Multicultural Classrooms, Monocultural Teachers

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> Remember gentlemen, John Chrysostom's exquisite story about the day
> he entered the rhetorician Libanius' school in Antioch. Whenever a new
> pupil arrived at his school, Libanius would question him about his past,
> his parents, and his country.
>
> Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*

Sometimes more than others, I sense the cultural thin ice I walk on in my
classrooms, and I reach out for more knowledge than I could ever hope to ac-
quire, just to hang on. With increasing cultural diversity in classrooms,
teachers need to structure learning experiences that both help students write
their way into the university and help teachers learn their way into student
cultures. Now this is admittedly a large task, especially if your students (like
mine) are Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Hmong, Laotian
(midland Lao, lowland Lao), Salvadoran, Afro-American, Mexican, French,
Chicano, Nicaraguan, Guatemalan, Native American (Patwin, Yurok, Hoopa,
Wintu), Indian (Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi), Mexican-American, Jamaican,
Filipino (Tagalog, Visayan, Ilocano), Guamanian, Samoan, and so on. It may
take a while for the underpaid, overworked freshman composition instructor
to acquire dense cultural knowledge of these groups. But I have a hunch that
how students handle the cultural transitions that occur in the acquisition of
academic discourse affects how successfully they acquire that discourse. The
very least we can do, it seems to me, is to educate ourselves so that when deal-
ing with our students, in the words of Michael Holzman, "We should stop
doing harm if we can help it" (31).

Some would question how much harm is being done. If enough students
pass exit exams and the class evaluations are good, then everything is OK.
Since we want our students to enter the mainstream, all we need worry about
is providing them the tools. Like opponents of bilingual education, some
would argue that we need to concern ourselves more with providing student
access to academic culture, not spending time on student culture. But reten-

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tion rates indicate that not all students are making the transition into academic culture equally well. While the causes of dropout are admittedly complex, cultural dissonance seems at the very least to play an important role. If indeed we are going to encounter "loss, violence, and compromise" (142) as David Bartholomae describes the experience of Richard Rodriguez, should we not be directing students to the counseling center? And if the attainment of biculturalism in many cases is painful and difficult, can we be assured, as Patricia Bizzell suggests, that those who do achieve power in the world of academic discourse will use it to argue persuasively for preservation of the language and the culture of the home world view? (299) This was not exactly Richard Rodriguez's response to academic success, but what if, after acquiring the power, our students feel more has been lost than gained? I think as teachers we have an obligation to raise these issues. Entering freshmen are often unaware of the erosion of their culture until they become seniors or even later. Like Richard Rodriguez, many students do not fully realize what they have lost until it is too late to regain it. Let me briefly outline the problem as I see it and offer some possible solutions.

The Problem

A lot is being asked of students. David Bartholomae describes the process: "What our beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that determine 'what might be said' and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community" (146). "Rituals and gestures, tricks of persuasion" mean taking on much more than the surface features of a culture. Carried to an extreme, students would have to learn when it is appropriate to laugh at someone slipping on a banana peel. When we teach composition, we are teaching culture. Depending on students' backgrounds, we are teaching at least academic culture, what is acceptable evidence, what persuasive strategies work best, what is taken to be a demonstration of "truth" in different disciplines. For students whose home culture is distant from mainstream culture, we are also teaching how, as a people, "mainstream" Americans view the world. Consciously or unconsciously, we do this, and the responsibility is frightening.

In many situations, the transitions are not effective. Several anthropological and social science studies show how cultural dissonance can affect learning. Shirley Brice Heath examines the ways in which the natural language environments of working-class Black and white children can interfere with their success in schools designed primarily for children from middle-class mainstream culture. The further a child's culture is from the culture of the school, the less chance for success. Classroom environments that do not value the home

culture of the students lead to decreased motivation and poor academic perfor-
mance (270-72). In a study of Chicano and Black children in Stockton, Cal-
ifornia schools, John Ogbu arrives at a similar conclusion. Susan Urmston
Philips analyzes the experiences of Warm Springs Native American children in
a school system in Oregon where the administrators, teachers, and even some
parents thought that little was left of traditional culture. But Philips shows
that "children who speak English and who live in a material environment that
is overwhelmingly Western in form can still grow up in a world where by far
the majority of their enculturation experience comes from their interaction
with other Indians. Thus school is still the main source of their contact with
mainstream Anglo culture" (11). Philips describes the shock that Warm
Springs Native American children experience upon entering a school system
designed for the Anglo middle-class child. Because of differences in the early
socialization process of Native American children (especially in face-to-face in-
teraction), they feel alienated in the classroom and withdraw from class activi-
ties (128).

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron examine how the cultural differ-
ences of social origin relate directly to school performance (8-21). Educational
rewards are given to those who feel most at home in the system, who, assured
of their vocations and abilities, can pursue fashionable and exotic themes that
pique the interest of their teachers, with little concern for the vocational im-
peratives of working-class and farm children. Working-class and farm children
must struggle to acquire the academic culture that has been passed on by os-
mosis to the middle and upper classes. The very fact that working-class and
farm children must laboriously acquire what others come by naturally is taken
as another sign of inferiority. They work hard because they have no talent.
They are remedial. The further the distance from the mainstream culture, the
more the antipathy of mainstream culture, the more difficulty students from
outside that culture will have in acquiring it through the educational system
(which for many is the only way):

> Those who believe that everyone would be given equal access to the high-
> est level of education and the highest culture, once the same economic
> means were provided for all those who have the requisite "gifts," have
> stopped halfway in their analysis of the obstacles; they ignore the fact that
> the abilities measured by the scholastic criteria stem not so much from
> natural "gifts" (which must remain hypothetical so long as the educa-
> tional inequalities can be traced to other causes), but from the greater or
> lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educa-
> tional system or the criteria which define success within it. [Working-
> class children] must assimilate a whole set of knowledge and techniques
> which are never completely separable from social values often contrary to
> those of their class origin. For the children of peasants, manual workers,
> clerks, or small shopkeepers, the acquisition of culture is acculturation.
> (Bourdieu and Passeron 22)

Social and cultural conditions in the United States are not the same as in

France, but the analyses of Bourdieu, Passeron, Heath, Ogbu, and others suggest interesting lines of inquiry when we look at the performance of students from different cultures and classes in U.S. schools. Performance seems not so much determined by cultural values (proudly cited by successful groups), but by class origins, socio-economic mobility, age at time of immigration, the degree of trauma experienced by immigrants or refugees, and the acceptance of student culture by the mainstream schools. Stephen Steinberg argues in *The Ethnic Myth* that class mobility precedes educational achievement in almost all immigrant groups (131-32). I really do not believe that Black, Native American, and Chicano cultures place less emphasis on the importance of education than Chinese, Jewish, Vietnamese, or Greek cultures do. We do not have over one hundred Black colleges in the United States because Blacks don't care about education. I have never been to a Native American Studies Conference or visited a rancheria or reservation that did not have newsletters, workshops, and fund-raisers in support of education. Bourdieu and Passeron's analysis suggests that educational success depends to a large extent on cultural match, and if an exact match is not possible, there must at least be respect and value of the culture children bring with them. Acculturation (assimilation) is possible for some, but it is not viable for all.

Acculturation itself poses problems. Jacquelyn Mitchell shows how cultural conflict affects the preschool child, the university undergraduate, the graduate student, and the faculty member as well. Success brings with it, for some people, alienation from the values and relationships of the home culture. "In fulfilling our academic roles, we interact increasingly more with the white power structure and significantly less with members of our ethnic community. This is not without risk or consequence; some minority scholars feel in jeopardy of losing their distinctive qualities" (38). The question Mitchell poses is, "How can blacks prepare themselves to move efficiently in mainstream society and still maintain their own culture?" (33) Jacqueline Fleming, in a cross-sectional study of Black students in Black colleges and predominantly white colleges, found Black colleges more effective despite the lack of funding because Black colleges are more "supportive" of students (194). Long before the recent media coverage of racial incidents on college campuses, Fleming noted that "all is not well with Black students in predominantly white colleges" (162). And in California, the dropout rate of "Hispanics" (a term that obscures cultural diversity much as the term "Asian" does) is greater than that of any other group except possibly Native Americans. But despite gloomy statistics, there is hope.

Theoretical Models for Multicultural Classrooms

Several theoretical models exist to help students mediate between cultures. In "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention," James Cummins provides one:

> The central tenet of the framework is that students from "dominated" so-
> cietal groups are "empowered" or "disabled" as a direct result of their in-
> teractions with educators in the schools. These interactions are mediated
> by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in rela-
> tion to four institutional characteristics of schools. These characteristics
> reflect the extent to which (1) minority students' language and culture are
> incorporated into the school program; (2) minority community participa-
> tion is encouraged as an integral component of children's education; (3)
> the pedagogy promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of students to use
> language actively in order to generate their own knowledge; and (4) pro-
> fessionals involved in assessment become advocates for minority students
> rather than legitimizing the location of the "problem" in the students.
> For each of these dimensions of school organization the role definitions of
> educators can be described in terms of a continuum, with one end pro-
> moting the empowerment of students and the other contributing to the
> disabling of students. (21)

Like Bourdieu, Cummins sees bicultural ambivalence as a negative factor in student performance. Students who have ambivalence about their cultural identity tend to do poorly whereas "widespread school failure does not occur in minority groups that are positively oriented towards both their own and the dominant culture, [that] do not perceive themselves as inferior to the domi-nant group, and [that] are not alienated from their own cultural values" (22). Cummins argues that vehement resistance to bilingual education comes in part because "the incorporation of minority languages and cultures into the school program confers status and power (jobs for example) on the minority group" (25). But for Cummins, it is precisely this valuing of culture within the school that leads to academic success because it reverses the role of domi-nation of students by the school.

Shirley Brice Heath's model is similar to Cummins'. The main difference is that she focuses on ethnography as a way for both teachers and students to mediate between home and school cultures. A consideration of home culture is the only way students can succeed in mainstream schools, increase scores on standardized tests, and be motivated to continue school: "Unless the bound-aries between classrooms and communities can be broken, and the flow of cul-tural patterns between them encouraged, the schools will continue to legiti-mate and reproduce communities of townspeople who control and limit the potential progress of other communities who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life" (369). Like Cummins, Heath aims for cultural mediation. As one student stated: "Why should my 'at home' way of talking be 'wrong' and your standard version be 'right?' . . . Show me that by adding a fluency in standard dialect, you are adding something to my language and not taking something away from me. Help retain my identity and self-respect while learning to talk 'your' way" (271). Paulo Freire, on the other hand, wants those from the outside to totally transform mainstream culture, not be-come part of it: "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (*Pedagogy* 28).

Yet in almost all other respects, Freire's model, like Cummins' and Heath's, is grounded in a thorough knowledge of the home culture by teachers, and actively learned, genuine knowledge by the student. Each of these models has different agendas. Teachers should take from them whatever suits their teaching style, values, and classroom situations. I would simply encourage an inclusion of the study of the wide diversity within student cultures.

Teaching Strategies for Multicultural Classes

Cultural Topics

Culturally oriented topics are particularly useful in raising issues of cultural diversity, of different value systems, different ways of problem solving. Several successful bridge programs have used comparison of different cultural rituals (weddings, funerals, New Year's) as a basis for introducing students to analytic academic discourse. Loretta Petrie from Chaminade University in Hawaii has a six-week summer-school curriculum based on this. Students can use their own experience, interview relatives, and read scholarly articles. Reading these papers to peer response groups gives students additional insights into rituals in their own culture as well as making them aware of similarities and differences with other groups. I have used variations of Ken Macrorie's I-Search paper (Olson 111-22) to allow students to explore part of their cultural heritage that they are not fully aware of. One Vietnamese student, who was three years old when she came to America, did a paper on Vietnam in which she not only interviewed relatives to find out about life there but sought out books on geography and politics; she literally did not know where Vietnam was on the map and was embarrassed when other students would ask her about life there. Several students whose parents were from the Philippines did research that was stimulated by the desire to further understand family customs and to explain to themselves how the way they thought of themselves as "American" had a unique quality to it. One student wrote:

> For over eighteen years I have been living in the United States. Since birth I have been and still am a citizen of this country. I consider myself a somewhat typical American who grew up with just about every American thing you can think of; yet, at home I am constantly reminded of my Filipino background. Even at school I was reminded of my Filipino culture. At my previous school, the two other Filipinos in my class and I tried to get our friends to learn a little about our culture.

But classmates were not always open to cultural diversity, and their rejection raised the central question of just how much you have to give up of your culture to succeed in the mainstream society:

> During the Philippine presidential election, there were comments at my school that we Filipinos were against fair democracy and were as corrupt as our ex-President Marcos. Also it was said that Filipinos are excessively

> violent barbaric savages. This is partly due to our history of fighting
> among ourselves, mostly one group that speaks one dialect against an-
> other group of a different language within the islands. Also maybe we are
> thought savages because of the food we eat such as "chocolate meat" and
> "balut," which is sort of a salted egg, some of which may contain a
> partially developed chicken. So, to be accepted into society you must give
> up your old culture.

"You must give up your old culture" is misleading. The student had to be
careful about sharing home culture with peers, but he isn't giving up his
culture; he is gaining a greater understanding of it. His essay ended with:

> I now have a better understanding of why I was doing a lot of those
> things I didn't understand. For example, whenever we visited some fami-
> ly friends, I had to bow and touch the older person's hand to my fore-
> head. My mother didn't really explain why I had to do this, except it was
> a sign of respect. Also my mother says my brother should, as a sign of
> respect, call me "manong" even though he is only two years younger than
> I. At first I thought all this was strange, but after doing research I found
> out that this practice goes back a long way, and it is a very important
> part of my Filipino culture.

Richard Rodriguez's widely anthologized "Aria" (from *Hunger of Memory*)
allows students to analyze his assertion that loss of language and culture is es-
sential to attain a "public voice." Although the student above seems to agree
in part with Rodriguez, most students find Rodriguez's assertions to be a be-
trayal of family and culture:

> I understand Rodriguez's assertion that if he learned English, he would
> lose his family closeness, but I think that he let paranoia overcome his
> senses. I feel that the lack of conversation could have been avoided if
> Rodriguez had attempted to speak to his parents instead of not saying
> anything just because they didn't. I am sure that one has to practice
> something in order to be good at it and it was helpful when his parents
> spoke in English to them while carrying on small conversation. To me,
> this would have brought the family closer because they would be helping
> each other trying to learn and grow to function in society. Instead of feel-
> ing left out at home and in his society, Rodriguez could've been included
> in both.

I have used this topic or variations on it for a half dozen years or so, and most
of my freshmen (roughly 85% of them) believe they do not have to give up
cultural and home values to succeed in the university. I find quite different at-
titudes among these students when they become juniors and seniors. More and
more students graduate who feel that they have lost more than they gained.
Raising this issue early provides students more choices. In some cases it may
mean deciding to play down what seem to be unacceptable parts of one's
culture (no balut at the potluck); in other cases it may lead to the assertion of
positive values of the home culture such as family cohesiveness and respect for
parents and older siblings. Courageous students will bring the balut to the

potluck anyway and let mainstream students figure it out. I often suspect that
some of the students who drop out of the university do so because they feel too
much is being given up and not enough is being received. Dropping out may
be a form of protecting cultural identity.

Cultural topics are equally important, if not more so, for students from the
mainstream culture. Many mainstream students on predominantly white cam-
puses feel inundated by Third World students. Their sense of cultural shock
can be as profound as that of the ESL basic writer. One student began a
quarter-long comparison/contrast essay on the immigration experiences of his
Italian grandparents with the experiences of Mexicans and Vietnamese in Cal-
ifornia. As the quarter went on, the paper shifted focus as the student became
aware that California was quickly becoming non-white. It scared him. The
essay was eventually titled "Shutting the Doors?" and ended with:

> I have had some bad experiences with foreigners. On a lonely night in
> Davis, three other friends and I decided to go to a Vietnamese dance.
> When we got there, I couldn't believe how we were treated. Their snob-
> bishness and arrogance filled the air. I was upset. But that was only one
> incident and possibly I am over reacting. I often reflect on my high
> school teacher's farewell address. He called for our acceptance of the cul-
> tural and religious background of each other. But after long days think-
> ing, I, like many others, am unable to answer. My only hope is that
> someone has a solution.

The student had grown up in Richmond, California, a culturally diverse East
Bay community, and was friendly with students from many cultures (it was
his idea to go to the dance). The very recognition on the part of the student of
what it feels like to be surrounded by difference at the dance is a beginning
step for him to understand what it means to try to be who he is in the midst
of another culture. I see this student quite often. He is not racist. Or if he is,
he at least has the courage to begin asking questions. The solution for which
the student yearned was not immediately forthcoming: his yearning for one is
worth writing about.

Language Topics

It is not unusual for ESL errors to persist in the writing or the pronunciation
of highly educated people (doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors) because,
consciously or unconsciously, those speech patterns are part of the person's
identity and culture. The same can be true of basic writers. Language-oriented
topics are one way to allow students to explore this kind of writing block. As-
signments that require students to analyze their attitudes toward writing,
their writing processes, and the role that writing plays in their lives can make
these conflicts explicit. For example, one student wrote:

> Moreover, being a Chinese, I find myself in a cultural conflict. I don't
> want to be a cultural betrayer. In fact, I want to conserve my culture and

> tradition. I would be enjoyable if I wrote my mother language. For exam-
> ple I like to write letter in Chinese to my friends because I can find
> warmth in the letter. The lack of interest in writing and the cultural con-
> flict has somehow blocked my road of learning English.

Overcoming this block may, however, cause problems in the home communi-
ty. In response to Rodriguez, one student wrote:

> I can relate when Rodriguez say that his family closeness was broken.
> Even though I speak the language that is understood and is comfortable
> at home, when I speak proper English around my friends at home, they
> accuse me of trying to be something I'm not. But what they don't realize
> is that I have to talk proper in order to make it in the real world.

Jacquelyn Mitchell writes of returning to her community after college:

> My professional attire identified me in this community as a "middle-
> class," "siddity," "uppity," "insensitive" school teacher who had made
> her way out of the ghetto, who had returned to "help and save," and who
> would leave before dark to return to the suburbs. My speech set me up as
> a prime candidate for suspicion and distrust. Speaking standard English
> added to the badges that my role had already pinned on me. (31)

In some way problems like this affect us all. In the small town that I grew up
in, simply going to college was enough to alienate you from your peers. Al-
though my parents encouraged me to get an education, they and their peers
saw college as producing primarily big egos—people who thought they knew
everything. No easy choices here. It took my uncle, who made the mistake of
becoming a Franciscan priest, forty years to be accepted back into the family
by my mother.

　　Another way to help students with cultural transitions is to make the home
language the subject of study along with the different kinds of academic dis-
course they will be required to learn. Suzy Groden, Eleanor Kutz, and Vivian
Zamel from the University of Massachusetts have developed an extensive cur-
riculum in which students become ethnographers and analyze their language
patterns at home, at school, and in different social situations, using tech-
niques developed by Shirley Brice Heath. This approach takes time (several
quarters of intensive reading and writing), but such a curriculum has great po-
tential for helping students acquire academic discourse while retaining pride
and a sense of power in the discourse they bring with them.

Peer Response Groups

Peer response groups encourage active learning and help students link home
and university cultures. The Puente Project, in affiliation with the Bay Area
Writing Project, combines aggressive counseling, community mentors, and
English courses that emphasize active peer response groups. The Puente Proj-
ect has turned what used to be a 50-60% first-year dropout rate into a
70-80% retention rate in fifteen California community colleges. All of the

students are academically high risk (meaning they graduated from high school
with a D average), they are Chicanos or Latinos, and all have a past history of
avoidance of English classes and very low self-confidence when it comes to
writing. Writing response groups give the students a sense of belonging on
campus. As students make the transition from home to school, the groups be-
come, in the students' own words, "una familia":

> Now after two quarters of Puente, it's totally different. My writing abil-
> ity has changed to about 110%. I might not be the best speller in the
> world, but I can think of different subjects faster and crank out papers
> like never before . . . having Latinos in a class by themselves is like a sun
> to a rose. This is the only class where I know the names of every student
> and with their help I decide what to write. (*Puente* 20)

   Joan Wauters illustrates how structured non-confrontational editing can
make peer response more than a support group. Students work in pairs on stu-
dent essays with specific training and instructions on what to look for, but the
author of the essay is not present. The author can later clarify any point she
wishes with the response group, but Wauters finds that the non-confronta-
tional approach allows students to be more frank about a paper's strengths and
weaknesses and that it is "especially valuable for instructors who work with
students from cultures where direct verbal criticism implies 'loss of face'"
(159). Wauters developed these techniques with Native American students,
but they apply equally well to other cultures.
   Response groups do not have to be homogeneous. Any small group encour-
ages participation by students who may not feel comfortable speaking up in
class for whatever reason. They provide a supportive environment for explor-
ing culturally sensitive issues that students might hesitate to bring up in class
or discuss with the teacher. The following paragraph was read by a Black stu-
dent to a group consisting of a Filipino, a Chinese, and two Chicano students:

> I am black, tall, big, yet shy and handsome. "I won't hurt you!" Get to
> know who I am first before you judge me. Don't be scared to speak; I
> won't bite you. My size intimidates most people I meet. I walk down my
> dormitory hallway and I can feel the tension between me and the person
> who's headed in my direction. A quick "Hi!" and my response is "Hello,
> how are you doing?" in a nice friendly way. It seems that most of the
> guys and girls are unsure if they should speak to me. I walk through the
> campus and eyes are fixed on me like an eagle watching its prey. A quick
> nod sometimes or a half grin. Do I look like the devil? No, I don't. May-
> be if I shrink in size and lightened in color they wouldn't be intimidated.
> Hey, I'm a Wild and Crazy Guy too!

This small group discussion of what it felt like to be an outsider spilled over
into the class as a whole, and students that normally would not have partici-
pated in class discussion found themselves involved in a debate about dorm
life at Davis. I know that peer response groups have limitations, need struc-
ture, and can be abused by students and teachers alike. But I have never heard

complaints from teachers using peer groups about how difficult it is to get ESL students to participate. In some cases the problem is to shut them up.

Class Newsletters

Class newsletters encourage students to write for an audience different from the teacher, and they generate knowledge about multicultural experiences. I use brief 20-minute in-class writing assignments on differences between the university and home, or how high school is different from the university, or ways in which the university is or is not sensitive to cultural differences on campus. Sometimes I simply have students finish the statement, "The university is like. . . ." These short paragraphs serve as introductions to issues of cultural transition, and when published, generate class discussions and give ideas for students who are ready to pursue the topic in more detail. Newsletters can be done in a variety of formats from ditto masters to desktop publishing. Students who feel comfortable discussing ethnic or cultural tensions establish a forum for those students whose initial response would be one of denial. For example, the story of a Guamanian and a Black student who thought they were not invited to a white fraternity party led to an extended class discussion of whether this kind of experience was typical and whether they had not been invited for ethnic reasons. The next time I had students write, a Chicana student articulated her awakening sense of cultural conflict between the university and her family:

> I was so upset about leaving home and coming to Davis. I was leaving all my friends, my boyfriend, and my family just to come to this dumb school. I was angry because I wanted to be like all my other friends and just have small goals. I was resentful that I had to go away just to accomplish something good for me. I felt left out and angry because it seemed that my family really wanted me to go away and I thought it was because they did not love me. I was not studying like I should because I wanted to punish them. My anger grew when I realized I was a minority at Davis. My whole town is Mexican and I never thought of prejudice until I came to Davis.

Family is central to Chicano/Latino/Mexican-American students. The pull toward home can create ambivalence for students about their school commitments. In this case, the family was aware of this pull, and encouraged the student to give college the priority. The daughter interpreted this as a loss of love. The student's ambivalence about home and school put her on probation for the first two quarters at Davis. She is now a junior, doing well as a pre-med student, and her chances for a career in medicine look good. I don't think just writing about these issues made the difference. The class discussion generated by her article helped her realize that her situation was shared by others who were experiencing the same thing but had not quite articulated it. She was not alone.

Bringing Campus Events into the Classroom

I recently assigned a paper topic for a quarter-long essay that made reading of the campus newspapers mandatory. I was surprised to find that many students did not read the campus newspapers on a daily basis and in many cases were quite unaware of campus issues that directly concerned them, for example, the withdrawal of funding from the Third World Forum (a campus newspaper that deals with Third World issues), compulsory English examinations for international graduate teaching assistants in science and math classes, and increasing incidents of hostility toward Asians (as reflected in bathroom graffiti, "Lower the curve: kill a chink"). Admission policies at UC Berkeley, particularly as reported in the press, have pitted Blacks and Chicanos against Asians, and quite often students find themselves in dorm discussions without having enough specific knowledge to respond. The more articulate students can be about these issues, the greater the chance the students will feel integrated in the university.

Assignments can make mandatory or strongly encourage students to attend campus events where cultural issues will be discussed within the context of campus life—issues such as the self-images of women of color or how Vietnamese students feel they are perceived on campus. A panel entitled "Model Minority Tells the Truth" called for Vietnamese students to become more involved in campus life partly in order to overcome misperceptions of some students:

> Vietnamese students feel inferior to Americans because Americans do not understand why we are here. We are refugees, not illegal immigrants. There are a lot of unspoken differences between Vietnamese and Americans because the memory of the Vietnam war is so fresh, and it is difficult for Americans to be comfortable with us because we are the conflict. Vietnamese students also suffer an identity crisis because the Vietnamese community has not established itself yet in America as other Asian groups have.

Anecdotes

Anecdotes about oneself and former class experiences are another way to generate discussion and raise issues of cultural transition and identity. The teacher's own curiosity and experience of cultural diversity will often give students ideas for other topics. Cultural identity does not depend on a Spanish surname alone nor does it reside in skin color. Richard Rodriguez, for example, does not consider himself a Chicano and was insulted when he was so identified at Berkeley during the sixties. I mentioned this in class and described the experiences of several former students whose parents were from different cultures (so-called "rainbow children"). Several weeks later, a student whose mother was Mexican and whose father was Anglo wrote:

> Someone once told me that I'd have to fight everyday to prove to every-
> one that I wasn't "another stupid Mexican." He was convinced that the
> whole American population was watching his every move, just waiting
> for him to slip and make a mistake. Having it emphasized that he is a
> minority certainly won't help his attitude any. It will just remind him
> that he is different. All of my life I never considered myself a minority. I
> didn't speak Spanish, I didn't follow Mexican customs, and I hung
> around with "American" kids. It is real hard for me to understand why
> minorities get so much special treatment.

This student found the existence of different student cultural groups on cam-
pus to be disturbing:

> When I came to Davis, instead of seeing a melting pot like the one I ex-
> pected, I saw distinct cultural groups. When I first heard about CHE
> (Chicanos in Health Education) I was furious. I could not see any need for
> a special club just for Hispanic students interested in health careers. It
> seemed that the students in CHE were segregating themselves from the
> real world. They should actually be interacting with everyone else prov-
> ing that they weren't different.

After interviewing members of CHE and VSA (Vietnamese Student Associa-
tion), this student was able to see how some people benefited from these
clubs:

> I didn't think I could find some positive aspects about these clubs, but I
> found some. Some clubs help immigrants assimilate into the Western
> culture. They provide the member with a sense of pride about who they
> are and they strengthen cultural bonds. If students attend classes and be-
> come discouraged by lower grades than they expected, they can go to a
> CHE meeting and see "one of their own" explain how they made it
> through the bad times and how they came back to beat the odds. I asked
> Trinh why she joined the VSA. She said she joined to learn more about
> her culture and to improve her language. But others join to help them-
> selves assimilate into Western culture. I was wondering what was so
> important about her culture that Trinh couldn't retain unless she went to
> these meetings. She said, "I can't explain it." But there is an atmosphere
> there that she can't get anywhere else. And if this gives her a good feel-
> ing, then more power to her.

This student still has reservations about cultural differences on campus (pri-
marily because she does not want to see herself as "different"), but the move-
ment from "I was furious about CHE" to "more power to her" is a step toward
recognizing her own cultural diversity. Cultural identity is not always simple.
I have seen second-generation Vietnamese, Indian, Korean, and Chinese stu-
dents who saw themselves primarily as "American" (no hyphens), and in some
cases as white. One Chinese student, from a Black neighborhood in Oakland,
grew up wanting to be Black. It was the cool thing to be.

 For some students, examining home culture and the culture of the universi-
ty can cause anxiety. Teenagers often do not relish the idea of being "differ-

ent." They have enough difficulty keeping their grades up, forming peer rela-
tionships, adjusting to being in a new environment. My sixteen-year-old
stepson argues constantly that he is just like his peers. He certainly tries to
be. But all you have to do is walk on the school grounds, look around a few
minutes, and it is impossible to miss the six-foot-tall, dark-skinned, hand-
some boy bobbing up and down amongst a sea of white faces: definitely Indian
(other Indians can identify him on sight as Telegu). It is becoming in-
creasingly difficult on predominantly white campuses for students to deny dif-
ferences in culture. What is important to learn is that while differences be-
tween home and school can lead to conflict, differences in themselves do not
inherently cause conflict. The home culture can be a source of strength which
can enable the student to negotiate with the mainstream culture. One of the
major factors of success of students coming from cultures least valued by soci-
ety is the ability of the family to help the student maintain a positive self-
image that allows her to withstand rejection and insensitivity of mainstream
peers. Occasionally, I have discovered some parents who did not want their
children in school at all and did everything in their power to deter the educa-
tion of their children. But most often, it is not the home culture that causes
problems, but a fear on the part of students that elements of that culture will
not be accepted in the university environment.

Implications for Teacher Training and Classroom Research

These topics and assignments not only help students mediate between school
and home cultures, they provide windows for the teacher into the diversity
within each of the cultures that students bring with them. They can serve as a
base for ongoing teacher research into the ways in which home and university
cultures interact. There simply is no training program for teachers, and can be
no definitive research study that will ever account for the realities our students
bring with them. Change is constant. Each generation is different. Given the
lack of homogeneity in our classes, given the incredible diversity of cultures
we are being exposed to, who better to learn from than our students? The
culture and language topics I have described here comprise roughly 30-50% of
the assignments I give in a ten-week course that meets for two hours twice a
week. Some quarters I find myself using more cultural topics than others; it
depends on the students. The course is English A, a four-unit course (two
units counting toward graduation) with English Department administered,
holistically-graded diagnostic, midterm, and final exams. The point is that if
one can begin to integrate cultures under these constraints, one should be able
to do it anywhere.

   The cultural transitions we ask of our students are by no means easy. Cul-
tural transition is ultimately defined by the student, whether she decides to
assimilate and leave her culture behind, or attempts to integrate her world
view with the academic world view. As composition teachers we are offered a

unique opportunity to make these transitions easier for students, and at the same time increase our skills in moving between cultures. Clifford Geertz puts it this way: "The primary question, for any cultural institution anywhere, now that nobody is leaving anybody else alone and isn't ever again going to, is not whether everything is going to come seamlessly together or whether, contrariwise, we are all going to exist sequestered in our separate prejudices. It is whether human beings are going to be able, in Java or Connecticut, through law, anthropology, or anything else, to imagine principled lives they can practicably lead" (234). But we may find, and this has been my experience, that in helping students make cultural transitions, we learn from them how to make transitions ourselves.

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