

How Can University Professors Help Their Students Understand Issues of Diversity Through Interpersonal & Intrapersonal Intelligences?

by Janis Strasser & Holly Seplocha



If individuals are to understand things that are meaningful to their lives, they need to be exploring topics that are consequential to what is important in the culture. (Dobry, 1999, p. 8)

Introduction

It was the first day of a typical class in our medium sized suburban state university, in a graduate class that prepares students for initial teacher certification. As always, the class was very diverse (see Figure 1).

We knew we needed to address issues of diversity and different perspectives, not only as part of the content of teacher education, but also to help our class become a community of learners.

College classrooms are changing from the traditional classroom of the past. Professors are greeted with a more diverse population of students and are seeing many different types of learners. Recent census data confirm that the United States population is becoming more multicultural and that this diversity will continue to increase. As our world is becoming more diverse, we believe that students in all domains of university study can benefit from developing an appreciation and understanding of issues of diversity.

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We define multicultural education in a sociopolitical context as a process of basic education that challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities and teachers reflect (Nieto, 2000).

We see great value in exploring our own identities and having our students also do so, to further the discussion of multiculturalism. Documenting and sharing some of the “transformative experiences that help us to bridge our personal and professional identities” (Genor & Schulte, 2002) can often begin a dialogue with students that embraces issues of race and diversity.

Nieto (1994, 2000) proposes four levels of understanding diversity: Tolerance;

Acceptance; Respect; and Affirmation/Solidarity/Critique. Tolerance, the lowest level, implies that differences are acknowledged and, perhaps, accepted. This level is sometimes targeted through workshops, readings and seminars that focus on diversity issues. However, in order to achieve the highest level (Affirmation/Solidarity/Critique), many opportunities for regular exploration of values as an integral part of the curriculum are necessary. Additionally, multicultural education is a *process*, continually changing and never finished. Given that multicultural education is critical pedagogy, it is necessarily dynamic (Nieto, 2000, p. 337).

Finally, by engaging in constant self-reflection, we, as educators must become aware of our own unconscious racist assumptions (Wynne, 2000). Do we have high

Figure 1. Diversity of Our 21 Students

Demographics of the college class included:

- ◆ 3 were from homes where no English was spoken
- ◆ 8 were the first in their families to attend college
- ◆ 2 were young single parents
- ◆ 13 were pursuing second careers
- ◆ 2 were in special programs for students with low grades
- ◆ 1 had recently graduated from an Ivy League university
- ◆ 1 was an attorney
- ◆ 3 had come to this country within the past year
- ◆ 7 were from suburban homes and lived with their parents
- ◆ 3 worked at least two jobs while attending the university
- ◆ Ages ranged from 22 to mid-50's
- ◆ Students identified themselves as Egyptian-Muslim (1), Turkish-Muslim (1), Puerto Rican (3), Jamaican African American (1), African-American (3), and Caucasian (12).

expectations for all students? Do we model fairness and understanding through what we say and do? Do we use books and materials that are free of bias? Do we consider that students have a variety of learning styles and do we use a variety of assignments so that each student will feel comfortable as a learner?

Adults bring to the classroom a complex web of experiences, knowledge, skills, and dispositions regarding themselves and the topic at hand. College students lead busy and frenetic lives. They often have fixed viewpoints and entrenched habits. Many have a problem-solving orientation and can be a valuable resource for one another. Some have a need to be self-directing. They almost always represent a

diverse group of learners who have strengths in one or more of the various multiple intelligences.

According to Nieto (2000), true multicultural education includes instructional strategies and interactions among teachers, students, and families. Howard Gardner gives us a framework to understand various types of learners and how to support their needs. Combining Nieto's principles with Gardner's Multiple Intelligences can provide context for various types of adult learning activities to address the range of learners and move beyond tolerance of differences toward affirmation and solidarity.

Using Gardner's Multiple Intelligences also respects the integrity of the individual

learner, by allowing him/her to express and share feelings about sensitive issues in a variety of ways. Nieto (1998) states that in the highest level of multicultural understanding (Affirmation/Solidarity/Critique), differences are embraced and accepted as vehicles to enhance learning. This complements Gardner's understanding of the "differences" in the ways in which individuals learn.

Using Gardner's Theories To Support Understanding of Diversity and Multiculturalism

Howard Gardner coined the term "multiple intelligences" as an outcome of his

Table 1

The Intelligences	People with a high degree of this intelligence:	Teaching Strategies
Verbal / Linguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Express themselves well through language ◆ Use words effectively whether speaking or writing ◆ High reading comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Written reports ◆ Presentations ◆ Essays ◆ Reading assignments ◆ Storytelling
Logical / Mathematical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Are very good with numbers ◆ Understand various patterns ◆ Patterns include thought, number, visual, color, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Analogies ◆ Metaphors & similes ◆ Quantitative tests ◆ Data analysis
Musical / Rhythmic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Understand rhythm, melody, pitch & tones ◆ Express themselves through rhythm, music or dance ◆ Sensitive to sounds in the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Listening to music ◆ Comparing/contrasting music & rhythms ◆ Listening walks ◆ Use rap or songs
Visual / Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Think in terms of images & pictures ◆ Good at mentally representing ideas ◆ Able to see the world accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use of art & varying art media ◆ Graphic organizers ◆ Charts & graphs ◆ Photography
Bodily/Kinesthetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use their bodies to express their ideas & feelings ◆ Tuned into their own body ◆ Active learners & learn best by doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Movement activities ◆ Field trips ◆ Activities to "walk in another's shoes"
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Deep understanding of what motivates other people ◆ Good at understanding other people's needs ◆ Work well with teams & communicate well with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Group discussion ◆ Small group tasks ◆ Group process ◆ Team work
Intrapersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strong sense of self & ability to examine own thoughts & feelings ◆ Often like to work alone. Introspective, often dreamers ◆ Equipped to make personal decisions about their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Journaling ◆ Reflecting ◆ Opportunities for introspection ◆ Individual tasks
Naturalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Love the outdoors & strong connection with the environment ◆ Sensitive to the needs of plants & animals ◆ High appreciation of the natural world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Nature walks ◆ Comparisons to the environment
Existential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Think on a universal level ◆ Compare self in relation to the universe ◆ Ponder deep questions – Who are we? Where do we come from? Why do we die? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Philosophizing ◆ Essential questions ◆ Spiritual comparisons

(Campbell, L. 1997; Garner, 1983; Gardner, 1991; Gardner 2000).

research studying human potential. He defines intelligence as “the ability to solve problems or to create problems, that are valued within one or more cultural settings” (Gardner, 1993a, p. x). Multiple intelligence theory implies that individuals have a wide range of capacities.

Gardner believed that all individuals possess all intelligences in varying degrees with each individual possessing their own strengths and individual make up. His theory has implications for teachers at all levels of classroom instruction. We believe that educators should recognize and teach to a broad range of talents and skills. Originally, Gardner defined 7 intelligences in *Frames of Mind* (1993a) and later added the last 2 intelligences in *Intelligences Reframed* (2000). Table 1 provides an overview of the nine intelligences and possible teaching strategies.

“The Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory seemed one likely savior to inspire and challenge students at all levels. Espoused by Howard Gardner, the premise advocated that students could learn and display knowledge in multiple ways, according to their developed strengths” (Gray & Waggoner, 2002). MI theory provides a theoretical foundation for recognizing and tapping into the different abilities and talents of students. Typically, teachers focus on the verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences in students and in teaching strategies regardless of the content.

In helping students understand multicultural perspectives and diversity issues, we have found it useful to approach the study using strategies to support Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences. We, therefore, have chosen to focus on teaching approaches that strengthen these two intelligences. Typically, students who operate well in the Interpersonal Intelligence tend to understand other people well, can mediate conflicts, understand and recognize stereotypes and prejudice, enjoy cooperative learning strategies, group projects, give feedback, and display empathy.

While those who feel comfortable in the Intrapersonal Intelligence understand themselves, focus and concentrate well, know their strengths and weaknesses, are intuitive, and excel at emotional processing and metacognition techniques. Both of these Intelligences are critical to consider when exploring issues of prejudice, diversity and multicultural perspectives (racism, gender bias, ageism, etc.).

Interpersonal Intelligence

Interpersonal Intelligence denotes a person’s capacity to understand the inten-

tions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently, to work effectively with others. “Interpersonal intelligence allows one to understand and work with others” (Gardner, 1993b, p. 25). In *Creating Minds* (Gardner, 1993c), Gardner describes seven creative geniuses that lived during the 20th century (each of whom was born before the turn of the century).

Each of the seven represents one of the multiple intelligences. In the book, Gardner chooses Mahatma Gandhi to embody the Interpersonal Intelligence. Other examples of famous people who reflect strong Interpersonal skills include Eleanor Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Lee Iacocca and Mother Teresa.

Classrooms that are rich in cooperative learning support the development of this intelligence. Individuals with strengths in Interpersonal Intelligence are capable of understanding others and excel at relating to other people. They are usually quite social and often exhibit leadership. They learn best by sharing, comparing, relating and cooperating.

Interpersonal learners get along well with others and can motivate others toward a common goal. They enjoy collaborating with others, discussions, small-group projects and solving problems together. They respond appropriately to the moods, feelings, temperaments, motivations, and intentions of others. They can recognize prejudice and stereotypes. General instructional strategies that support Interpersonal Intelligence include the following: Discussing; Presenting; Cooperative Learning Groups; Role-Playing; Group Projects; Sharing Ideas in Whole Group and Small Group Formats; Literature Circles and Book Groups; and Collaborative Problem Solving.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Intrapersonal Intelligence involves the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself- including one’s own desires, fears, and capacities- and to use such information effectively in regulating one’s own life. “Intrapersonal intelligence allows one to understand and work with one’s self” (Gardner, 1993b, p.25). In *Creating Minds* (Gardner, 1993c) Gardner chooses Sigmund Freud as the example of a creative genius in Intrapersonal domain. Other examples of famous individuals who exhibit strong Intrapersonal skills are Marva Collins, Marie Montessori, Malcolm X, Aristotle, and Helen Keller.

Opportunities to reflect and explore inner feelings and thought support the de-

velopment of this intelligence. Students with strengths in Intrapersonal Intelligence have an understanding of themselves and are aware of what they can and cannot accomplish. They learn best through working alone, individualized projects, self-paced instruction and having their own space to pursue interests.

Intrapersonal learners are reflective and intuitive. They identify and understand their own feelings and can use them to guide behavior. They understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and desires. The Interpersonal learner enjoys working alone, individual projects, self-study, self-evaluation, and independent research. General instructional strategies that support Intrapersonal Intelligence include these techniques: Journalizing; Autobiographies; Self-study; Self-Assessment; Divergent Questions; Analogies; Visualization; Metacognition (thinking about thinking); Reflection; and Connections to Personal Life.

Supporting the Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Learner

Coursework and assignments in the Interpersonal domain give students the opportunity to dialogue and share opinions, while coursework and assignments in the Intrapersonal domain encourage students to reflect and make individual meaning. As we looked to improve our teaching, we asked ourselves the following questions. We encourage you to take a moment to reflect on your own teaching.

Am I, as professor, supporting the Interpersonal Intelligence in my courses?

- ◆ Do I have opportunities for questioning, sharing of experiences, and feedback?
- ◆ Have I created opportunities for students to get to know one another?
- ◆ Do my assignments include group work?
- ◆ Do I encourage collaboration?
- ◆ Have I fostered a community of learners?

Am I, as professor, supporting the Intrapersonal Intelligence in my courses?

- ◆ Do I relate material directly to students’ lives, loves, and experiences?
- ◆ Am I teaching from life experience?
- ◆ Do my assignments include individual projects, journalizing, reports, students’ opinions and reflections?

- ◆ Do I encourage the exploration of feelings?
- ◆ Do I provide time and opportunities for introspection?

Strategies for Incorporating Issues of Diversity

It is important for college professors to understand and include BOTH the Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences in planning coursework intended to broaden awareness of multicultural perspectives and diversity. "Under multiple intelligence theory, an intelligence can serve both as the content of instruction and the means or medium for communicating that content" (Gardner, 1993b, p. 32).

Understanding diversity and multiculturalism involves both internal reflection (Intrapersonal) as well as getting along (Interpersonal). Derman-Sparks reminds us of some of the Intrapersonal goals for children (which we apply to college students, as well): to construct a knowledgeable, confident self-identity; to develop comfortable, empathetic, and just interaction with diversity; and to develop critical thinking and the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice (1989, p. ix).

Tiedt & Tiedt (1990) include many outcomes for multicultural education that are Interpersonal. Among these are discussions of literature by and about members of diverse cultures, discussions of age-related and gender related concerns, participation in community and school affairs, and discussions of real life scenarios where stereotyped thinking and prejudice have occurred.

In developing strategies to support students in exploring issues of diversity, we attempted to provide varying examples to support Nieto's framework, recognizing that understanding is a progression. Examining concrete manifestations of culture such as language, foods, music, holidays, and artifacts provides a basic foundation for Tolerance and Acceptance.

Moving beyond to explore the ways people do things including behavior, norms, communication, relationships, and traditions, can support students in developing respect for cultures different than their own. Examining diversity in internal beliefs including expectations, dreams, beliefs, and values is necessary for reaching Nieto's highest level of Affirmation/Solidarity/Critique.

Specific examples of strategies and assignments that have been successful in helping students in our classes understand multicultural perspectives and diversity is-

ues through the Interpersonal and Intrapersonal domains include:

1. Exploring and sharing one's own values: Make a list of instrumental values including as many as you can think of (e.g. honest, clean, open-minded, ambitious, courageous, forgiving, helpful, independent, intellectual, logical, loving, obedient, polite, responsible, cheerful, capable) and ask students to rank order the values with one being most valuable. Share as a group and discuss the diversity in the class and how we learn our values. *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence through self-examination and reflection of values and the Intrapersonal Intelligence through sharing and discussions of others' values.* (There are several published surveys for this activity. We have used and adapted several of the surveys and small group activities outlined in *Developing Roots & Wings: A Trainer's Guide to Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs* (York, 1992)).

2. Using a quilt as a method of sharing: Following a read aloud of the children's book *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold, students were given a 10" x 10" piece of oak tag, asked to depict their dream and return with it the following week. Some students made collages; some wrote poetry; some drew a picture; some made a web; some wrote a paragraph. After sharing their 'dream' with each other during class, the pieces were quilted together using a hole punch and pipe cleaners. This was hung in our class and referred to during later class discussions on the diversity of our dreams and values. A similar assignment could be given to depict why they want to teach or to depict themselves based on their ethnicity. *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence through interpreting their vision and the Interpersonal Intelligence as the quilt is used for group reflection during the semester.*

3. Evaluating children's books for stereotyping and bias, in small groups. An excellent checklist for this is *Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Sexism and Racism* (Derman-Sparks, 1989 pp. 143-145). *This supports the Interpersonal Intelligence as students work together to identify issues of bias.*

4. Viewing and discussing videotapes on diversity: Two of our favor-

ites are Starting Small (Southern Poverty Law Center); Anti-bias Curriculum (Pacific Oaks College). *This supports the Interpersonal Intelligence through discussion and analysis of powerful scenarios presented in the videos.*

5. Reading and discussing research and journal articles about tolerance and multiculturalism. Journals such as *Multicultural Education*, *Rethinking Schools*, *Multicultural Perspectives* and *Teaching Tolerance* are excellent sources for such articles. *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence through personal reflection and the Interpersonal Intelligence through discussions.*

6. Sharing personal experiences of prejudice and bias. *This supports the Interpersonal Intelligence as students make meaning of experiences of others.*

7. Reading and discussing personal perspectives of diversity and bias issues. Some good examples include: *Maggie's American Dream* (Comer, 1988), *White Teacher* (Paley, 1979), *Kwanzaa and Me* (Paley, (1995), *Among Schoolchildren* (Kidder, 1989), *The Water is Wide* (Conroy, 1987), and *The Color of Dirt* (Northington, 2000). *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence as students read and reflect and the Interpersonal Intelligence as they share their perspectives.*

8. Concept Maps: This assignment asks the student to take a word such as diversity, anti-bias, multicultural education, or curriculum and develop a weblike organizer expressing their understanding of the concept. In the center of the paper, the student writes "diversity is" and then add phrases or words to depict their understanding. Usually a concept map is completed prior to classroom coverage of the topic and then again repeated later in the semester after instruction, readings and discussion. By viewing the two concept maps together, the instructor can assess the student's prior knowledge and then growing knowledge of the concept at-hand. *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence as it provides an opportunity for individual expression and reflection.*

9. A Ha! Slips: Students are given blank A Ha! Slips prior to the end of each class meeting. *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence as they write about a new "learning" or "knowing" they had during the class or as a result of readings.*

10. Journalizing: Time is provided in class or assigned outside of class for students to process and reflect on class discussions and readings. Journals are usually collected midway and again at the end of the semester. *This supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence by providing the students with the opportunity to process and reflect on class discussion and learnings and provides the instructor the opportunity to dialog individually with students.*

11. Using a children's book as a springboard for discussion: One of our favorites is *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), a story about an African American child and a white child who live next door to each other with a fence between their yards. After watching and guessing about the other, they eventually decide to sit on the fence together. *This supports the Interpersonal Intelligence as students share barriers or "fences" in our lives and how we could overcome them.* Other good books include *All the Colors of the Earth*, (Hamanaka, 1994), *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 1997), *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991) and *We Are All Alike... We Are All Different* (Cheltenham Elementary School Kindergartners, 1991).

Some Final Thoughts

◆ After the tragic bombing of September 11, 2001, one Muslim student was able to describe the racial profiling that occurred in the school where her eight-year old daughter was a student. As she tearfully shared her daughters' experience, being called names, the other students became aware of the injustice. In the discussion that followed, some students may have begun to understand what it was like to be a Muslim-American during this difficult time.

◆ After reading a picture book describing the various shades of brown skin color, another student shared her negative experiences, growing up as a light skinned African American child. This type of prejudice was very unfamiliar to the white students in the class.

◆ When a Jewish professor shared an experience of bias that she encountered while she was a college student in the South, many of the students responded with their own personal experiences of discrimination.

The exploration of diversity and multiculturalism is an exciting and often frightening challenge! As we open our classrooms to discussions of issues that involve hon-

esty, controversy and self-examination, often, there is disagreement, discomfort, and initial hostility. However, only through these opportunities can we all reach higher degrees of self-awareness and understanding for our students and ourselves. Multiple Intelligences theory is meant to empower not label people.

It is also necessary to recognize that students exhibit many different talents, abilities and intelligences. In examining Nieto's work in light of Gardner's work, we have begun to rethink our philosophy on teaching and how students can come to internalize the challenging concept of embracing diversity. With help from Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, we can create these opportunities for all students, acknowledging their ways of communicating and learning in the Intrapersonal and Interpersonal domains. We have also begun to explore the ways in which the other intelligences can help to move students to affirming diversity.

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