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African American and Teaching in Higher Education IS a Course on Race and Culture

Carole G. Parker Ph.D.

Department of Business Management, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland

Emma T. Lucas

Department of Social Work, Carlow College, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

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African American and Teaching in Higher Education IS a Course on Race and Culture

Abstract

Using theoretical applications, the authors present an overview of theories that highlight approaches for teaching culturally sensitive content, personal experiences as educator and colleague in a predominantly white college campus and strategies for addressing culturally insensitive experiences in and outside the classroom. Presenters focus on the recruitment and retention of people of color and stress the need for today's predominantly white institutions to become more knowledgeable, tolerant and sensitive about their environments in an effort to make them more accepting.

Carole G. Parker, Ph.D.

Department of Business Management, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland

Emma T. Lucas

Department of Social Work, Carlow College, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

Race and culture are constant parts of the every day life for any person of color. The racial and ethnic make-up of our country is changing and, at the same time, the world is becoming more interdependent. With increased certainty, more individuals are likely to have first-hand contact with someone of a racial or ethnic background that is difference from their own. By the year 2030, one-third of the population of this country will be minorities. Although this is a documented fact based on changing demographics, some individuals will more readily accept this than others. These changes necessitate a need for today's college students to respect and become more knowledgeable, tolerant and sensitive to differences. College curricula must include courses that include components of racial and cultural awareness. Competent educators teach a variety of courses with content areas that cover cultural and ethnic diversity. However, when minority educators teach these courses, various dynamics surface from challenges to course content to rejection of information shared, from comments that are grounded in long-held bigoted beliefs, to accusations against the course instructor. In higher education, it is particularly challenging to be an African American professor whose teaching assignment includes courses on racial and cultural awareness and sensitivity. We contend that the very *presence itself* of minority educators in these courses and the institution in which they teach, provides a “course” on race and culture.

As an African American in the academy, teaching any subject is an opportunity to use oneself as an instrument for change, influence and candidness of addressing race and culture. This additional pressure may influence the retention and recruitment of minorities in predominately white academic institutions. This additional pressure may influence the retention and recruitment of minorities in predominately white academic institutions.

Respect for difference and acceptance of that which is new and unfamiliar becomes a priority in a quest for a true culturally sensitive and culturally diverse society. However,

the reality is that there is sometimes resistance to the contributions these individuals make in and out of the classroom.

Methods used to explore our topic include the behavioral event interview (Boyatzis, 1982). A behavioral event interview (BEI) format is specifically designed to engage the interviewee in directed discussion about specific organizational events relating to the identified course of inquiry. The purpose of using such a technique is to conduct a cross analysis of events identified by two or more individuals and performing a content analysis among events. The BEI is a "structured probe strategy which elicits the most critical organizational experiences as perceived by the interviewee. This strategy varies from the more traditional interviewing techniques that focus on a standard sequence of questions" (Boyatzis, 1982). In addition, we, through content analysis, identify critical choice points (Glidewell, 1970) the African American educator experiences and the perceived consequences of their choices upon their teaching experience, acceptance in the academy, progression through the ranks and ability to maintain a healthy mental perspective on their self concept, worth and contributions to our society.

Using theoretical applications, the authors present an overview of theories that highlight approaches for teaching culturally sensitive content, personal experiences as educator and colleague in a predominantly white college campus and strategies for addressing culturally insensitive experiences in and outside the classroom.

We will address that the recruitment and retention of people of color and the need for today's predominantly white institutions to become more knowledgeable, tolerant and sensitive about their environments in an effort to make them more accepting. People of color in white institutions should not be the "textbook" for institutional learning about the differences they bring and contribute. A top/down approach that indicates diversity is valued is a precursor for acceptance and respect. In higher education, it is particularly challenging to be an African American professor who finds her/himself among a very small number of individuals like them at an institution. We contend that these institutions must inform their total environment, as well as minority educators themselves, of their commitment to diversity.

Presenters

Carole G. Parker, Frostburg State University, Department of Business Management, MBA Program

Emma T. Lucas, Carlow College, Department of Social Work, Pittsburg, P A