

Insights & Ideas for Teaching and Learning

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Teaching and Learning Committee

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Diversity

The Teaching and Learning Committee, with Howard Schwartz as chair, has devoted this issue of *Insights and Ideas* to articles regarding the challenges of diversity. Within the university we have begun to discuss the issue of assessment of pedagogy and learning outcomes in order to determine the quality of an Oakland education. At some point in higher education we have equated diversity with the lowering of standards. Invariably, higher education should provide an environment for higher learning for all students.

The most compelling argument for providing an environment which embraces diversity is the fundamental conflict between diversity and quality. We can broaden our understanding about quality without diluting our expectations for learning outcomes. In order to do this, we will have to restructure our understanding of quality. "When will we come to terms with diversity in our personal and professional lives? When will we as a society begin to recognize the diverse forms that quality can take?...and thus initiate the process of making quality limitless in its manifestations, infinite in quantity, unrestricted with respect to its origins, and more importantly, virulently contagious." Dr. Arturo Madrid, UCLA.

Clearly, if the institution is to meet the challenges of diversity we must continue to move forward in creating learning environments that cultivate the intelligence of

all of our students.

--Virginia Allen, editor

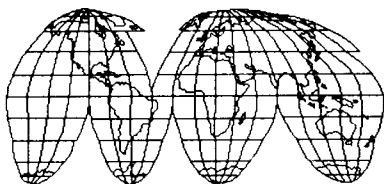
Reciprocal Arts

What happens when one falls ill depends largely upon one's position in society and on contemporary cultural beliefs about life, illness and human rights as well as on the state of science. Cultural beliefs are a part of the caregiver as well as the recipient of care. Cultural beliefs can be universal or simply very personal. How, then, can a student of nursing be taught to know and understand the role of cultural beliefs in illness and recovery. Cultural beliefs taught in most nursing curricula are those of the four major minority groups in the United States. The geographical location of many schools preclude clinical experience with many of these populations. As a consequence, neither teaching nor learning takes place. The teacher preaches and the student meditates, but "not on these things."

An old "law of learning" posits "a student must be in a state of readiness to learn." One successful way I have found to involve students in learning about cultural beliefs is to place them by family name in their specific ethnic groups and then ask for any information related to family practices. Part of the assignment is to use grandparents as a source of information. The outcomes include enthusiasm, wonder, documentary evidence; e.g., old-time cold remedies, photographs, costumes, holiday and religious customs. This

often leads to an interest in cultures of friends, neighbors and ultimately toward a curiosity to reach out and learn about other culture including that of our own major minority groups. The art of teaching facilitates the art of learning when two humans, teacher and student, reach out and respond to each others uniqueness and then extend that human response out to others.

--Ann Douglas, Ph.D., R.N.



Geoculture

Italian-Irish; Sottish; Polish; Rumanian; German-English...are typical of the greatest proportion of responses whenever I have asked groups of university and secondary educators as well as Oakland University students the question, "What nationality are you?" In response to a follow up question, "Where were you born?" most indicate the United States. Admittedly, some in these mini survey groups, respond to the nationality question, as "American", or with an answer comparable to "Jewish-American, "Lebanese-American", "African-American".

The point is, these descendants' imprinted beliefs significantly value their geoculture. Such beliefs echo the thesis of Professor John H. Clarke, currently professor Emeritus of African World Studies at Hunter College, which states, "The name of a people must always reflect land, history, and culture." And their geoculture referents do precisely that! So much so for some, that it predominates their United States (American) nationality.

It is also apparent that geocultural lineage, which accounts for what Carter G. Woodson call "differentness", implying neither superiority nor inferiority, remains significant

to the vast majority of U.S. Americans in spite of acculturation and pluralism.

Many of the current terms used to identify groups of people provide a partial geocultural image. Thus, it is important to be aware of the implications aroused when a story is incomplete. Let us briefly examine a few of these terms. For example: black-white-red-tan-yellow used to segment the human race, describes skin color according to melanin content. Hispanic, another example, is a language classification used to lump almost all Spanish or Spanish/bilingual speakers regardless of their geocultural lineage. Minority, which means a smaller group differing in some aspects from a majority group, and the term generally used to differentiate those who are not the U.S. majority European - American geocultural group, is yet another example. These terms are limited in their scope. Furthermore, their connotations and denotations can dignify, glorify, marginalize, trivialize, stigmatize, isolate, demoralize, ostracize, include, or exclude.

The respect for one's own geocultural group, a learned behavior, should be nothing less than the conscience that guides what one uses to respectfully describe another. Let us be aware of the way we use terms for classification of people and remember to honor the cultural heritage of the others as we would our own.

--Toni S. Walters, Ph.D.

"Recognizing & eliminating prejudice...a prerequisite to education."

Extracted from an article entitled:

"Music as a practical vehicle for exposure and elimination of racial and cultural prejudice...fundamental to education"

Presented at the ABS-15th Annual Conference:

"Models of Racial Unity"

Omni Hotel-Atlanta, Georgia

November 10,1990

In the human kingdom itself there are points of contact, properties common to all mankind; likewise, there are

points of distinction which separate race from race, individual from individual. If the points of contact, which are the common properties of humanity, overcome the peculiar points of distinction, unity is assured.

Abdu'l Baha Abbas: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.67-68

If we are able to accept the premise that, as one point of contact, all human beings reflect to a greater or lesser degree the belief systems, and cultural vocabulary of their life experience, then one's experiences, by reason of the restrictions of exposure to human variants perpetuated by limitations in resources, cultural, family group or personal bias...are also *universally* limited. Lack of exposure to *alternatives* implies rather simply that one is "ignorant" of what one does not know or to what one has never been exposed. If we allow ourselves to apply sufficient *humility** in our approach to alternatives, not as a handicap or weakness, but as a universally common asset and a strength, we may then be free to explore the foundation of the *walls of ignorance* which stand firmly in our path and most tragically in the path of those we later seek to educate.

Though we may now (1990's) be trained to shun the word-*prejudice*,...it and it's synonyms: bias and partiality are universal conditions and perhaps the greatest hinderances to the educational process. Unquestionably however, their elimination is dependent upon their recognition---and this may be the least emphasized of the essential prerequisites to open-minded learning.

If prejudice, and particularly the most incomprehensible of all--racial prejudice... can be seen as a formidable yet approachable barrier to the educational process, then the cultivation of disciplines and attitudes which recognize and perpetuate both the necessity and practicality of penetrating their restrictive influence relevant to the expansion of these educational perimeters is both practical and essential.

"[Complete freedom from prejudice]" should be the immediate, the universal, and the chief concern of

all..... of whatever age, rank, experience, class, or color, as all, with no exception, must face its challenging implications, and none can claim, however much he may have progressed along this line, to have completely discharged the stern responsibilities which it inculcates."

-Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice -p.22

--Michael Naylor, M.M.

*-Humility (the absence of pride or self-assertion) is potentially the **most** important ingredient necessary in the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to view ones deficiencies not in a prideful or defensive manner as Western agenda generally dictates, but with the belief that one must constantly questions one's own perception.

Call For Nominations

Undergraduate Distinguished Achievement Award

Do you know of extraordinary undergraduate performance beyond that required for good grades? You can nominate an undergraduate for such achievements as exceptional reports, creations, or performances. Successful nominees receive a citation and \$500 at Fall commencement.

Watch your mail for the complete announcement on eligibility and criteria or call Geoff Brieger.

Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity

During Black Awareness Month, the university community often increases its awareness of issues of cultural and racial sensitivity. It is with pleasure that I identify a few strategies that can increase cultural

sensitivity in the classroom.

First, it will be difficult to teach with cultural sensitivity if there is a lack of respect and recognition of one's own cultural background. If you can't see culture in yourself, it will be difficult to see it in others. I would encourage all faculty to write a cultural autobiography. What are the influences of your racial background on who and what you are today? Are there family traditions that have been shared from generation to generation? There are other cultural factors to consider, but the most important point is to see yourself as a cultural being.

Secondly, one must be knowledgeable about those ethnic minority groups that are reflected in the student body. This will help to increase cultural awareness in specific ways. For example, in some Asian cultures it is considered disrespectful to have prolonged eye contact. The fact that the student may look away when talking to an instructor is not a sign of disrespect or disinterest, but reflects the values of that particular culture. By being culturally aware, one can avoid jumping to erroneous conclusions about the actions of ethnic minority students.

This is also good advice for faculty who are members of ethnic minorities. It took some time for me to realize that when members of the dominant race called me by my first name, they were being friendly, not disrespectfully. Understanding the culture of others, can avoid unnecessary conflicts and hard feelings. Everyone can benefit from increasing their knowledge of cultures different from their own.

Third, don't make assumptions about students based on names and physical characteristics. There is a faculty member in the School of Nursing who's married name is Kulwicki. However, Dr. Kulwicki is from Lebanon and is widely sought for her expertise in Middle Eastern culture.

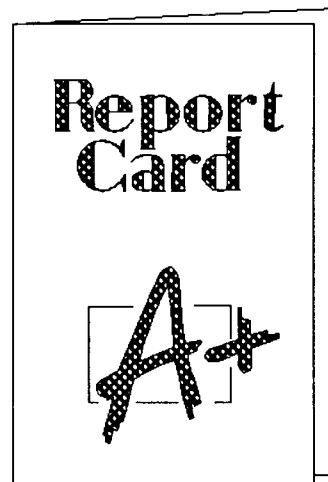
Last, each of us must evaluate our own prejudices and racial attitudes, even if we don't believe we have any racist beliefs. This is difficult to do. Most of us are not racial

extremists. Yet, we must recognize that too often we can unwittingly fall prey to racial stereotypes. What stereotypes do we hold about other racial groups? How does this affect our teaching effectiveness? Without realistic, even painful introspection, we will never increase our cultural sensitivity.

This is an issue of importance as we daily encounter academic issues related to race and/or ethnicity. A culturally insensitive teacher may overlook teaching physical assessment of dark-skinned people. Thus, students may be unable to recognize cyanosis in a dark-skinned client who might die as a result. There are numerous examples of how cultural insensitivity negatively affects the quality of instruction, as well as classroom atmosphere and rapport with students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In conclusion, being culturally sensitive benefits the campus atmosphere and enhances the quality of instruction. As the number of ethnic minorities increase in American society, the need for cultural awareness will also increase.

--Frances Jackson, Ph.D., R.N.



Studying Smarter---Not Harder

This article describes how knowledge of one's preferred learning style made a difference in how students in the DuBois Scholars Program learned to learn. The DuBois Schol-

ars Program at Oakland University is a summer residency program for minority high school students who have been identified by their schools as having the potential to complete a college program. The program is administered through Dr. Manual Pierson's office.

During the summer of 1990, DuBois Scholars from the 10th and 11th grades attended a course in study skills that I facilitated. The text Learning to Learn was adapted to be used within the parameters of the summer schedule.

One of the initial chapters suggested that individuals learn best if information is conveyed through their preferred learning modality. I believe that students needed to be more active and responsible in acquiring knowledge, therefore, I administered a learning style inventory to these students during the first week of class. Students scored their inventories to find out if they had a preferred learning modality. The inventory used identified three modalities: visual, auditory, and tactile.

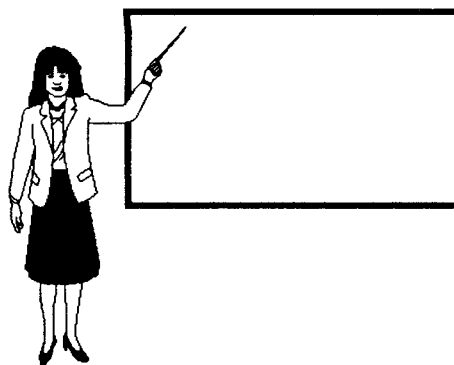
Discussion about how knowledge of learning style could help students to adapt study strategies for efficient and effective learning continued throughout the summer session. Students learned that studying effectiveness is not only a function of time but also a function of adapting and organizing information to support their dominant learning style.

In groups, students helped each other by suggesting ways to study that emphasized one modality over another. Finally, we created lists of ways to study different content areas based on a preferred learning style. I enjoyed listening to students enthusiastically report that they tried some of the ideas in other courses in the program and, "They really worked!!" In an evaluation of the study skills component of the program, students did identify this activity as a strength of the study skills component.

Some students have been successful in high school because they have been able to

memorize enormous amounts of information. In college, where we challenge our students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate ideas, these strategies are not as effective. Often, when we ask college students in our classes how they study, they say that they read the materials with highlighter in hand. For some students highlighting is neither effective nor efficient, and in the end, leads to colorful pages but shallow knowledge acquisition.

--Joyce A. Eckart, Ed.D.



Teaching Learning with the Foreign Student

I was asked by a colleague to write a short article discussing teaching learning issues for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This article will focus on tips to assist foreign students to become successful in the American academic milieu. "Foreign students" refers to those students from abroad here to pursue a field of study and then return to their country of origin.

Generally, foreign students are a privileged group. Often they are sponsored by their government or international agencies based on their exceptional academic promise and motivation. In other instances, they come from socio-economic backgrounds which permit the expense of foreign education and travel. For the most part, they are not disadvantaged socially, academically or economically and naturally resent being treated in a condescending fashion.

Despite their achievements, foreign students studying in U.S. institutions face obstacles to maintaining their level of excellence for a least an adjustment period. This may be due to imperfect English language skills, unfamiliar teaching learning styles, and ancillary factors (e.g. desire to "experience" rather than study). For students with obvious English language difficulty, enrollment in rhetoric courses may alleviate problems. Accent and pronunciation are not necessarily an indication of comprehension or ability to communicate.

Clearly, defining course objectives early in a course may forestall later problems. Keep in mind that foreign students approach a course with a wide range of expectations. Some foreign academic programs are highly structured with mandatory attendance and frequent testing; others require no class attendance and have only a final exam or "exit" project. It is helpful to outline expectations, provide study guides, and sample exam formats and papers. In my experience, many foreign students have trouble with multiple choice exam format because they are used to the comprehensive essay format.

Foreign students bring new perspectives to situations/discussions in the classroom. Faculty should avail themselves of the opportunity to enrich classroom discussion by having foreign students present those perspectives. As with all students, a sensitivity to individual comfort in sharing such information is necessary.

Faculty need to remember that the foreign student in a U.S. institution is generally a highly motivated individual. Faculty who approach the foreign student with patience and understanding will generally meet a positive response.

--Anahid Kulwicki, D.N.S., R.N.

Reflections On: 'One Strategy; One Success'

presented by, P. Uri Treisman, at Equity within the Academy: Graduating Minority Students Conference,

Lansing, Michigan

The speaker is a visiting professor at Swarthmore College and the Director of the Dana Center, at University of California-Berkeley. He is interested in Mathematics Education, with emphasis on minority participation. He received commendations from the National Research Council, for his innovative college education efforts.

Professor Uri Treisman's interest in mathematics education was prompted by a visible need to improve the quality and performance of incoming Berkeley students, particularly minority students. He quickly realized that there was disparity between the instructors' viewpoints in teaching the subject matter and the students' corresponding

Editorial Information

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interpretations. Also, it was extremely difficult to access and evaluate the learning styles and beliefs that his students brought to the classroom. However, in his research, increased human contact and a small faculty to student ratio helped to explain some of the negative performance symptoms and sometimes their causes.

Dr. Triesman focused his subsequent research on minority students, primarily black students. He began to compile a comprehen-

sive data base that included results from the literature on educational research as well as practical case studies that he and his colleagues encountered, within the California University system. Although the literature had attributed poor mathematics learning skills and low success rate to poor high school preparation, low family income, incomplete family education and inadequate motivation, these factors did not account for the observed data. Apparently, a missing factor had emerged from comparative case studies that involved students with Asian ethnic background. It was found that these Asian students developed multiple study techniques. They would, for example, study individually to identify and absorb the basics and later get together to refine their knowledge and hence resolve any difficulties that remained. Finally, these students tended to connect more frequently with their instructors, and ask more probing questions, which not only aided them individually but also aided their study group.

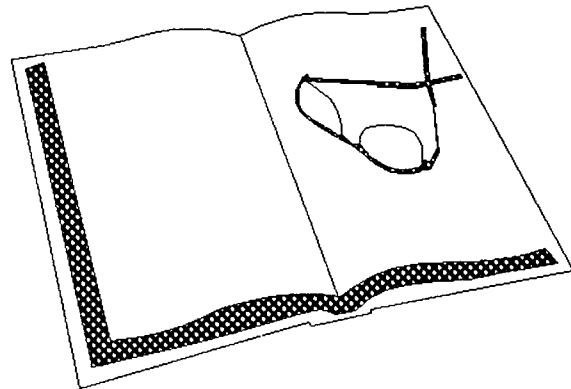
The study group concept and other associated experimental techniques have proven their worth by a marked increase in grade point averages and college success, even in the traditionally difficult calculus courses. As a result of these techniques, positive feedback was obtained which changed students' attitudes toward learning and improved their study habits. The students developed an appreciation for and understanding of mathematics and science. Slowly but surely, both educators and students worked toward common goals and reached them.

Another approach that paid high dividends was keeping track of many details about selected students' living conditions, daily routines, study disciplines, as well as family involvement and support. Although such approaches are tedious and expensive, they provided very useful profiles, which were utilized in subsequent research. This data enabled the faculty involved in the research to determine strategies for eliminating barriers

to high achievement, and it also revealed which study techniques were most likely to work given individual conditions, backgrounds and intellectual ability.

Dr. Treisman truly believes in sound policies and practices in higher education to increase minority participation, yet he very strongly emphasized faculty and graduate student involvement in departmental and academic programs. The faculty usually deliver the bulk of technical information to students and must thus take on the difficult challenge of employing fresh approaches and scientifically based techniques of effective instruction to improve minority students' performance. There is no 'expert solution' to this multifaceted problem in modern higher education, but certainly there are several success stories to motivate and encourage us to ponder more.

--M.A. Zohdy, Ph.D.



"Equity Within the Academy: Graduating Minority Students"

January 23, 1991

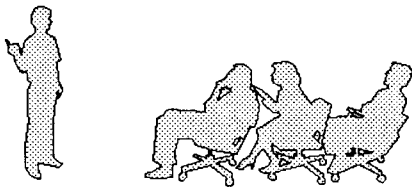
Harold L. Hodgkinson's (Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, D.C.) presentation on "Diversity in Our Future" stressed eight ways to deal with increased student diversity. He suggested that the academy:

1. Front-load curricular resources to the freshman year.
2. Test students in every class in the first three weeks of the

- class and use this as an "early warning" to seek help.
3. Provide each student with a clear statement of knowledge skills needed for completion of each course. (These are to be as specifically directive as possible).
 4. Make use of active modes of learning.
 5. Link academic, personal and financial guidance (even physically) through an integration of services.
 6. Use remediation only to allow students access to their major curriculum.
 7. Allow middle-class values to "pay off" quickly (through recognition or job placement or other opportunities).
 8. Exploit cultural diversity as a learning resource/experience.

Culture clashes occur in the present, but are affected by and do affect the future as well as the past. Our "middle class values" come from the past, are transformed in the present and the future. How do we "pass on" virtues such as hard work, studying hard, loyalty, etc.? Hodgkinson stressed incorporating a reward system into our classes and curriculums that will allow a quick "pay off" of these virtues. Perhaps we could incorporate some of these into our current classes.

--Helen Woodman



Body Ergonomics of Learning

As a person engages in a learning activity, the state of the physical body can help or hinder the ability to synthesize and integrate information. It is known that the learning

process will be enhanced if:

- 1) breathing is comfortable, easy and regular as perceived by the learner
- 2) jaw is relaxed and teeth are not touching
- 3) the facial muscles are at ease and if you in are doubt then separate your lips and breathe evenly
- 4) you feel comfortably warm all over your body
- 5) you avoid feeling hungry, too full, and use the bathroom prior to the learning situation.
- 6) sitting be sure that:
 - a) feet are flat on the floor, or if this does not feel easy, lift one heel and then drop it, always start with both feet flat - alternate one foot at time
 - b) thighs are parallel with the ground (when you place a round pen on thigh it will just lie there) and if your knees are below your hips (pen will roll off) take newspaper and add under your fee until your thighs are parallel to floor. If your hips are below your knees (pen will roll into your lap) then add newspaper on the seat of the chair until your thighs are parallel.
- 7) sit on your sitting bones - The seat of the chair is parallel to the ground (not tilted back). To check note if your belly button is on line with your pubis and you can lean on your forearms on the table if it helps.

All these postural check-ups are a way each of us can help ourselves to learn with our body supporting the process.

--Osa Jackson Klykken, Ph.D., PT