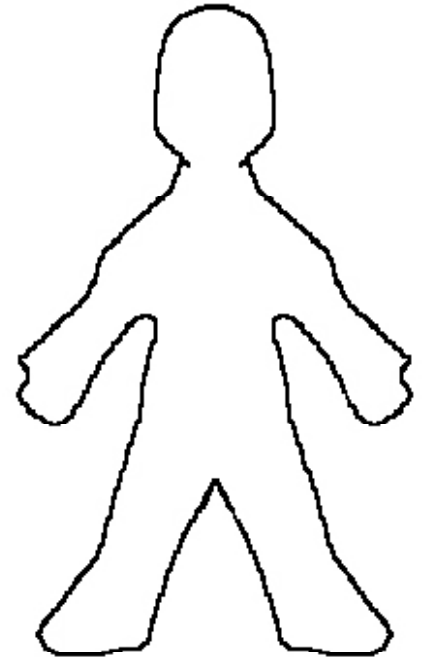# Tolerance
in Teacher Education:
Restructuring the Curriculum
in a Diverse But Segregated
University Classroom

By Sandy White Watson & Linda Johnston

Introduction

Many of us teach undergraduate and graduate teacher education courses that include a cultural hodgepodge of future teachers who differ not only in ethnicity, but in age, sexual preference, religion, language, and a host of other microcultural areas. Occasionally it is clear within the first couple of class sessions that these groups are reluctant to interact with one another in any format. In these instances, those few cliques that could possibly develop do so early on and class discussions may be almost nonexistent at the outset of the courses. In later discussions we have witnessed angry encampments of student groups lashing out at one another.

What follows is our attempt at bringing diverse and segregated class groups together in some sense of understanding and respect for one another through a restructured, reconceptualized, multicultural curriculum. After all, these very groups of non-cooperative students will very soon be serving as teachers in schools across the United States and will need to develop the skills necessary to foster multicultural tolerance among their own students.

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The Call for Multicultural Education in Higher Education

Gollnick and Chinn (2002) provide a list of fundamental characteristics of multicultural higher education:

1. Cultural differences have strength and value.

2. Schools and institutions of higher learning should be models for the community in reflecting respect for cultural differences and expression of human rights.

3. Social justice and equality for all people should be of paramount importance in the design and delivery of curricula.

4. Attitudes and values necessary for the continuation of a democratic society can be promoted in schools and institutions of higher learning.

5. Schooling can provide the knowledge, skills, and dispositions, for redistribution of power and income among diverse groups of people.

6. Educators at institutes of higher learning work with local communities to create an environment that is supportive of respect for diversity and multiculturalism.

Because institutions of higher education are models for academic excellence and democratic human values, it is paramount that university faculty and administrators embrace the above characteristics. We are the exemplary models for public schools and the community (Ameny-Dixon, 2004).

Preparing Pre-Service Teachers To Be Culturally Responsive

As a culturally responsive teacher one must celebrate each student as part of the learning community. To be culturally responsive and find the commonalities within a classroom, a teacher must recognize that he/she must work toward social justice for his/her students (Kroeger & Bauer, 2004). In order for teachers to learn and practice this concept, institutions of higher education must make this happen. Teacher candidates must be prepared to be culturally responsive teachers.

Colleges of education must adhere to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2002) Standard # 4, *Diversity*. Standard 4 states:

> The unit designs, implements and evaluates curriculum and experiences for candidates to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to help all students learn. These experiences include working with diverse higher education and school faculty, diverse candidates and diverse students in P-12 schools.

In addition, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (1992) (INTASC) Principle # 3 provides colleges and universities with a venue for teacher candidates to adhere to cultural sensitivity. INTASC (1992) Principle # 3 states:

The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

Teachers must be prepared in such a way as to become role models in effectuating change. The faces of America's school children have changed at a rapid pace. The number of school age children who are disabled, have limited English proficiencies, and who are from various ethnic groups of color has increased during the last ten years. Therefore, teacher candidates must understand exactly what it means to be culturally responsive.

According to Gay (2000) a culturally responsive teacher:

Acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.

Builds on meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.

Uses a variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.

Teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages.

Incorporates multicultural information, resources and materials in all subjects and skills taught in school. (as cited in Kroeger & Bauer, 2004, p. 25)

To enhance a teacher candidate's perceptions of multicultural education as well as to begin the process of bringing various groups together, it is imperative that faculty within colleges of education provide various activities to stimulate this endeavor.

Microcultures

Within the larger macroculture in the United States are countless smaller subsocieties or subcultures known as microcultures. According to Gollnick and Chinn (2002), microcultres share cultural patterns of the macroculture but also have their own distinct sets of cultural patterns and "People who belong to the same microculture share traits and values that bind them together as a group" (p. 18).

Microcultural examples could include place of residence (farm, urban, etc.), abilities (marathon runner, gardener, etc.), age, career (physician, teacher, construction worker, etc.), socioeconomic status, group member, gender, etc. Individuals belonging to one microculture may not all belong to another.

All of us are members of numerous microcultural groups and if we could step back and view the interactions of those groups, we could see commonalities emerging that perhaps we did not know existed. And it is that interconnectedness that we wish to emphasize as a means of fostering commonalities in diverse groups.

Microcultural Mapping

A very effective initial classroom exercise involves the identification of one's microcultural self (this is an activity modified from *Awareness Activities,* part of the *Multicultural Pavilion Internet Project).* After a discussion of culture and microculture, students are asked to define who they are via the identification of the microcultures to which they belong. They are provided outlines of human forms that represent themselves and they are then asked to draw lines from the forms outward to six or seven circles in which they write the names of microcultures to which they hold membership—what they feel demonstrates the most important dimensions of their personal identity (see Figure 1).

Their papers are collected and from those papers a list is generated of all identified microcultures; no group is identified more than once. On a very large sheet of bulletin board paper all the identified microcultural groups are recorded randomly, all over the paper. Each student is then provided a cutout of a human with his or

her name on it and is asked to glue his/her cutout somewhere on the large paper among the various microcultures.

During the next class session students are given yardsticks and are asked to draw lines from themselves to all of the microcultures to which they belong (see Figure 2). The professor's personal cutout and connections are drawn to serve as an example and to also show students that he/she is willing to share his/her microcultural connections with the students. What results, is a very large microcultural "map" or "web." During the activity, some students may realize membership in groups they had not previously identified.
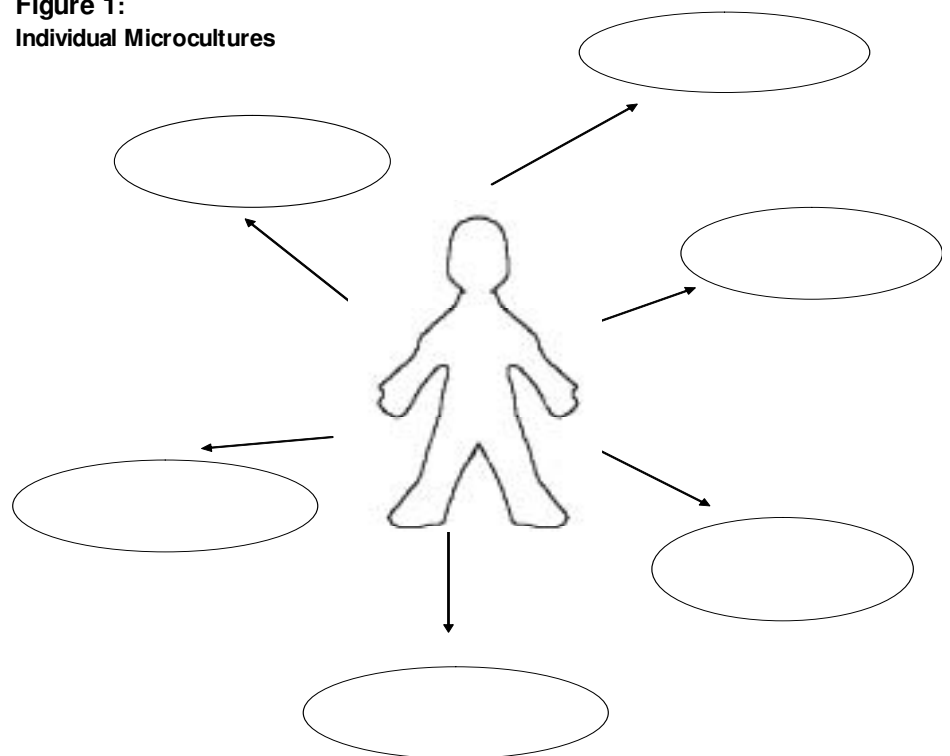
When the "mapping" is complete, students should see the commonalities they share with others in the class. Often, students find connections with individuals that they previously claimed to have nothing in common with.

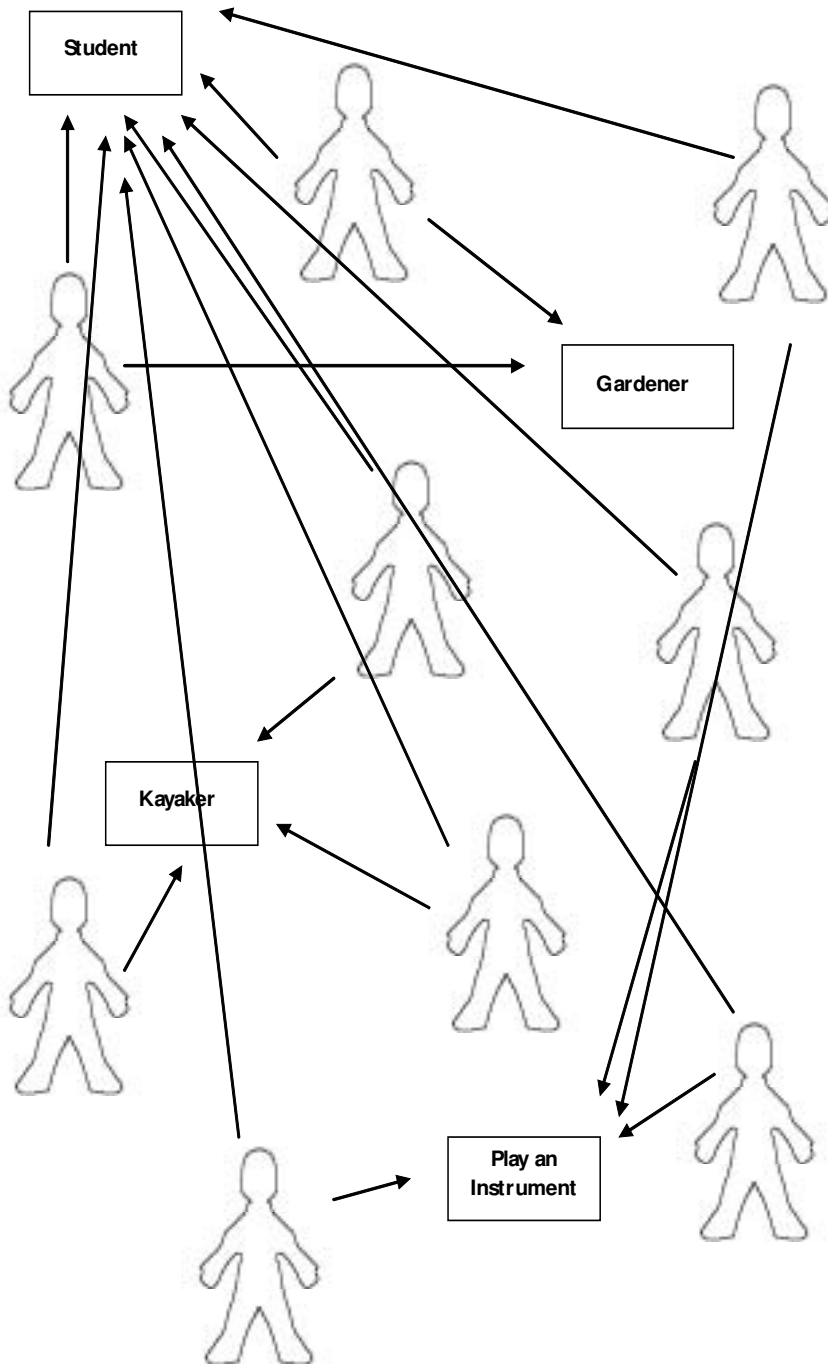## Professional Development School Tolerance Activities

The Professional Development School (PDS) semester is designed for candidates to spend a semester in an actual urban public school setting. They work in the classroom under the supervision of a teacher for part of the day. University faculty teach the courses on site for the remainder of the day.

This semester occurs early in the students' college careers in order to provide

Figure 1:
Individual Microcultures

Figure 2:
Group Microcultures

The magazine *Teaching Tolerance* has a wealth of articles that are thought provoking. These articles are used to stimulate class discussions about topics many students have had little or no exposure to during their lifetime. During the 50th anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, these articles were the basis of research projects, poems, reflective writings, dramatic presentations, and unit developments.

These activities were also utilized by school-based faculty who provided seminars to candidates. Individuals from around the community, who were part of that era and were educated in segregated environments, were brought in to facilitate small group discussions with candidates. Comments such as "I never thought about how the other side felt, until now," or "What vision and strength those individuals had," are part of a reflective process that brings sensitivity awareness to various events and cultures that the students had never thought about.

Community Mapping

Another awareness activity to stimulate sensitivity about the community where students actually live is community mapping. Candidates are divided into small groups and given instructions to go out into the community and spend one half day. They are to stop at restaurants, churches, community buildings, grocery stores, quick stop markets, etc., and talk with people in each of these settings to gain a deeper understanding about where students in the area's K-12 schools reside.

They are asked to inform individuals who they are and what they are doing in this process. After returning to class they compile a list of things they learned from their time in the community. As a result, they have a deeper understanding of the role of the school within the community. Candidates always enjoy this activity and come back with a greater sensitivity to students attending the schools where they are teaching. This activity is conducted at the beginning of the PDS semester and provides teacher candidates with the opportunity to begin thinking about their role as teachers in relation to the students within the school.

100% Smart Activity

The 100% smart activity is one in which students determine the learning styles of the class members. Candidates are given a paper plate and then divided into groups of four or five. They are given a list of eleven different styles of learning:

them with exposure to the world of teaching. If candidates decide not to pursue a degree in the field of education, because the PDS experience occurs early in their college career it provides them with ample time to change majors.

The PDS semester is structured in such a way by both the school-based faculty and the university faculty to enhance students' awareness and provide them with a venue to begin thinking about the value of microculture connections. Microculture connections are a means for teacher education candidates to find commonalities among the diverse students they will teach. During the PDS semester they grow to appreciate heterogeneous classrooms and better understand how to be culturally sensitive in order to teach a very diverse student population. These activities can be held in reserve and then used by the candidates when they have their own classrooms.

auditory, visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, tactile, musical, logical-mathematical, linguistic, and naturalistic. From this list they are to determine what percentage of students in the class represent each learning style based on their own perception of themselves.

They are then asked to divide the plate into pie shaped slices representing the percentage of each learning style. The total must equal 100%. The average is compiled for each group and then for the class as a whole in order for all to see the variation in the number of learning styles that are represented in the group.

The discussion that follows relates to the commonalities within the class as students are asked to consider what they think the class, as a whole, has in common and how the class members differ from one another. They are then asked to consider ways in which they could connect with one another considering their differences and then considering their commonalities.

This activity is designed to allow students to recognize awareness of diversity within the classroom and how teachers need to be sensitive to each student's learning style. It is emphasized that candidates must learn to connect with their classmates, no matter what their differences might be, and carry these strategies to their future classrooms as teachers.

Diverse Grouping

During the PDS semester candidates are divided into small groups to work on various projects throughout the semester. Candidates are divided into groups for the semester that are balanced with respect to learning styles, gender, race, and ethnicity. This is done by both site-based faculty and university faculty to promote an appreciation for all candidates and provide a means for candidates to begin learning how to collaborate with a wide range of individuals. This provides a learning experience in acceptance, professionalism, and tolerance.

English Language Learners

An activity that stimulates much discussion related to English Language Learners (ELL) is one that is astounding to some of the candidates. An ELL teacher is invited to conduct a seminar during the semester. The teacher is of Hispanic origin and begins the activity by speaking in Spanish. He/she continues to hand out papers and pencils and presents an activity on an overhead projector, all the time speaking in Spanish. Candidates find themselves both lost and frustrated.

What follows is a discussion related to the feelings they may have experienced during the activity, including isolation, frustration, anger, upsetness, and confusion. Candidates reflect on their feelings and in the process have a better understanding of what ELL students experience. This is an informative session and one that creates a huge awareness and better understanding related to sensitivity for students who may come to their classroom as non-English speakers.

Teacher candidates must develop a knowledge base and appreciation for teaching all students. They must also understand that students must feel an ownership in their own education. Shor (1992) suggests that women, minorities, and non-elite whites make up the bulk of students, and democratic education should be reflective of the cultures, conditions, needs, and history of those students. Participation should be a means for empowering education.

Cultural diversity is a strength, as well as a persistent, vitalizing force in personal and civic lives. It is a very useful resource for improving educational effectiveness for all students (Gay, 2000). Accepting diversity and celebrating that diversity within the classroom should be a day to day part of teaching.

Conclusion

American schools (K-12 and beyond) are currently housing the most culturally diverse group of students in the history of American education (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). Certain ethnic populations have experienced phenomenal growth in the United States in the last decade. According to the Social Science Data Analysis Network (2001), the Hispanic population in the U.S. has increased by 45 percent, while the Asian community grew by 45 percent and the Black and Native American populations have each increased by 15 percent.

Increased ethnic diversity likewise means increased religious and linguistic differences. With this increase in diversity among U.S. student populations comes an increased responsibility to better prepare future educators to deal with the complex issues and needs of such diverse student groups. But before preservice teachers can master teaching for tolerance, they must first demonstrate respect and tolerance for one another as students.

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