Confronting Exclusionary Ideologies in the Classroom:
Transforming Toward Inclusion and Diversity

Teaching at three large, midwestern, primarily white universities over the past seven years has increased my awareness of the need for a more inclusive approach regarding interactions with and among students. This need has been addressed variously during the past decade by many thinkers including Paulo Freire who have called our attention to the potentially oppressive or ideologically rigid modes of operation within a classroom dynamic. More recently, I have noted a growing number of conference panels, sessions, or plenaries focused on some aspect of empowering students through an education which fosters diversity, reciprocity, and mutuality. One such roundtable which elucidated my own sense of the need for transformation on these bases took place at the 1990 National Women's Studies Association Convention. Panelists discussing the stages of white and minority awareness on college campuses offered helpful suggestions on how to integrate activist consciousness-raising into the teaching/learning process without sacrificing or interfering with course content objectives, regardless of the discipline. Participants used this session as a forum for exchanging varied, though similar, experiences of exclusionary attitudes, expressions, and behaviors among students in their classrooms--forces which have proven debilitating and prohibitive.

After reviewing the instructive handouts provided during this session and studying their originary sources, I read many other important works (for example, Gabriel and Smithson's 1990 Gender in the Classroom: Power and Pedagogy (U of Illinois Press)). Such resources clarified that many of the tenets for anti-racist strategies are applicable to anti-sexist goals, as well, and further, may be adapted and modified for addressing other detrimental exclusionary attitudes which stifle diversity. This substantial theoretical and practical grounding was instrumental in developing, drafting, and revising syllabi, course materials, writing assignments, and supplemental tools conscientiously designed to foster diversity and its valuation.

I would like to discuss each of these areas individually in relation to the continuing transformation of one course, English Composition. First, in terms of the latter (i.e., supplemental tools), one of the instruments I pieced together from the sources cited above was a two-page "Class Project" handout for student distribution the first class day. Though initially entitled "Class Project Groundrules," the need for a less intimidating, less ambivalent, indeed less stifling/restrictive heading and format became apparent as I shared this idea with colleagues. The resulting changes illustrate the necessity to remind oneself to be as flexible and perhaps tentative as the openminded revision-in-progress/process requires. Thus it is that I continue to modify the following handout to my students, newly framed as a "letter" in order to emphasize its objective to initiate (rather than close) inclusionary (rather than exclusionary) dialogue; its
intent is to foster diversity of exchange, rather than "dictate" rules or laws--as the original title and format may have unintentionally suggested. The current handout reads as follows:

Dear Class:

Seven years of the teaching/learning process have been extremely rewarding to me. From time to time, however, they have also demonstrated that our interactions with others (and with ourselves) are often burdened with ideologies of oppression that even we--knowingly or otherwise--may practice or at least subscribe to on some level: racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ageism, etc. Each of these systems of domination and exclusion is characterized by three components: 1) attitudes (e.g., prejudice); 2) behaviors (i.e., discrimination); and 3) practices (often, the consequences of misinformation about our own and others' identities or group affiliations take many shapes, some of which--e.g., stereotyping--are damaging).

In an effort to acknowledge and assess such attitudes and behaviors, perhaps in our daily discussions, activities, responses and interactions with one another, we could make an effort to be consciously aware of and sensitive to the following considerations:

1) While we can't be blamed for the misinformation we've learned regarding these issues, we are responsible for perpetuating it after learning otherwise;

2) Because unlearning previous misconceptions is a rigorous and ongoing process, perhaps we can assume "good faith" (i.e., that each of us is doing the best we can);

3) We can try to recognize that people are not to be blamed for their oppression; we may even consider whether such an assumption could be a way of avoiding responsibility for its existence;

4) We can try actively to pursue information about all groups, including our own, and share that whenever possible in a way that does not demean the experience of another;

5) We can try to distinguish between a) anger or hatred, which are emotions/reactions and therefore within the context of free thought and free speech and thus cannot be censored, silenced, or suppressed; and b) racism/sexism/anti-Semitism/homophobia/ableism, etc., which represent forms of institutional power and can be addressed or discussed as such.

Many social theorists consider these exclusionary notions, which often operate on "automatic pilot," the problem of the dominant or privileged classes. If they are programmed responses/reactions, perhaps we can struggle against them and against the restrictions imposed in a culture which institutionalizes them. One might discover that this struggle is accompanied by the following helpful, potentially transformative (and even healing) realizations:

A) A genuine demonstration of respect for others.

B) The possibility that to ignore these attitudes, behaviors, and practices, or any of their multiple ramifications, IS an act.
C) The plausibility that interacting with difference is an important way to learn about it.

D) The distinction between non-racist/sexist/etc.--as we define such terms for ourselves--and anti-racist/sexist/etc. is significant because the intellectual commitment to being anti-________ is not the same as being outside the force(s) which implement(s) that oppressive ideology. In some ways, self-introspection regarding beliefs, values, myths can be a primary means in distinguishing between anti-________ and non-________ for ourselves, as well.

E) We could try to remember the distinction, as well, between repression (limiting one's life choices) and oppression (having them limited by someone else).

I share these with you because I wonder if we can explore whether such goals of increased awareness enhance class interactions by rooting them in mutual respect and understanding? Could we have a mutual understanding whereby your classmates and I will expect such efforts of you, as you could expect them of your fellow students and of me? Can we also try to be gently (re)mindful of each other's different points in this lifelong process and patient with our human fallibility?

Regarding the latter, it has seemed to be the case that part of human imperfection could manifest itself in distancing/side-skirting/avoiding behaviors which we are particularly susceptible to when exclusionary barriers have not been collaboratively transformed into inclusionary interaction and acceptance of diversity. I'm wondering here if one of our collective objectives could be to alert ourselves to these so as to address, discuss, and perhaps remedy them as they arise...

Please feel free to share your own responses, additions, modifications to these speculations. This "working draft" of a possible "Class Project" is open to suggestion, change, etc. Thank you in advance for your openness, honesty, earnest cooperation, and sincere collaborative efforts in what I suspect could be a worthwhile joint endeavor!

Students--be they in Freshman Composition, the Survey of Women's Literature, or Introduction to Women's Studies--have been receptive to this handout and even expressed appreciation for it (both in my office and on course/instructor evaluations). For example, one student wrote:"...When I entered this class I was pretty comfortable with my prejudices. Dr. Hoefel's gentle thoughts in the "Class Project" ditto challenged me and I came to realize the person I was harming most was myself." Another contended:"I have learned to look at many social and political problems with a more unbiased view. This approach is open-minded and encourages students to speak our minds." I somewhat anxiously anticipated that some might, even unintentionally, "begrudge" this effort, e.g., as a moralistic imposition; happily, after seven classes over the scope of the past year, with @26-35 students in each course, I have as yet to encounter such.

However, the recent controversy regarding the pitfalls of "political correctness" has given me pause and served, in part, as the impetus both for making my own language in this handout "inclusive" and for altering the format so as to avoid what very well could have been seen by students as a restriction of their own rights (i.e., to free thought and free speech) or misconstrued
as an equally oppressive imposition of the teacher's "rightness". I imagine this handout will continue to be revised the more I receive feedback from students and discuss it with colleagues.

Thus far, though, the absence of objection, combined with the modification in the current supplement, have been hopeful, from my view, and enabled me to adjust course content accordingly, as well, and with a fair amount of success and receptivity on the part of those enrolled. The students, largely, actually appreciate(d) a broader, more comprehensive perspective, alternative approaches, and diverse offerings--though a choice few may be initially defensive: e.g., one white male student in my Introduction to Fiction class demanded to know why the three novelists we were reading were "black women" (Willa Cather, Ralph Ellison, Gloria Naylor!).

I would like to emphasize that, even in an intradisciplinary-oriented writing course, such as English Composition 105, the readings selected (and even a few of the assignments and exercises, as will be discussed later) can be crafted to reflect this focus while not "coercing" a particularized "political agenda" and not compromising any of the specific institution's course goals and requirements.

Susan Koppleman, also a contributor to the NWSA panel mentioned earlier, shared, for instance, the gains achieved in her literature seminar which covered select works by women from a variety of time periods (1850-1970), three different religious persuasions, four various regional backgrounds, and four racial traditions. By providing this multiple group representation of, essentially the "same story," told by varied gifted writers, students were able to work from similarities in subject matter--a fairly comfortable and non-threatening vantage point--to exploring differences.

With this inspiring testimony in mind, I began to include diverse items on my 105 English Composition syllabus. As always, the primary criteria in text selection for this freshman writing course was that the works be exemplary of various refined writing techniques and rhetorical devices and that they offered powerful models of crafting careful though and language. At two universities where I have taught, Ohio State and Iowa State, for example, the Freshman English Policy Committee, after thorough consideration and thoughtful evaluation/discussion, selects @ 4-5 readers which meet these goals and from which instructors can choose. Among the ones I've chosen from those lists in the past two years are Re-reading America and Fields of Writing. Student evaluations have been largely favorable to both, though a few have found the former somewhat overwhelming in its intensity, which in part lead to my use of the latter this past year.

In these ways, texts are selected neither randomly nor idiosyncratically (i.e., based upon some individual or personal agenda). Rather, they are chosen with the following important factors in mind: the goals of the particular course, the suggestions of experts in the field, the feedback from current and previous students, and the instructor's often agonizing discretion--encompassing, e.g., awareness of limited student budgets and course time constraints. Thus it is that text selection, too, can be a collaborative effort, inclusive of multiple student needs and responses, rather than an "omniscient" teacher's "dictum"-of sorts.
Through such cooperative efforts among students, colleagues, and myself, then, my 105 syllabus has, variously, included the following mixture of exemplary writing models which also discuss notions of inclusion and exclusion: Brian Lanker's Preface and Maya Angelou's Introduction to "I Dream a World", James Baldwin's "Autobiographical Notes", Paula Gunn Allen's "Where I Come From Is Like This", Gloria Naylor's "The Two", Richard Goldstein's "The Gay Family", and more recently, essays about Japanese internment camps by Japanese-American writers. About these, students have written comments in journals and exams concerning their thought-provoking and elucidating content, as well as their stylistic merit and finely honed rhetorical approaches: "These essays have influenced me to open my mind....They helped me emotionally and made me think"; "These essays showed me the contrasting tones used in reporting, informing, and narrating personal experience. They collectively displayed how different styles can be more or less effective"; "These readings have helped me develop more compassion and awareness. They show me what rough really is"; "Some of this stuff has really helped me focus my writing ability and I feel better as a writer now".

In addition to the anthologized pieces, I have also found Lois Gould's delightful "The Fabulous Child's Story" to be an especially effective supplement to the text, particularly with beginning college students, for a couple reasons. First, it offers a fictional mode of writing, which is an instructive change of pace from the many non-fiction essays of their reader. Second, it humorously yet poignantly addresses the many issues related to the familial and sociocultural construction of gendered role expectations, demands, rituals, reproach, and dis(en)abling romantic notions portrayed in fairy tales--all of which Gould spoofs with a keen wit and energy students welcome. As journal entries and final papers attest, this work has proven a winner among traditional and non-traditional (i.e., returning) students alike. A few have even tried to adapt her prose style to their own creative revision of a "fairy tale".

My final sample is a collection which merits fuller discussion because 1) it greatly enhances beginning writers' development of a) sense of audience, b) authenticity of expression, and c) trust in their own authority; and 2) it brilliantly addresses issues of race, class, sex, ethnicity, and ability, demonstrating their layeredness and origin as part of a larger piece. I am referring to Alice Childress' Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life, a series of dramatic conversations written by a fictional domestic for a larger audience which includes actual domestics who would read these pieces in Black newspapers. It is no coincidence that, regardless of the course in which I've taught part or all of Alice Childress's Like One of the Family (e.g., Composition, Women's Literature, Intro to Fiction), the majority, if not all, of the students express being, simultaneously, 1) both moved and entertained by her message(s) and delivery, and 2) able to gain perspective on the often fragmentary nature of composition as well as on one or each of the previously mentioned writing choices/concerns.

Because the hallmarks of Childress's craft and artistry are love of life and people, her accent on struggle is tempered with humor--humor which, accompanied by the "polite bite" of creative nonviolent resistance to oppression, serves as a cultural healer. As one who bends the literary form in order to most truthfully express its content and, simultaneously, move beyond the either/or's of "artistic" and politically imposed limitations, Childress's fondness for theatrics is apparent in her visual, staged "conversations". That is, her monologues are ingeniously transformed into dialogues through an absent, yet present, "Marge," one of her live actors who
signals hoped-for responses from readers--hence providing a sharp model of audience anticipation and awareness for beginning writers. Childress's satires--sometimes ethnic, idiomatic, or signifying, but always universal--provide for her an edge against prejudice and hypocrisy; at the same time, they offer an excellent example to students for honesty of expression as well as humor as a spice in delivery of their own writing or speaking.

With writing/speaking/dialogue as arts of defiance, Mildred, the central figure, becomes a model both for nonviolent confrontation of exclusion and for transformation. She is, for instance, an example of how Black women can claim space and use body politics (e.g., she violates space within a white woman's house by sitting down when a white man, Billy "Alabama" wants to; "Let's Face It"). And, since Black domestics read these conversations in black newspapers, Childress was thereby able to pass this awareness on, demonstrating to them how to say "No" without being militant. Childress has Mildred stand up for her rights, often by sitting down (be it wherever she prefers" in "Ridin' the Bus" or in the living room with a stunned Johnny Alabama or in Marge's kitchen with a comforting cup of coffee after a long day of service and insult). The refusal to exchange/compromise dignity for pay is supported by the belief that "creation is the highest form of compensation."

Significantly, one composition student picked up on the latter theme as a means of dealing with writer's block; i.e., as he explained it to me, by telling himself that "creating" (composing) a work could be its own reward, he was able to table his anxiety over "grades." This shift from extrinsic, inhibiting/prohibitive forces to intrinsic empowering motivation is further exemplified in Mildred's pushing the limits of authority and politeness: Mildred voices the conscience and concern she embodies to those who personify condescension and evasion (e.g., Mrs. B, in "Story Tellin' Time"), and/or those who subscribe to an ideology oppressive to themselves, their own people (as is the case with Bernice in "Why Should I Get Upset?"), or others--be they minster, meek friend, or obnoxious brute.

Classroom observation and engagement have lead me to conjecture that Mildred provides, thus, a model for more involved and straightforward student participation and class discussion, as well as confidence of expression. Mildred, for a refreshing change, variously puts "in their place" insensitive racist, sexist, and ageist infidels (in every case, examining her own complicity, e.g., in "Old As The Hills") and those she depicts as "presumptuous bourgeois elitists" who prefer to avoid or deny the realities of war, domination, and suffering ("Interestin' and Amusin'"). Thus does Childress refuse to allow human value to be determined by one's social status; she insists instead upon the dignity and potential for self-determination, which she applauds, among all human beings; ironically, as one African-American student pointed out, she does this at the price of negative public reaction by those whose stance Mildred undercuts. i.e, those who refuse to see non-whites as human. For Childress's Mildred, a virtually comprehensive, inclusive alternative to human interaction exists, and could encompass the following certainly non-exhaustive list of worthy ideals: 1) her enlightening definition of peace as much more than the absence of war, i.e., the willful elimination of destructive division ("Merry Christmas"), which is similar to her description of Heaven as a place that cherishes diversity, but eliminates exclusionary inequities ("If Heaven Is What We Want"); with such peace, crucifixion, as explored in "What Is It All About?" a conversation in which Mildred critiques the vices of society, its hypocrisy and pretense.
Indeed, Childress's role in confronting the detrimental effects of other exclusionary practices is integrally linked to Mildred's mission as cultural critic. In "Inhibitions" Mildred critiques dysfunctional family dynamics rooted in detrimental mind-games, guilt, and avoidance. Likewise, she criticizes movies/media which perpetuate any kind of minority stereotypes, or misrepresent groups, or legitimate abuse ("About Those Colored Movies"), or those which duplicate sexist notions and are, thus, hilariously unreal(istic) ("I Could Run a School Too"). She addresses God about the KKK, condemning its bigotry, violence, and "silencing" atrocities--about which, she claims, they lack any conscience and are more traitorous, thus, than Judas ("A New Kind of Prayer").

Nor do the following escape Mildred's scrutiny--and, by extension, that of the students who by this point are active audience participants much like Marge is: the humiliation women suffer due to conventional inequitable social relations ("Dance with Me, Henry") or derision ("Men in Your Life"); Northern whites and blacks who want to scapegoat the South, rather than claim their own responsibility for its racist state and give credit to Southern whites who have helped their cause; Blacks who subscribe to separatist and/or internally divisive views ("Benevolent Club"); the shallowness of the famous who society perversely requires to sacrifice privacy, free speech, and direct communication--all of which Mildred prizes ("Where Is the Speaking Place?"); unfair, unreasonable, reductive responsibility of "representin' the race"--a by-product of treating Black achievement as out-of-the-ordinary ("History in the Makin'").

Yet, in the context and format Childress's work offers, such ordinarily "heavy" subjects do not become burdensome for the college student. For, in addition to Childress's espousal of new concepts or ideals and the critique of old, unworthy ideas, one can't help but marvel at the educational and celebratory value of the conversations, as well. By the time one reads "Missionaries," one must ask if this book is part of Childress's mission to "spread the light and bring joy" and if "enlightened education" is her main objective. In "All about Miss Tubman," for instance, Mildred rewrites herstory by giving students in her story--already indoctrinated and thus resistant--a sense of their own rich heritage and pride, of which they'd been deprived. And rather than condemning substance users, Mildred seeks the roots of using and finds them in societal pressures and human weakness; she takes the romance out of pot and explores instead the negative effects on appearance, mood, etc., inclusive of severe withdrawal ("Dope and Things Like That").

In another piece dealing with the pressures and consequences of living during a time of revolutionary transition and change, Mildred questions the child's perspective and dilemmas, thus encouraging student empathy ("The ABC's of Life and Learning"). Students have noted such excerpts not only as informative and thought-provoking, but also as relevant to their own lives, concerns, and struggles. As such, this book spurs their own writing sometimes upon reflection and in response to the author. In addition to giving a voice to childhood, adolescent, and young adult concerns, Mildred pays poetic tribute to the wisdom, kindness, and generosity of the aged, who are often misunderstood and/or denied full personhood, as well ("I Visit Yesterday" and, my favorite, "I Wish I Was a Poet"). In a similar reversal of majority "disdain," she offers respect and gratitude to the white women of South Africa who, even when they non-violently protested racial injustice, were chastised (stoned!), and for men like Eddie, defying cultural role expectations ("Men in Your Life").
The sense that justice and conscience can outweigh fear and passivity/complicity redeems Mildred's faith in humanity. Likewise her book often redeems students' faith in humanity's possibilities and its capacities for positive change. As one student claimed on a midterm: "Mildred has too many strong convictions about human dignity to take any flack. She and her friend [Marge] show that people really do care." When asked how/if their view of humanity has changed over the course of a term (due to works covered, revelations in discussion, discoveries in writing, etc.), students invariably discuss this collection with respect, keener awareness, raised consciousness, and fond admiration. They find value in Childress's playful yet determined and justice-oriented sociocultural critiquing perspective and demonstrate variously in interactions throughout the term the positive ways in which that work has informed their critical thinking, writing, speaking, and evaluating skills, particularly with regard to the diversity to which it gives voice and the exclusionary misconceptions it debunks. According to one composition student: "I did not want to put this book down. I just kept reading. She taught me while making me laugh at the way she turned the tables around. These conversations can really wake a person up!" For many of these reasons, this collection has met with success in literature, composition, and drama classes alike, serving as a supplemental text that more than a few students proclaim they are "not selling back to the bookstore."

In addition to being strengthened by carefully and cooperatively chosen, maintained, or altered reading selections, the aforementioned skills can be enhanced by corresponding writing activities designed not only to prepare them for the reading, but to assist in their own introspective and expressive responses to it, be it in discussion, journal writing, or specific assignments. This is true for longer collections, such as Childress's book, and for shorter works, like the essays included in Freshman readers. For instance, prior to reading Goldstein's essay on the gay family, students could be asked to spend a few moments jotting down images, etc., they associate with "family" and then work in small groups (or pairs, depending on the composition, compatibility, and preferences of the class) to discover what assumptions these associations might reveal.

A challenging, though successful writing assignment for one of the composition students' main themes has evolved around their personal experience essay: students are asked to write about an experience they had concerning a time when they felt and/or acted upon a prejudice against a person or group--covering any area, from the "biggies" (such as religion or race) to the less discussed (such as "four-eyes" jokes when in grade school against students who wore glasses). In these papers, students explain what the prejudice was, narrate or dramatize an instance of its manifestation/expression, and try to discover its roots, exploring whether it is a bias they need/want/choose to maintain (and why) or one they can discard (and how).

Understandably, some students resist such an assignment at first, either claiming that they have no biases or feeling that acknowledging so is a self-indictment. In such cases, I ask students to be as thorough and certain as they can in this "soul-searching," and offer them the option of developing the same narrative, but from the receiving end of the prejudice. Initially, I only gave examples of my own bias recognition to these few students who came to me individually; now, having seen how this can help them discover their own cases, I offer to the entire class one or two of my own limitations as examples when I first assign this exploration. I have also modified the assignment to include the second option (i.e., when they were the recipient of prejudicial behavior, how they responded/copied, etc.); this change was made partly in response to the above
portion of students unable to retrieve an instance as perpetrator/perpetuator, and in part due to one student's claim that it was an assignment which unfairly and moralistically assumed everyone was in some way prejudiced. Two other students had equally enlightening responses: One wrote that he was prejudiced against prejudiced people, and another, that he was prejudiced against those (yours truly included, I believe was the message) who assumed others were, at least at some point, prejudiced. Nevertheless, the revised version of this writing activity has--according to the majority of students' replies on the assignment-evaluation sheets--elicited helpfully revelatory self-introspection and -discovery. In the context of a literature survey or other survey or comprehensive studies class, similar self-examination can be encouraged in response, say, to the course content/readings and/or discussions through journal writing. For example, many of my Women's Literature students have used their journals as a medium for dialogue concerning aspects which trouble or surprise them, such as the number of openly lesbian women writers, or the honest breaking of silence regarding incest in such works as Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" or Mary Howard's "Father Me, Father Me Not." The latter is a prize-winning piece of fiction by a white woman which I include in order to, among other things, offset the tendency of some students to mistakenly perceive incest as a dilemma specific to African-American lives (e.g., a few of them hastily generalize, if not from literature, from movies like The Color Purple, that this is not a "white" problem). Of course, such misunderstandings, when voiced, may be taken as an opportunity to gently encourage student awareness of whether (or how) gender, race, etc., politics have determined their experiences and perceptions. These amounts may also serve as a point of departure in discussing how differences in reading texts incur and include differences in writing about them. The value for students in a writing class is evident. One of my colleagues suggested that this plausibility could be demonstrated, for instance, by requesting that, in one journal entry, students assume the identity of a particular literary character or essayist and explore difficulties encountered in assuming certain identities. I plan to integrate this activity in my Composition class next semester in conjunction with the use of a new interdisciplinary, cross-cultural reader entitled Writing about the World.

Conclusion

Indeed, transforming the curriculum will not be merely a matter of adding a few sample texts, or assignments for that matter, but actually shifting the focus so that the dominant locus is changed and academic imperialism, avoided. This could include aspects I've yet to explore more fully, those which go beyond the scope of the classroom, but which inevitably affect it at some point. For instance, it occurs to me that we may need to consider dismantling, reworking, and reconstructing the very terms of discourse (omitting, for instance, the terminology of supposedly "separate but equal" genres and "distinct" disciplines; or, better, testing such boundaries).

In other words, transformation of the ways in which higher education reinforces divisions and exclusions by teaching students how to "classify," perhaps, needs to occur. Issues concerning a more diversified and inclusive curriculum could be mainlined, rather than devalued and marginalized. In addition, open-ended, even "inconclusive" discussion (rather than, say, debate--complete with its "attack" and "counterattack" motif and war imagery) could be prioritized. As with any institutional change, these would most likely meet with resistance if/when a few may initially perceive such efforts as imposing ideology on an allegedly "neutral" atmosphere.
For my part, I have noted and documented very definite changes in terms of growth, awareness, and expression among my students, in turn inspiring my own re-evaluation and, at times, painful acknowledgement of my biases, "blinders," and "limitations." Enabling an active/dynamic tenor, rather than a passive/absorptive one, in the classroom is often risky business, because it means a shift in the balance of power, specifically a sharing and discarding of it by the instructor. Yet, it seems the most fruitful means available for empowering students--which, I believe, is the main goal. As one student phrased his own intellectual growth: "As I heard other students' views and took part in discussions, things that once meant nothing to me now made me think twice.... These have helped me mature mentally be realizing other people's views and ideas and accepting them as okay." And another: "The way I look at humanity is much more open than closed-minded. I feel I have been able to make radical changes and I have grown much. My thoughts have gone from wanting to live the life of destruction to one of rebuilding." Yet another: "I think seriously about other people now. Not just myself. I want to make a difference, and I will."

Further, allowing ourselves to be students in our own courses may be the most honest gauge and tool by which we can progress in our own re-visioning of the teaching/learning and learning/teaching processes. Students, and faculty, of all sorts should be able to claim an education which fosters diversity and replaces a model of dominance/domination with a principle of reciprocity in mutual care and respect, (r)evolutionary growth, and perpetual transformation.

Works Cited


Coventree, C.J. (1990) "Hierarchies and Oppression."


Minneapolis Women's Theatre Group. (Fall 1986) At the Foot of the Mountain, 12.2:5.

The following are some of the handouts that were distributed to the class.

Faculty Behaviors Reported by Minority Students which may Communicate Uneasiness and Differential Expectations

1. Ignoring black students by avoiding eye contact, by not acknowledging comments, or by not calling on them directly.

2. Using a voice tone or facial expression that expresses disbelief or surprise when a black student responds correctly or makes an academic accomplishment.
3. Interrupting black students more when they do respond and not helping them to probe further with their responses.

4. Making comments which imply that blacks are not as competent as whites or presume that blacks cannot be in charge.

5. Asking a black student for an opinion on an issue related to race as if the black person is a spokesperson for all blacks.

6. Offering little guidance and criticism of the work black students produce.

7. Ignoring the cultural contributions of blacks and using examples in such a way as to reinforce a stereotyped and negative view of blacks.

8. Reacting to comments or questions articulated in a black language style as if they are inherently of less value.

Effects of these Behaviors

1. Discourage classroom participation.

2. Discourage students from seeking help outside of class.

3. Lead students to drop or avoid certain classes and to switch majors.

4. Make students feel less confident.

5. Inhibit the development of relationships with faculty that can be helpful in learning about a particular discipline and related career paths.

Recommendations for Creating a Learning Environment that is More Conducive to the Participation of Black Students

1. During the first few weeks of class, become aware of how you and black and white students interact with one another. Make sure relevant questions, comments or opinions of black students are acknowledged by you and other students.

2. Encourage black students who are reluctant to participate.

3. Try to solicit and listen to the opinions expressed by a black student as those of an individual rather than those of a group spokesperson.

4. Make sure that black students are not unnecessarily being interrupted or discredited by you or other students in the class.

5. Make good eye contact with black students.
6. Make sure that black students are assuming responsibility in group activities and are allowed to take on leadership roles.

7. Be careful not to call a black student using the name of another black student in the class or group. Black students are likely to interpret this action as regarding them as part of a group rather than an individual.

8. Notice whether the language style of a black student's comment, question, or response affects your own perception of its importance.

9. Meet with black students to discuss academic and career goals. Offer to write reference letters when appropriate.

10. Include black students in the informal interactions that can be important in communicating support and acceptance.

11. Become aware of contributions by blacks in your area and use examples when appropriate. The implications of certain theoretical perspectives for blacks may also be pertinent in certain disciplines.

12. Provide blacks with informal as well as formal feedback or constructive critique on the quality of their work. Watch for comments that may imply they are not as competent as white students or that attribute their success to chance and their failure to lack of ability.

Distancing Behaviors Often Used in Discussions of Race and Gender Issues

Many of us use distancing behaviors--things which separate us from the issue at hand, in an effort to avoid dealing with a very painful subject such as racism or sexism. This sheet includes some of the behaviors we often use against each other to the detriment of dealing with issues of race and gender.

1. Definitions Game -- Requests for clear, absolute definitions of racism/sexism or related terms. Usually leads to involved discussion. Not to be confused with an actual need to clarify differences among concepts like racism, discrimination, prejudice, etc.

2. Where are the Black people -- (or any other people): Assuming/insisting that in order to make progress combatting personal racism we must be in a discussion with people of color. Combined with this is the idea that if there are no or few Third World people in a given community, that racism isn't a problem. (In fact, racism may be such a great problem that few Third World people can stand to live there.)

3. Racism/Sexism isn't the only problem-Assuming/insisting that racism/sexism is only a facet of a larger-problem, or that we can't just deal with it, we have to talk about how we are all hurt so, etc. While it is true that there are other oppressions, this is often a resistance to dealing with and focusing on racism or sexism.
4. Being an Expert: -- Being an expert on the experience of another race or culture and on how to deal with racism/sexism, the "I'm the okay white (male) person in the group" distinction. This leads to intellectualizing and not dealing with the ongoing need to change.

5. Instant Solutions -- Oversimplification by choosing and pushing single solutions to racism/sexism may be a kind of avoidance and might, even if sincere, be unproductive because it is not looking deep enough.

6. Find the Racis/Sexist -- Rather than acknowledging that we all are racist or sexist by socialization and that all white people benefit from racism, including myself, and all men from sexism, it can be easy to focus on the person in a group who may be more open about her racism/sexism, or have intellectualized the least about racism/sexism, or have thought the least about them. Regardless of how much we have done, we still have more to learn.

7. After I -- Focusing on all the things which prevent one from acting right now to challenge sexism/racism. It will be done when..(some magic occurrence).

8. Geography -- Focusing on places or countries with the reputation for racism/sexism, rather than looking to discover how racism/sexism is affecting my own community. For instance, in the sixties everyone thought that racism only existed in the South. Now many of us might think that it only exists in Boston; or only in a place where there's a visible presence of Third World people. This is not necessarily true. In a white dominated society, there is racism everywhere.

9. You've come a long way -- Focusing on what changes have or may have occurred since people of colors and women began the recent struggle for civil rights then liberation, as though to suggest that they should be satisfied. Though we should acknowledge victories hard won, it is important not to discount what is left to be done.

10. Black people are racist/Women are sexist too -- focusing on instances where blacks hold prejudiced attitudes toward whites or also hold negative attitudes toward other blacks, and on instances where women think and behave in sexist ways or hold negative attitudes toward men. While it is important to understand the complex ways in which women and racial minorities have internalized their oppression or react in anger toward the dominant group, this is again often a strategy for resisting or avoiding dealing with one's own racism and sexism.

A sheet of discussion questions was given to students at the end of the course. The sheet wanted students to:

"Please respond in writing on this sheet to at least two of the following questions. These discussion questions are especially important, so please explain your opinions as clearly, fully, and specifically as you can.

A. Have you grown intellectually through studying under the direction of this teacher?

B. What were the strengths or weaknesses of the class sessions?
C. How well did the teacher achieve the stated purposes of the course?

D. How do you rate this teacher in comparison with other teachers at ISU?

E. What other things would you like the teacher to know, either about the course itself or about the teacher's performance?

Two of the student responses were:

"A. I have most certainly grown intellectually through my study with Dr. Hoefel. When I entered this class I was pretty comfortable with my prejudices. Dr. Hoefel's gentle insights challenged me and I came to realize the person I was harming most was myself.

D. Dr. Hoefel is my favorite instructor at I.S.U. in this, my first semester. She is thorough in coursework and a very caring human being. It has been my pleasure.

E. Dr. Hoefel should know how much her concern means to a student. Her constructive words are such a help and so rewarding. The course was very interesting. I'm so glad I didn't try to test out and miss this 105 experience." Another student replied:

"A. During this course I have learned to look at many social and political problems with a more unbiased view. Dr. Hoefel is very open minded and encourages her students to speak our minds. B. The strengths of the class sessions were the humor, and the passionate way Dr. Hoefel taught us. The only weaknesses would be we sometimes got so involved with something that we would lose track of time."

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