Training Methods* (Fowler & Mumford, 1995); *Developing Intercultural Awareness: A Cross-Cultural Training Handbook* (Kohls & Knight, 1994); *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (Nieto, 1992); *Preventing Prejudice* (Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993); *Experiential Activities for Intercultural Learning* (Seelye, 1996); *Cross-Cultural Dialogues* (Storti, 1994); *Counseling the Culturally Different* (Sue & Sue, 1990); and *Diversity and Motivation* (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). These books make information about other cultures accessible to both the student and to the instructor in traditional and

nontraditional forms. Nieto (1992), for example, relies heavily on case studies while Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) take a more prescriptive pedagogical approach and Seelye (1996) and others focus on experiential learning.

Expanding the Definition of Culture

The second step an instructor can take before entering the non-diverse classroom is to have and to understand a definition of diversity that makes multicultural issues relevant to the students in that classroom. We advocate a broad definition of culture that highlights symbolic meanings and forms that reflect the views of particular cultural communities (Carbaugh, 1990). Based on Schneider's (1976) approach, we define culture as a historically transmitted system of shared symbols and meaning. This broader cultural definition allows us to focus on many aspects of culture as enacted in various communities, rather than seeing culture *solely* as ethnicity. Braithwaite (1991) argued that this kind of definition of culture allows us to expand our notion of diversity in our classrooms. For example, we can look at diversity in terms of people with disabilities as a culture (Braithwaite, 1990, 1991; Braithwaite & Braithwaite, in press; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Siple, 1994); Vietnam veterans as a culture (Braithwaite, 1990a, 1990b); people who are elderly as a culture (Carmichael, 1988); "blue-collar" or lower class urban males as a culture (Philipsen, 1975, 1976, 1986); and people who are gay as a culture (Majors, 1994), just to name a few. Additionally, many authors look at the communication of men and women as reflecting different cultural experiences (e.g., Tannen, 1990; Wood, 1994).

Not only will students see the cultural differences *in* these groups, but we can help them to identify the commonalities they have *with* these groups. Students may be encouraged to examine how their own experiences are similar to those of people they might otherwise consider very "different." For example Braithwaite's (1991) research on persons with disabilities highlights that they are much more like their able bodied counterparts than they are different. Students should be able to identify similar points of convergence with other groups.

How will expanding the definition of culture facilitate the recognition of diversity in ethnically non-diverse regions? If students live in an area that is not racially or ethnically diverse, then issues associated with multiculturalism such as stereotyping and prejudice may not seem relevant when presented in terms of race or ethnicity. However, if these issues can be presented in terms of gender, age, or disability, they may help students become aware of cultural issues in their own backyard (Braithwaite, 1991). For example, students can readily see how stereotyping of persons who are elderly affects interactions with their own elderly family members and are aware of the communication adaptations necessary to communicate successfully with an elderly person. They may be able to relate to the discomfort they have communicating with people they perceive as different than they are, for example a Vietnam veteran or a person who is gay. It is likely they have experienced the discomfort of communicating with a person who is disabled or have witnessed the effects of stereotyping that a disabled classmate experiences. As a result, the thematic issues of diversity training such as values, perceptions, experiences (individual and group), communication styles, conflict styles, and assumptions may assume greater relevance when they can relate these experiences to themselves, their families, or other people

in their communities (Schmitz, Paul, & Greenberg, 1992). In other words, this view highlights and makes problematic the diversity that is all around them.

A broad definition of culture or "diversity," according to Beckerman and Burrell (1994), increases the heterogeneity of the ethnically non-diverse community and makes visible groups (in addition to racial or ethnic groups) which are also subject to discrimination and/or difficult communicative encounters. These localized groups may serve as illustrations of entrenched stereotypes, different communication styles, low status in the community, and deeply rooted forms of oppression which allow students to recognize individual characteristics of minority groups as well as the characteristics and structural problems shared by diverse groups (Beckerman & Burrell, 1994).

Finally, a broad definition of culture would encourage the residents of non-diverse areas to recognize that *they* themselves are part of a distinct culture created by their unique living environment, traditions, and communication. This is not to imply that the experience of all these groups are the same or that the issues of race and ethnicity should take a back seat to other cultural groups. However, when residents of non-diverse areas can learn about and appreciate their own background, this becomes a critical step in the process of understanding and learning about other cultures (Ayalon, 1995).

Classroom Strategies

While we do think it is important for instructors to prepare themselves and to broaden their definition of culture, we also know there are many practical strategies across the curriculum instructors can use to facilitate the incorporation of multicultural issues in classrooms in ethnically non-diverse settings. The practical approaches to multiculturalism we suggest here are predicated on a broad definition of culture as described above. Although some might mandate that every assignment has to be tied into some issue of diversity (Byrd, 1995), others might choose to focus on issues of diversity in some units and assignments more than others. We recognize that some students might be more open to diversity when they are not asked to deal with these topics at every turn. Certainly individual instructors need to perform a careful audience analysis of student attitudes, values, fears, and motivations to design classroom approaches tailored specifically to the needs of their particular students. The classroom strategies we present take several forms: assignments, readings, guest speakers, videos, simulations and exercises, and discussion.

Assignments

It has been our experience that the work students complete individually makes the greatest impact on them when it is also discussed in the classroom. When a project assignment provides the opportunity for students to take time to reflect on the culture around them, this can be a great learning experience and one that takes place away from the peer pressure that may exist in the classroom. Subsequent discussion would allow the student to fit his or her experience into that of the larger group. One such assignment is the exploration of a student's own ethnic heritage, whether from his or her own bloodlines or from an adopted or step family. We have found that many students are relatively unaware of their own roots. We would also suggest that students be asked to explore membership in other cultures beyond the obvious ethnic roots. For example, students can look at the effects of

coming from an agrarian culture, as contrasted with coming from an urban one. Students may also be asked to reflect on the experiences of family members from other cultural groups, for example, an uncle who is a Vietnam veteran, or a cousin who practices a different religion from other family members. Many of our students have reported a secondary effect of this assignment: the strengthening of family ties while tracking down "the oldest family story" or family origins. Said one student after completing this assignment: *"My grandma was so excited when I called (to ask) her about our history. She could have talked forever!"*

A second suggestion is to assign journals wherein each student explores issues and responses to diversity, including his or her own position in relation to majority and minority groups. Students may be asked to reflect upon face-to-face encounters with people of other cultural groups, on items in the media, or their reactions to various class readings and exercises. Students could be asked to contrast this with other cultures, for example, an uncle who is a Vietnam veteran or a cousin who practices a different religion from other family members. For example, one of us asked students to read a chapter by Sue and Sue (1990), which presents a model of "white identity" and asked students to write about their reactions in their journals. Many students indicated this was a useful, even eye-opening, exercise. After completing the assignment, one student who was interested in making a career of diversity training remarked: *"It was uncomfortable, but I'm glad we did it. I have a better idea of who I am in relation to who I want to be."*

In a third assignment, students may be asked to trace issues of multiculturalism via interviews, case studies, media, or historical texts. For example, students in business courses may be asked to interview women about their experiences in adapting to working in male-dominated organizations. One of us asked students to analyze historical letters from the governor's archives which reflected the intergroup tensions present in the history of the state. These materials are available in the archives of any state capital. The students were asked to select and analyze, from a group of 30 or more letters, those which represented the various forms of prejudice discussed by Allport (1979). The text of many such letters is often relevant to many more current issues, a fact which often results in a discussion of resistance to social change and institutionally sanctioned prejudice.

Readings

Reading literature written from a perspective different from the dominant one found in most textbooks may increase a student's appreciation for alternate world views as it is a form of exposure they might not otherwise encounter. Beckerman and Burrell (1994) noted this was a common avenue through which social work students in rural schools have been exposed to diversity issues.

One suggestion which may seem trite is the necessity of engaging in active discussion after assigned readings. It has been our experience that some students may resist reading articles with which they may feel uncomfortable and may take passive roles in the ensuing discussion. As a result, we have found it useful either to assign a group to present an overview of the article before discussion or, if possible, students are given time to "refresh their memory" during class.

We recommend a number of different readings, many of which were mentioned earlier. We would add to this list: *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Kochman, 1981); *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1987); *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (Samovar & Porter, 1994); and *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). We acknowledge that there are many other readings available which allow students in non-diverse areas to “hear” and understand voices they might not otherwise encounter in the course of their studies.

Additionally, we would recommend that students be exposed to ethnographies of other cultures, which would help them learn about culturally distinctive patterns of communication. According to Braithwaite (1991), good places to locate ethnographies include Philipsen and Carbaugh’s bibliography (1986), which provides citations of 282 studies that describe and analyze diverse speech communities. Gumperz and Hymes’ (1972) book includes 19 ethnographic studies of communication rules in verbal and nonverbal behavior. Bauman and Sherzer’s (1974) book presents 21 ethnographic studies. Finally, Carbaugh’s (1990) collection of ethnographies covers many different dimensions of communication among diverse cultures. Two journals which publish quality ethnographies include *Language in Society* and *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. For students in non-diverse areas, this may be their first exposure to the thoughts and feelings of the individual members of cultures whose labels are constantly bandied about in the media. Both Bright (1995) and Tatum (1992) note, however, that students who are resistant to issues of diversity may withdraw by not reading assignments and then not participating in discussions based on the readings. One of the authors of this article has found it useful to allow time in class to review the readings before discussion, whereas another uses short quizzes as incentives to read before class.

Guest speakers

If it is possible to contact a person who is willing to talk about the experiences of living as a member in a particular cultural group in your classroom, by all means do so. Often students appreciate a different perspective on the classroom material and they may be able to relate to a live person talking about cultural issues more readily than to those presented in readings. It makes, as one of our students said in her journal: “*everything we’ve been talking about come to life.*” We would caution, however, those in smaller communities to be careful not to place undue demands upon the few members of non-dominant groups who are available. Similarly, we would caution instructors to be careful not to expect minority members in classes to take on the undue burden to “speak for their group.” We do suggest alternating guest speakers from semester to semester and tapping into spokesperson bureaus such as those which exist in the larger communities (e.g., NAACP, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or Vietnam Veterans of America) to see if they might be willing to speak in your classroom as well.

Videotape resources

A well-chosen videotape can give life to discussions and make visible some cultural concepts with which students in different areas may have little experience. We recommend films which present a comprehensive view of different cultural groups: for example, *The Joy Luck Club*, *Mi Familia*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Dim Sum*, *Coming Home*, *Boyz in the Hood*,

Dances with Wolves, *Down and Out in America*, and *Tale of O*. These are just a few films containing themes relevant to discussions of either specific cultures or processes of intergroup contact. *Tale of O* is a cartoon-simplified discussion of being a minority in a majority situation, while *The Joy Luck Club*, *Mi Familia*, and *Dim Sum* illustrate intergenerational tensions and the heterogeneity of ethnic groups other than those in the mainstream. The remaining films look at the experiences of members of different groups within the United States. These films are available from most commercial video outlets and, as a result, may be more accessible to some educators than those prepared for smaller audiences.

Simulations and exercises

Cultural simulations such as BaFa BaFa, Ecotonos, or Barga provide students with cultural experiences they may not otherwise gain within the confines of a homogeneous community. The difficulty here is that the rules for many of the more elaborate games must be purchased. There are, however, simplified cultural simulations which require a minimum of financial investment. Many of these are available in the suggested readings. Simulation games provide a learning experience that is, as our students have indicated, more powerful than the readings and discussion combined. We argue that simulated experiences are essential when teaching about diversity in non-diverse areas.

Another type of experiential activity, not a simulation, asks students or groups of students to attend an event where they might find themselves "in the minority" and write about their experience and feelings. We had a group of middle-class students complete this assignment by spending one night in a shelter for people who are homeless. Other students have spent time visiting nursing homes or a social event for people who are elderly. We have asked men to report on their experience of attending a wedding or baby shower, which is usually attended and run by women. We have had Anglo students attend dances or concerts sponsored and attended by mostly African American or Latino students on campus. Students participating in the above experiences saw first-hand what it was like to be "different," to stand out from the crowd, or to be in a situation when they did not understand the rules for successfully participating or communicating in a particular event. Many of the students had never experienced these feelings before and this experience created a heightened awareness and, in some cases, increased empathy for others in similar positions.

Even experiences that are not inter-ethnic but put one in the minority can be eye-opening. For example, we have asked students to attend a movie alone on a Friday night or "date night," or eat in a nice restaurant alone, if they have never done so. In both of these examples, the norm is to participate in these events in the company of others, as in couples on date night or as a family at dinner. We also arranged for hearing students to attend a party of deaf students on campus, to allow them to experience a situation where they did not share the language of the group. Students often experience a great amount of trepidation before undertaking this exercise and they often report feeling isolated, stared at, or different. These kinds of experiences are especially helpful in sensitizing people who have rarely, if ever, experienced being "in the minority" and can lead to useful class discussions and heightened awareness of cultural issues.

We should point out that amidst some of the discomfort one might feel when learning about other cultural groups there can and should be room for fun. For example, students in one of our programs have initiated “intercultural dining nights” where students and faculty are invited to go out and experience cuisine from other cultures in restaurants or in private homes. Students are directed to pay just as much—if not more—attention to the environmental and (if possible) historical aspects of their dining experiences as they do to the food itself. And while eating “ethnic” food will not make one culturally sensitive, given the importance of food in so many culturally significant rituals (e.g., tamales at Christmas time for many Latin Americans), an appreciation for the role and taste of food in different cultures is not unwarranted. Students can also be involved in analyses of fashion, music, or hairstyles that are borrowed from different ethnic groups. Students may study media images of different groups: for example, one of us has students bring in video clips of people who are elderly and lead the class in discussions of how the media portray the experiences of these people.

Discussion

Readings, guest speakers, videos, and simulations should all be followed by discussions, which may be difficult to initiate, as many find talking about cultural differences uncomfortable. Students may be especially uncomfortable and “afraid of saying the wrong thing” in front of a member of a minority group. Our experience has borne out the benefits of not always having an answer to the difficult questions posed in discussions of multicultural issues. Such a stance encourages a climate of exploration of “issues” as opposed to resolution of “problems.” Such a climate supports the expression of ideas and opinions which may be otherwise unpopular or unheard. Goodman (1995) makes fourteen suggestions for how an instructor might facilitate discussions concerning diversity including having and enforcing discussion guidelines, using examples from one’s own life and encouraging others. The following guidelines are a synthesis of suggestions gleaned from the literature and practices we have found useful in our own classrooms.

- Establish and maintain a climate of openness and interaction by disclosing personal information about yourself and your cultural heritage (Allen, 1992). You may wish to provide an abbreviated biography of yourself and your group memberships before you ask your students to tell you about themselves as a journal assignment. Goodman (1995) also suggests using examples from your own life to illustrate issues under discussion.
- Do not ask student members of underrepresented groups to give that group’s “point of view” on any given topic. An individual cannot speak for a group. To ask a student to do so is not only potentially embarrassing for the student but it implies there is not a diversity of perspectives within the group (Flick, 1992). All students in the classroom should be encouraged, however, to contribute relevant viewpoints.
- Do not expect and do not ask students of color to be knowledgeable about their ethnic history or culture. The same applies to language. For example, do not ask a

Chinese American student, "How would you say this in Chinese?" Many students of different social groups have not had an opportunity to learn the history, culture, and/or language of their heritage. Additionally, those who have had such opportunities may not wish to be singled out (Flick, 1992). We have found, however, that many times students volunteer to talk about their experiences as "others" in our classes. It may also be fruitful to assign individuals to represent a different cultural viewpoint or to recast situations to reflect different cultural perspectives, asking, for example, "okay, how might a disabled-bodied person respond to (fill in the blank)?"

- Shift emphasis from guilt to responsibility and commitment to change (Goodman 1995). Rather than making learning about other cultures socially punishing, we suggest a focus upon the ways the information gained from the class can be used toward positive ends. We have had numerous students who, based upon discussions in our classrooms, have made "never again" personal oaths or who have changed the course of their studies to reflect their newly found perspectives.

Conclusion

Although there may be some resistance to issues of diversity from students in universities in ethnically non-diverse areas, the importance of exposure to and an understanding of these issues is crucial in light of the changing demographics in both the United States and Canada. Educators can capitalize on the "backyard" view of culture that appears to exist regionally by expanding the definition of culture and/or diversity and then illustrating how such diversity can be found "at home" and all around us. Taking a broader definition of culture will allow the instructor to increase the relevance of diversity assignments, videotapes, exercises, and simulations and will facilitate more applicable examples for discussion.

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