

Cultural Competency in College Teaching: An Exploration of Inclusiveness, Tolerance for Diversity, and Self-Awareness

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Abstract

This article explores the necessary changes in the college classroom in America due to changing demographics. It is argued that cultural competency is increasingly important for college teaching. Several models of cultural competency are applied to the criminal justice classroom specifically. Typical types of student resistance to culturally competent teaching are examined with recommendations for overcoming this resistance. Finally, examples of culturally insensitive policies are addressed.

Key words: cultural competence, white privilege, college teaching, students of color

1. Introduction

The United States is experiencing rapidly changing demographics. The current level of Balkanization means that by mid-century, a majority of the country will be nonwhite. As the nation continues this trend, it is important for Americans, particularly educators, to become culturally competent to meet the needs of an ever increasingly diverse population (Healy, 1995). In fact, cultural competence will soon become a professional necessity comparable to English or computer literacy. It is imperative, then, that college educators work toward the goal of enhancing their levels of cultural competence. The purpose of this paper is to present key components of cultural competency, models of teaching from a cultural competence perspective, and to illustrate examples of cultural competence in criminal justice college teaching.

1.1 Defining Cultural Competence

Moule (2011) provides an excellent model of cultural competence. It is defined as the ability to teach students from cultures other than that of the instructor. It also includes becoming aware and sensitive to one's own biases and prejudices while acquiring new knowledge of other cultures. As one becomes more culturally competent, he or she will avoid imposing his or her own cultural beliefs and standards onto others. By doing so, the culturally competent instructor will avoid making students feel ill-at-ease while helping them succeed in the world of the dominant culture.

Culturally competent instructors avoid, even inadvertently, communicating to students that their cultural beliefs are inferior or unwelcomed. Also, there is explicit acknowledgment of white privilege and how it has tremendously disadvantaged students of color throughout the history of the United States. Culturally competent instructors develop empathy which will help them understand why students of color approach

mainstream educational systems with trepidation and distrust and why they fail to succeed as a result of succumbing to stress and frustration. This helps instructors teach students of color on the students' terms in an atmosphere that embraces, rather than denigrates, their subcultural values and needs. Finally, culturally competent instructors avoid stereotyping students of color. While it is completely acceptable to point out and discuss patterns of behaviors (e.g., the fact that blacks commit a disproportionate amount of crime in America) it is important to avoid assuming that all students of color contribute to this pattern.

2.0 Teaching in a Culturally Competent Environment

To become a credible teacher in a culturally competent environment one must approach the task with a model or paradigm in mind. Failure to do so will result in a haphazard or piecemeal approach to working with students of color and will invariably lead to frustration and failure. Cross et al. (1989) offer an excellent starting point that deserves some degree of attention. Their model is discussed below and includes skill areas that are important for effective cross-cultural teaching.

2.1 Awareness and Acceptance of Differences

Awareness and acceptance of differences include becoming cognizant of how cultures are different and how these differences impact the teaching and learning process. Cultural differences can be found in myriad places and include ways of communicating, perception of time, definition of success, and the role of the self in the community. An excellent discussion of this skill area was offered by Rokeach (1960) who said the primary motivation for hatred between the races deals more with cultural differences than with race per se. In the college classroom, for example, white professors may find it abhorrent for black students to engage in private conversations during a lecture. The white Euro-American professor may have been taught that it is extremely rude, obnoxious, and disrespectful for black students to have a private chat going on but the students of color are doing this, not to be disrespectful, but because of their culture and background. As a general rule, black students value the relationship and collegiality with fellow students more than they value sitting quietly and listening to the lecture. They may be learning better by virtue of their private chats because they are sharing information with each other and the private communication helps them feel safer and more welcomed in the hostile world of the dominant culture classroom. Therefore, the antipathy the white professor has for the black students is based, not on race, but on cultural differences. If the professor becomes culturally competent and empathizes with the black students, he or she will be more at ease with the cultural differences rather than frustrated and offended. It also will help the students' grades as culturally competent professors are less likely to deduct class participation points for violating Eurocentric classroom etiquette policies.

2.2 Self-Awareness

Another skill area offered by Cross et al. (1989) involves becoming aware of one's own culture and the impact it has on how professors evaluate students. In America, whites have the privilege of defining their cultural predilections as "normal" behavior. Whites have deluded themselves into believing that they are "colorblind" so that many of them have no ability to see how they are able to transform their likes and dislikes into law, policies, practices, and standard operating procedures. Take the concept of time, for example. The hyper-punctual white Euro-American professor assumes that if class is scheduled to start at 0800 hours, then all those arriving after that time are late. Not only are they late but they also are assumed to be lazy, disrespectful, and not very serious about academia. Students of color, however, often have a radically different conception of time. In many subcultures, the Euro-American obsession with time and punctuality is considered both irrational and unnecessary. To many students of color, arriving between 0801

and 0815 is essentially the same thing as being there before 0800 hours. Whereas the Euro-American professor views punctuality as a dichotomy (i.e., on-time vs. late), students of color may see it as more of a continuum (Moule, 2011). This is sometimes referred to as "colored people's time." In any case, culturally competent professors will eschew imposing tyrannical standards of tardiness on students of color by becoming more flexible, tolerant, and inclusive of opposing cultural viewpoints on the issue of time.

2.3 Dynamics of Differences

This skill area involves being able to understand the nature of, and causes for, miscommunication between cultures. A good example of this would be if there is a white professor who counts, as part of a student's class participation grade, open and expressive dialogue during class time. While this of course seems benign, even necessary, to the Eurocentric professor, it may be interpreted as extremely racist and insensitive to some students of color. Blacks, for example, are the only people in the United States who immigrated to the country involuntarily. To have been slaves, dehumanized, and to have had their culture and language extinguished by force, may make many of them apprehensive and suspicious about a white professor's request to orally participate during class. This is particularly true if the request involves disclosure of personal information. Understanding these perceptions is imperative for the white professor.

2.4 Knowledge of the Student's Culture

Here, it is imperative for white professors to have some knowledge of the cultural references made by students of color. This does not mean the professor, to be considered culturally competent, must dress like students, listen to their music or fraternize with them in nonacademic settings. However, it does mean that some effort to learn about other cultures is necessary. It is not enough, for example, to simply have students attend an event on Martin Luther King Day and expect this to satisfy the politically correct requirement of promoting inclusion of other cultures. These types of "multicultural trifles" are transparent and most students of color will view them as halfhearted attempts of patronization.

A much more meaningful exercise to demonstrate knowledge of another culture could be as follows. Show the class the video *Maria Full of Grace*. This is a movie about poor Central American girls who swallow balloons filled with heroin to be smuggled into the United States. Once here, one of them decides to stay. It is a video that sympathetically shows the desperate state of affairs that many illegal aliens experience at home and how coming to America can be their salvation. After the video, discuss the contributions made by immigrants. For example, the professor could discuss the rate at which Hispanics join the U.S. military or border patrol, and the contributions made to the tax base by performing menial jobs. Similarly, a discussion could ensue concerning the "need" for a border fence and current policies aimed at getting undocumented workers to "self-deport." Of course to make the discussion balanced and fair there also must be attention paid to the social problems created by illegal aliens.

2.5 Adaptation of Skills

This concept refers to the professor continually adapting new techniques. For example, we know that blacks tend to communicate emotions through words (Shusta, 2010). If a white professor is lecturing in a flat, monotone voice on inflammatory topics such as racial profiling, playing the race card, the Civil Rights Industrial Complex, or discriminatory sentencing, black students may tend to believe he or she does not care or is completely disinterested in the issue. It is highly advisable for the teacher to be demonstrative both in body language and presentation style (Delpit, 1995).

3.0 Prejudice and Racism

Prejudice is the human tendency to have our opinions of others influenced in advance, often without an objective assessment. An example noted earlier is a white professor prejudging black students' tardiness as laziness or lack of commitment to academia without understanding how students of color often have legitimate cultural differences in how time is perceived and processed.

Racism and prejudice are not necessarily borne of hatred or nefarious objectives. Indeed, there is a natural tendency for humans to show an affinity to those similar to them. We tend to defend that which is similar to us and is consistent with our upbringing and oppose or attack those who are different (Allport, 1954). The problem is greatly exacerbated by insular behavior that cuts us off from exposure to other races and cultures.

Discrimination, on the other hand, is when a person demonstrates unfair treatment toward a person or group on the basis of prejudice. Finally, racism is the combination of prejudice and the power or authority to exercise discrimination against people of color on the basis of race. Consequently, whites cannot be legitimate victims of racism in America because they are in the dominant role whereas people of color lack the requisite power to impose their will over their oppressors (Wise, 2011).

Perhaps the most widely accepted explanation of racism is the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard and Miller, 1939). This approach posits that frustration elicits aggression and hostility which generally cannot be aimed at the original source of the frustration but only at a safer and more accessible target. Generally, the target must be both visible and vulnerable. Whites, for example, are beginning to realize that their demographic numerical superiority is diminishing. The flood of Asians, Central Americans and Mexicans along with 40 million blacks currently in the United States means that soon the country will be a majority-minority nation. The resultant competition for resources, power, influence, jobs, and benefits will be fierce and will cause many millions of whites to experience extreme fear and frustration. Whites cannot simply ventilate their frustration openly onto people of color so their racism will have to take on a much more subtle form. For example, it is not uncommon today to hear white college students lamenting the "horrors of affirmative action," the illegal alien "invasion," political correctness, and out-of-control welfare spending aimed at communities of color. These types of racist beliefs are made all the more worse by low self-esteem, stereotyping and an external locus of control. With reference to the latter, whites are beginning to feel as though they will no longer control the nation or its resources and this causes fear that leads to racist beliefs.

3.1 Confronting Racism from a Culturally Competent Standpoint

As noted above, the rapidly declining influence of whites is leading to scapegoating by white college students. Blacks are castigated for committing a disproportionate amount of crime, illegal aliens are criticized for "stealing American jobs," and many people of color are attacked for not properly assimilating into mainstream American culture. This can be partially neutralized by pointing out simple statistics. For example, students should be told that when blacks are compared to whites in America they have: 1) higher infant mortality rates, 2) higher levels of poverty, 3) 60% of the income of whites, 4) less opportunity for attending college, 5) shorter life expectancy, and 6) restricted choices of upward mobility (Moule, 2011).

While an approach as direct as this may have intuitive appeal and seem rather straightforward, it will not be accepted completely by white students. It is necessary also to understand the types of students and resistance that may be encountered when attempting to use a culturally competent approach. Helms (1995) created a very useful typology that may help sensitize professors to the various stages of white racial identity and how they impact the culturally competent instructor. The stages include: contact status, disintegration status, reintegration status, pseudo-independent status, immersion – emersion status, and autonomy status.

Contact status is where white students have internalized the majority culture's view of people of color and also the privileges of being white. To minimize the guilt associated with the adoption of this advantaged position, white students will typically claim to be "colorblind" and purport to be oblivious to the disadvantaged position occupied by people of color (Helms, 1995). The delusion experienced by white students here is that race simply does not matter in America. Students typically will defend this position with phrases such as, "The playing field in America is level," "America is a meritocracy and if you work hard you will get ahead no matter what race or social class you are," and "I never owned slaves so it's not my fault people of color were mistreated."

During the *disintegration status* phase, white students, as a result of having witnessed some event in their lives, will begin to question the myth of meritocracy. The events are myriad but the end result is that the student now becomes at least partially aware of the benefits of white privilege that he or she enjoys. The student is now psychologically forced to choose between maintaining loyalty to the dominant group (whites) and continue enjoying white privilege, or choosing to take a more compassionate approach by pursuing social justice for people of color. A typical phrase from a student in this phase will be, "I see that the criminal justice system is really biased against people of color but what can one person like me do about it?"

If the student chooses own group loyalty over compassion, he or she will enter the *reintegration status* phase. Here, the allegiance to one's own group requires rejection of, and intolerance for, other cultures. This is necessary because in the previous phase, the student began to see that injustices were present and that white privilege unfairly benefits him or her. This rejection is usually "justified" via selective observation of the other culture's flaws. These selectively observed weaknesses are then exaggerated and offered as "proof" of the superiority of white culture and the justification of white privilege. For example, white students, having successfully suppressed their apprehension about white supremacy, will emphasize "natural deficits" in people of color. Victim-blaming phrases illustrating this phase include, "On IQ tests blacks consistently score at the bottom compared to all other races," "Life's outcomes follow a bell curve and someone has to be on the far left tail of the distribution," "How is it that South Africa was over 90% black and yet still ruled by whites?" and "The reason blacks have it so bad in America is because of low self-control and having so many kids outside of marriage."

However, if culturally competent educators are persistent, students will ultimately see the errors in their thinking and move into the *pseudo-independent status* phase. Here, students will feign tolerance for people of color but simultaneously hold onto inner contempt for them. The student has, in essence, been successfully indoctrinated into publicly espousing a liberal political ideology and no longer openly demonstrates racist or prejudicial attitudes and beliefs. That is, he or she has internalized the fact that professors will not tolerate opposition to affirmative-action, illegal immigration, the welfare state, multiculturalism, or inclusivity. However, internally the student is extremely resentful of people of color and the gains they are making, especially numerical ones.

As students continue to evolve, they will move into the *immersion/emersion status* phase. Instructors may find this to be a very exciting time because it means the student is genuinely exploring the nature of racism and white privilege and is beginning to gain some personal insight into how he or she benefits from it. As the name implies, white students have *immersed* themselves into the study of white privilege and the history of white oppression of people of color in the United States. Students *emerge* with a new acceptance of how unfair the criminal justice system has been toward people of color and how its persecution of the oppressed leaves whites free to pursue a disproportionate amount of societal resources. Students now genuinely understand that if business owners, police, and private security are hyper-vigilant toward people of color, then white deviance will largely be defined downward or ignored altogether. Students will begin to understand, for example, how the "war on drugs" is really an attempt to criminalize not drugs per se, but the

behaviors of desperate people of color in inner cities who feel as though they have no choice but to sell and/or use drugs.

Ultimately, students will move into the *autonomy status* phase whereby they will not only appreciate the unfair advantage of white privilege, but will take steps to eliminate it. Students will no longer claim to be “oblivious” or “colorblind” nor will they feel it necessary to suppress resentment for advances made by people of color. Indeed, students will be devoid of aversion for people of color and will seek to end the hierarchy of racial groups in America. In a criminal justice sense, students will advocate for an end to the drug war, persecution of immigrants, and the overreliance on prisons that warehouse overwhelmingly nonwhite segments of poor communities. This can only come about after they have progressed far enough to completely abandon a sense of entitlement based on whiteness.

4.0 Classroom Policy and Cultural Competence

Culturally competent professors can greatly improve the atmosphere of their classrooms by making them feel safe for students of color. This can be done by addressing the following policies: 1) dress codes, 2) conceptualization of time, and 3) classroom etiquette.

Generally for dress codes, effort should be made to indicate to students that tolerance for diversity is the rule. There should be no encouragement or imposition of Eurocentric styles focusing on neatness or traditionally accepted middle-class standards. Sagging jeans, oversized shirts, sideways baseball caps, and displays of inner-city cultural icons and symbols should not only be tolerated but encouraged.

With reference to time orientations, professors must remember that not all cultures view time as discrete, incremental units that pass, but rather, as fluid and more nebulous. Adherence to rigidly Eurocentric rules of tardiness is both intolerant and racist and will create a hostile learning environment for many students of color. The starting time for a class should be viewed more as a suggestion rather than a mandate. Remember, the goal is to create a culturally inclusive learning environment, not teach students of color how to act white.

The area of classroom etiquette policy provides a very fruitful ground for promoting inclusion and acceptance of diversity. No area exemplifies this more than that of interactional style. As a general rule, nonwhites tend to be more attuned to feelings, acceptance, and emotional closeness than do Euro-Americans. This means that professors must promote collaboration and create, not inhibit, opportunities for interaction between members of the learning community. For example, Euro-American professors may be tempted to discourage or punish private conversations during lecture. This is counterproductive and unwise. In fact, research shows that blacks tend to value the need to affiliate with each other as much as they value achievement. This means professors must view private conversations as learning moments for students of color and appreciate the value of this type of sharing and emotional closeness between students rather than attempting to quash them (Delpit, 1995; Moule, 2011). To impose rigidly racist dress codes, time restrictions, and etiquette standards on students of color simply irritates the fact that many of them already feel as though they do not belong, are unwanted, and disliked by the dominant culture, and are being forced to abandon their cultural values. This is precisely the type of atmosphere that breeds failure, frustration, reduced grades, and causes students of color to be angry and hostile toward the academic enterprise (Delpit, 1995; Moule, 2011).

5.0 Exploring Cultural Differences

There are myriad ways in which cultures differ and it would be unrealistic and unfair to expect a teacher to master them all. However, Brown and Brown (1995) created a typology that can be applied to the college setting. The following is a discussion and application of those principles and should be viewed by

the reader simply as concepts to initiate a discussion of how to become a more culturally competent instructor. This is designed to sensitize faculty to the complexity of becoming more culturally competent. Each individual professor should consider his or her own student clientele and focus on those aspects of culture that would make them better teachers.

One of the first cultural differences that impact how students learn is the area of expression. Whites tend to be more comfortable with self-expression in the classroom. While they may be somewhat apprehensive about discussing issues at first, they nevertheless belong to a culture that rewards dialogue, divulging personal information, and the free exchange of ideas with relatively little reservation.

Euro-American students and faculty typically are comfortable, for example, talking openly about goals, objectives and the need to be competitive. Whites have been acculturated to being prideful of accomplishments and are rewarded for expressing this pride verbally. On the other hand, students of color (especially Hispanics and Native Americans) typically have been taught to be more reserved. Expressions about individual accomplishments are viewed as haughty and self-aggrandizing (Moule, 2011). Native Americans, in fact, reward each other for their brevity in speech and place high-value in limited public expression. Similarly, blacks tend to use language as a way of expressing emotion but at the same time will often be extremely guarded and suspicious about white faculty requests for information and personal opinions. This stems largely from the history of white oppression and antipathy toward blacks. Therefore, with reference to managing and requiring expressiveness from students, it is important for educators to be sensitive to how students from different cultures perceive and interpret the professor's request for both personal information and class participation. Whereas whites will tend to be less apprehensive about the requests, students of color may approach such scenarios with more trepidation. This should not be viewed as indifference or hostility on the part of students of color.

Another area of cultural variation that must be respected involves one's view of nature. Euro-Americans are taught to dominate it (e.g., drilling for oil, building superior shipping, damming rivers, etc.). They are encouraged to be masters over their surroundings including their peers. This requires unapologetic ambition and therefore white students will be more comfortable with distinguishing themselves from peers. In this line of reasoning, whites will be more comfortable viewing the distribution of grades as a zero-sum game. That is, if X% of the class will receive an "A" grade, then they will be more amenable with competing for that grade even if it means "defeating" their peers.

Students of color, on the other hand, are more likely to view the natural environment as one requiring and deserving harmony and peace. Cultures of color are more willing to seek a peaceful state with peers and to share. This means that students of color will not be as comfortable with having a competitive atmosphere forced upon them. Many will actually find it distasteful and will retreat from competition altogether. This partially explains why academic failure is more likely among nonwhites when they find themselves in the alien, dominant, mainstream culture (Saeki and Borow, 1985).

With reference to attitudes toward independence, Euro-Americans tend to value individual-level responsibility, independence, and individual rights. White students have learned that self-reliance, autonomy, and personal coping with stress are viewed as strengths and are likewise rewarded. When in class, whites are more likely to be concerned with "my grade," "what can I do to succeed," and "how can I compete more favorably against my classroom competitors" (Saeki and Borow, 1985; Sue and Sue, 1990).

Students of color, on the other hand, will likely value cooperation, emotional expressiveness, interdependence, harmony, deference to peers, and an expanded view of the self. They will view excessive competition and independence as distasteful. These students are more likely to take the perspective of "our assignments," and "our progress in class." It is essential for teachers to understand how their Euro-American outlook and corresponding values are at odds with nonwhites. When these differences are identified,

sensitivity must be shown to prevent sending the signal that other cultures' perspectives are flawed or somehow in need of correction.

The theory of learning (e.g., epistemology) is another area explored by Brown and Brown (1995). Cultural variation on this measure will impact how white and nonwhite students acquire and process knowledge. While of course there are plenty of spiritual white students, the general trend will be for them to lean toward the scientific enterprise as the primary way of knowing. Whites are known to be more convinced, for example, by arguments related to the scientific enterprise that have been published. It follows, then, that white Euro-American students will be educated more effectively by helping them understand the findings in the academic literature. This represents the objective way of learning.

Students of color, on the other hand, will be more likely to take a subjective or even spiritual approach to learning. The academic literature, for example, may be viewed with suspicion given that it has been long dominated by white professors and journal reviewers. Students of color may be more convinced by learning techniques that involve meditative practices, case studies, or tradition that is passed down via cultural transmission. Strict quantitative approaches will not be as persuasive. The primary confusion comes about when purveyors of one approach fail to appreciate the differences and similarities of other perspectives (Salmon, 2013).

In the area of time, as discussed above, whites view time as incremental with an extreme emphasis on the future. White teachers tend to be obsessed with the promotion of future goals and objectives and being on time is seen as a virtue. One additional point can be made, however. Students of color may find the classroom environment to be an alien and hostile place when confronted with the Euro-American obsession with punctuality and future events. In fact, Asians and Hispanics are characterized as past/present oriented. Blacks also are characterized as present oriented. This means students of color are more interested in, and respond to, what has led up to the current moment and what will become of it in the "now" (Moule, 2011).

Consider the criminal justice issue of the death penalty and how it is administered. Euro-Americans, with their fixation on the future, may tend to view the death penalty from a utilitarian perspective. That is, they will want to focus on the function it serves. From a criminal justice goal standpoint, these students will be concerned with the incapacitation and deterrence-related functions of the death penalty. Incapacitation is future-oriented because as a criminal justice goal, it is interested in the extent to which the death penalty removes the capital offender from society and takes away the opportunity to commit further heinous acts of violence. Deterrence also is future-oriented. Here, the death penalty must cause fear in the general population so that future acts of violence are reduced.

However, students of color may be more past/present oriented in their interpretation of the death penalty. They may, for example, respond better (and have more to share in class) to a discussion of how past oppression and white supremacy created the environment where the death penalty disproportionately impacts nonwhites and the poor. Injustices in the criminal justice system and the unfair administration of the criminal code would be excellent topics to be raised with the class. These problems are antecedents to the arbitrary and capricious application of the death penalty that disproportionately hurts the poor and people of color (Walker, 2011). This is not to say that whites and nonwhites could not understand both approaches but this is simply an illustration of the "cultural minefield" that Euro-American professors must navigate if they are to promote a safe, inclusive, culturally competent atmosphere in their classrooms (Sue and Zane, 1987).

Finally, the concept of level of communality must be understood for an instructor to be culturally competent. This concept addresses the extent to which the group or culture emphasizes a self-serving approach or prefers to stress that behaviors are evaluated by how much they benefit the group or community. White America, by virtue of enjoying white privilege, is afforded the luxury of not having to have a racial identity of its own (e.g., colorblindness) nor is it obligated to understand anyone else's group or culture. This

"freedom" from having to worry about race means that whites can focus more on what benefits them as individuals. They believe that if everyone pursues self-interest it will ultimately benefit society because strong, self-reliant, successful individuals will improve the community as a whole even with little attention paid specifically to their community responsibilities.

Students of color may have a drastically different mindset. Nobles (1972) referred to this as an "experiential communality" which involves a collaborative focus. Here, behaviors are deemed good or bad by how much they benefit the community as a whole. For blacks and Hispanics, this emphasis developed because both groups suffered at the hands of oppressive groups; therefore, the community's survival became the paramount concern.

From a criminal justice student standpoint, whites focus on how crime impacts the *individual*. Burglary, for example, is viewed as a violation of *individual* property rights and crime prevention strategies tend to focus on how individuals can protect themselves. Target hardening such as carrying concealed weapons, use of alarms, and better lighting will be promoted to protect the individual property owner.

Students of color may be more interested in how crime impacts the community. Here, the burglar is not violating individual rights as much as he is injuring the neighborhood. They may respond better to discussing how burglary impacts fear of crime and how this harms the community by altering behavior (e.g., fewer homeowners using the streets at night and how this attracts more abnormal users). Crime prevention programs discussed in class may need to focus on community-wide, collective approaches whereby burglary is viewed more as a disease of the neighborhood that can only be remedied by improving the quality of life for all.

6.0 Applying the Haberman Model in the Criminal Justice Classroom

The author of this article has recently experimented with the Haberman (1996) model of culturally competent teaching. While certainly not an exhaustive list of principles, this model is excellent in helping guide instructors' thinking, organizing and preparation for class. It also serves as a good model to help instructors handle the inevitable self-doubt that comes from moving toward cultural competence. The following is a discussion of how these principles need to be applied when teaching students who come from diverse backgrounds.

Engage everyone. Getting everyone in the class engaged in classroom activities is imperative. Self-segregation is the greatest enemy of this concept. Self-segregation happens when students are allowed to form destructive cliques in class. For example, students may self-segregate into the following groups: 1) athletes, 2) the highly motivated, loquacious students; 3) the disinterested, 4) racial segregation, and 5) those who detach themselves from class via electronic devices (e.g., iPhones, laptops, etc.). Of course these are not mutually exclusive groups but the point is clear; self-segregation of this nature can lead to a form of tracking where the good students are "here" and bad students are "over there." The self-fulfilling prophecy for the "bad students" will take hold and they will very quickly disengage from class, stop attending, and eventually drop out. A remedy for this is to try assigned seating (e.g., alphabetical order). While this completely assuages the problem of self-segregation it also creates the hazard of undermining meaningful relationship building among students of color that may be beneficial. Individual instructors must determine for themselves if assigned seating is worth that risk.

Another tactic to engage everyone can be to have names printed on notecards and use them to randomly select individuals to answer review questions, topics of discussion and so forth. As noted earlier, however, some cultural groups may be suspicious or resistant to requests for participation, particularly from white professors.

Demonstrate caring. It is essential to send the message to diverse students that you genuinely care about whether or not they succeed. This can partially be accomplished by choosing culturally diverse textbooks, videos for class, and understanding cultural references made by students. Another key aspect of caring is to continually offer yourself as a mentor to students of color.

Recognize your own fallibility. No one knows everything. Cultural competence is not something that can be mastered by reading a book, attending a conference, or receiving a certificate at a workshop or seminar. It is an ongoing process and mistakes will be made along the way. However, all of those things can be used to increase one's level of cultural competence along with attending multicultural movies, lectures, eating at an ethnic restaurant or even visiting another country. The primary element here is to approach multiculturalism and diverse students with humility and to make it abundantly clear that you are educable.

Be persistent. When a strategy fails, don't quit. An important consideration here is to prepare mentally for resistance and disruptions. As discussed above, some cultural groups do not view private conversations during lectures, the appearance of disinterest, or tardiness as deviant behavior. Also, white professors should expect students of color to harbor suspicion about them. Learn to live with this and do not allow these obstacles to impede your progress. This author reminds himself repeatedly of the term *equanimity*. To be equanimous is to visualize yourself as being in the middle of a violent hurricane yet you do not have a single hair out of place. Similarly, in criminal justice if you try a video to raise diversity issues (e.g., *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy*-- a documentary about a group of black youth falsely accused, charged, convicted, and imprisoned for raping a white woman in 1931) and it does not elicit the responses intended, move on to something else. Perhaps a discussion of the Scottsboro case proceeding through the courts and prison system will bring about a better discussion. There are always new angles, videos, topics, internet assignments, or review questions from reading that can be tried.

Remain indefatigable. Both physical and emotional stamina are required. The proper mindset when teaching from a culturally competent perspective is to remember that your clientele is diverse. The term *diverse* is oftentimes a euphemism designed to mask the variation in abilities among students, both white and nonwhite. The fact is that many professors are increasingly dealing with academically and culturally challenged students. Students of color have the psychological baggage of having been oppressed, hated, and marginalized by the mainstream culture. Similarly, many come from distressed home lives and have the added stress of having to compete in an alien environment where they are forced to be bi-cultural (i.e., having to know how to perform in their own culture as well as trying to compete with the white dominated American culture). Additionally, many students of color have never experienced academic success. The constant fear of "acting white," for example, continually hinders many throughout their academic careers. Also, many students of color do not appreciate the relevance of higher education. "How is studying Supreme Court decisions going to help me get a job?" might be a question for the professor. Keeping this in mind will help the instructor prepare for the inevitable resistance and disruptions while simultaneously preserving his or her own energy.

Emphasize Effort. To improve the learning environment, culturally competent professors must reward effort no matter how flawed or sporadic rather than focus on objective measures of achievement. Take, for example, the situation whereby a student of color is communicating using Ebonics in a class discussion or on a writing assignment. In an actual case involving this author's introductory criminal justice class, a student wrote about an individual who had gotten in trouble with the criminal justice system. The student attempted to explain why the individual had fallen into crime by stating, "*he a criminal slainin' crack cause he gotta fucked up family and he ain't got no job and shit.*" A Euro-American, white, elitist professor may cringe in horror at the use of Ebonics in a case like this. The student's paper may be spattered with red ink indicating the revulsion felt toward him for his lack of communication skills. Culturally competent

professors, on the other hand, quickly come to the conclusion that what the student was attempting to communicate is not all that unclear. Is it really that difficult to see that the student was indicating the reason for criminality was because the offender had come from a broken home (perhaps with criminal parents who were divorced) and had turned to crime because of feeling hopelessness brought on by chronic unemployment? Is this method of communicating really inferior to white America's preferred nomenclature? At what point does hypersensitivity to "correct" grammar and sentence structure cross the line from meaningful writing instruction into the area of condescending ethnocentricity? These are the types of questions professors must be asking themselves as they strive to become more culturally competent in their classrooms.

By focusing on the effort rather than the result, educators avoid stigmatizing students of color specifically and marginal students in general. A similar technique used by the author based on this principle is to focus students' attention on the *strategy* rather than on his or her academic shortcomings. For the case study discussed above, the student was not excoriated for his writing problems but was encouraged to focus his attention on various strategies that maybe used to improve his writing. The strategies included the following: 1) comments and corrections on his paper (mostly emphasizing effort); 2) instructions on how to use grammar and spell check in his wordprocessing software – this is particularly useful if using WordPerfect X6 which has a far superior grammar and spell checker compared to MS Word; 3) getting the student to make an appointment with the campus writing center – an area staffed by English faculty who work with students on their papers; and 4) frequent invitations to come to the office during office hours – this allows the student to work one-on-one directly with the professor on issues associated with writing assignments. The point here is not the list of strategies (they will vary from professor to professor); the diversionary emphasis is to get students focused on the strategies rather than on their failures according to some Eurocentric definition of "proper sentence construction and terminology." This encourages students to see that they all have worth and that if we can only "find the right strategy," we can help them succeed. The burden is at least partly on the educator and the strategy rather than simply sending the signal that the student, his culture, manner of speaking, and writing, is inferior to that of white America's.

7.0 Conclusion

Any professor contemplating a move toward cultural competence will be met with more than a modicum of resistance, both from white and nonwhite students. White students will complain that a move toward culturally competent teaching merely represents another tyrannical form of political correctness being imposed upon them. They will exclaim, "What white privilege? I have been affirmative actioned out of jobs before. Where's my privilege?" or "America's population is primarily European in nature; why don't all these immigrants assimilate to us? We have gone from being a melting pot to being a chamber pot." Similarly, whites will attempt to minimize the difficulties faced by students of color by arguing that "The playing field is level and anyone who works hard can make it in America" (i.e., the myth of meritocracy) or "We give nonwhites tons of welfare and they even get to have a black president; what else could they possibly want?"

Perhaps paradoxically, nonwhite students also will show some resistance. Academic achievement is still viewed pejoratively as "acting white." Students of color who adopt this destructive perspective will frequently develop an oppositional posture or identity toward representatives of the oppressive white mainstream culture. Many of these students want to do well at university but are terrified of the name-calling that can come from members of their own group. Succeeding in school is viewed as obsequiousness and they will often be referred to as "*passing*," or being a student of color but selling out and playing the "white man's game." Slurs used against them will be those to indicate that they are one color on the outside but

white on the inside: Oreos for blacks, coconuts for Hispanics, apples for Native Americans, and bananas for Asians. This will cause many students of color to reject characteristics they deem as white (academic success, planning for the future, deference to authority, punctuality, courteousness in class, etc.). This "reaction formation" whereby white middle-class values are inverted can lead to extreme problems in development and ultimately be a primary reason for dropping out (Cohen, 1955). This rebellion can be viewed as an attempt to keep the dominant and untrustworthy white culture at a distance and may result in students of color being almost totally alienated from school (Tatum, 1997; Jones and Korchin, 1982). Nevertheless, the current trajectory of the nation's demographics dictate that this resistance (albeit seemingly intractable) must be transcended so that the country can peacefully evolve away from being a Eurocentric nation and into a truly multicultural one.

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