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Enhancing Multicultural Education Through Higher Education Initiatives

by Porter L. Troutman, Jr.

This paper describes a comprehensive initiative intended to increase multicultural education and the amount of ethnic diversity among college of education faculty and undergraduate teacher education students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). The paper details six components of the on-going initiative: 1) staff development: to enhance the sensitivity of college of education faculty regarding cultural issues, 2) a minority mentoring program: to provide a stronger support system for under-represented populations enrolled in the teacher education program, 3) the multicultural education project (MCE): a collaborative effort with the public school district in multicultural education, 4) the College of Education Diversity Committee, 5) the Provost's Commission on Teacher Preparation and the conceptual framework it produced for changing demographics, entitled "Preparing Reflective Teachers for Diverse Urban Populations," and (6) the President's Task Force on Campus Culture, Equity, and Environment.

The continuing lack of ethnic diversity among college of education faculty and public school teachers suggests a failure to address the issue of under-representation in colleges of education. The problem requires a comprehensive approach focused on a number of initiatives simultaneously. The individual initiatives described here are not unique, but used in combination, this approach may warrant replication in other institutions.

The activities described in this paper were not implemented in a vacuum. Indeed the importance of diversity had been addressed in some respects. University degree requirements include a single required course in multicultural education. The university had committed to equal opportunity/affirmative action in the employment of faculty. University publications already included language suggesting the desire for diversity, and there were specific recruiting efforts to increase the extent of diversity in student and faculty. Despite these efforts at remediation, the lack of a diverse faculty and student body continued. The fact that this persistent problem with diversity was not unique to our college or university was not an excuse to ignore it. After the national accreditation team called specific attention to the weakness of our program in reference to diversity the university chose to initiate a more comprehensive plan. Attention initially focused on motivational and sensitivity factors among the faculty.

Staff Development

There are a number of available resources with content which could help college of education faculty incorporate multicultural education in their programs.¹ At the annual conference of the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, Smith presented a particularly comprehensive model. This model, "Toward Defining Culturally Responsible and Responsive Teacher Education," identified fourteen individual knowledge bases with specific objectives for each area.²

Following the accreditation team's report in spring 1992, the Dean of the College of Education at UNLV supported a two-day workshop for the fall semester of 1992. An outside team was contracted to present the workshop under the heading "Multicultural School: Challenge for the Workplace and the Classroom." The workshop was conducted in the context of an off-campus retreat. All College of Education faculty were informed that attendance at the workshop was expected. Each announcement of the activity and each reminder about attendance together with the workshop content, emphasized that the university had a significant problem which required attention.

Activities included experiential exercises, small group case-study problem solving, attitude surveys, and some content presentation. A total of sixty-three faculty participated in the process.

Response of the faculty to the activity was, as expected, mixed. The overall evaluations conducted at the close suggested a satisfactory experience. Some faculty members reported the typical reactions to in-service activities (i.e. unnecessary, could have used time better, don't need outsiders to help with this problem). In isolation, a workshop of this type is, of course, insufficient to address the larger need. In concert with the other planned activities, however, the workshop was a critical element in the overall plan. All faculty, regardless of their reported reaction, inevitably exited the workshop with a greater sensitivity to the problem and increased awareness that this was an area of priority in the College of Education. As teachers become more knowledgeable about and more sensitive to the value of diversity, students begin to see themselves as integral, not separate. Those students are more likely to perceive the teaching profession as a potential career and more likely to experience motivation toward such a career.

The workshop ended just as the fall semester began. The workshop was followed up with memoranda and discussion at faculty meetings. These served as on-going reminders that while the single required course in multicultural education was important, there was now an expectation that faculty would infuse multicultural material and perspectives across the curriculum.

Assessing the results of this workshop is difficult. There was an increase in the extent to which course syllabi were revised to include multicultural attention, which creates the reasonable expectation that this change was also reflected in actual course delivery.

Staff development is an important component of the

larger initiative with full recognition that it will be a long process with years before the outcome may be evident in actual student enrollment. However, there was a second initiative with specific intent to retain the students already enrolled or contemplating enrollment in the College of Education.

Minority Mentoring

The Minority Mentoring Program was established to create and maintain rapport between the faculty mentors and the culturally diverse students. The goal was to enhance retention and success in the college of education. The specific objectives included: 1) providing academic advisement, 2) assisting students in the identification, location, and utilization of support services at the university, 3) helping students feel that they belonged, and 4) instilling academic confidence.

Approximately 39% of the college of education faculty members served as faculty mentors. The faculty mentor was asked to meet once every two weeks with one or more of the 44 students who signed up for the program. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the student's academic progress, career interests, current work, and any other issues or concerns the student might have. Monitoring the student's academic progress was central to ensuring the student's success, so the faculty mentors were asked to keep a journal, documenting and describing each student contact.

Results of the mentoring program are in process. However, student comments suggest they do not feel isolated or shut out from the program. Many repeat a common sentiment: "Having someone I can go to who understands what it is like for feel different really helps a lot."

Project Multicultural Education

Our university is located in one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in this country. The metropolitan area is served by a single, unified school district with a total enrollment of 190,000, among the largest of U.S. school districts. Faculty in our College of Education, in partnership with this school district, participated in a project to bring a multicultural perspective to the classrooms in the school district.

The goals of this project, of course, go far beyond simply increasing current diversity levels in the student and faculty populations in the college of education. The attitudes of students about their teachers and the profession of teaching are shaped early in the public school experience. A teacher who projects a multicultural perspective is more likely to be seen as a role model for previously neglected students.

This project involved an in-service commitment to eventually reach each teacher in the district's elementary and middle schools. From the period of September 8, 1994 through May 2, 1995, the staff development workshop was presented at 120 different schools. Goals for the workshop were to assist the teachers to: 1) recognize the role of self and culture values, personal

feelings, attitude, and beliefs in fostering and inhibiting cultural interactions and awareness, 2) promote positive attitudes about cultural differences, 3) identify levels of racism as it relates to cultural differences, 4) explore strategies for understanding and learning about cultural differences, and 5) develop an awareness action plan for the schools/classrooms. A variety of activities were included to facilitate attainment of these objectives during the one day period including presentation, role-playing case studies, improvisations, and simulation activities.

A total of 2,656 teachers participated in this series of workshops, with a mean of 22.9 participants in each workshop. At the conclusion of each workshop the evaluation instrument requested each participant to not only evaluate the quality of the presentation, but to also indicate whether the topic was perceived as important, whether something new was learned, whether the information presented would be useful in the classroom, and whether the information would be useful in other ways.

Ninety-six percent of the participants noted agreement or strong agreement that multicultural awareness was an important topic. Strongly agree or agree was the response of 91% of the participants to the question of whether something new was learned. Ninety percent reported agreement or strong agreement that the information would be useful in the classroom. Eighty-four percent expressed agreement or strong agreement that the information would be useful in other ways.

These data suggest that the workshops reached a large number of teachers in the district, and that the teachers had highly positive responses to the experience. Of particular significance may be that more than half of the respondents expressed strong agreement that this information related to multicultural awareness would be useful in their classrooms. Even granting the likelihood that not all would follow through with actual change in classroom behavior, these numbers suggest reason for optimism that there can be change in the classroom atmospheres which very likely have had direct and indirect eventual influence on the lack of diversity in the student body and faculty of teacher education programs.

College of Education Diversity Committee Bylaw Changes

The next effort was to establish a College of Education Diversity Committee to address goals relating to the university's own professional development needs. The Diversity Committee is a standing committee in the College of Education. College of Education Bylaws were changed to reflect the composition and purposes of the Diversity Committee. The Diversity Committee consisted of two faculty members from each department.

Terms of membership are for two years and are staggered to ensure continuity. Additional College of Education faculty could join the Diversity Committee to accomplish various tasks. The Diversity Committee focused on infusing multicultural learning experiences across the college curriculum, attracting a more culturally

diverse population as students, providing collaboration and services to our local school district, and providing leadership to our community and university. This task force was charged by the Dean to create a vision of a College of Education that attracts, prepares, and inspires men and women of all ethnic groups to be culturally sensitive teachers and administrators of the increasingly diverse students in Southern Nevada.

Provost's Commission on Teacher Preparation

The next initiative focused on Teacher Preparation. The Commission on Teacher Preparation of the College of Education was formed on September 27, 1996, at the request of the provost. The impetus for the formation of the commission was to develop a comprehensive plan to enhance teacher preparation at UNLV and to build a bridge into the 21st century for teacher education in Nevada.

The Commission consisted of a faculty group of volunteers with profound interest in the status of teacher education at UNLV. The commission was chaired by the Dean of Education. The specific charges of the commissions were to: a) formulate a plan which accounts for the future of teacher preparation at UNLV, b) explore ways to increase the number of teachers UNLV prepares for the state of Nevada including alternative routes to licensure and, c) set expectations to implement this plan for the Provost's Office as well as the State Department of Education, the state legislature, and the community. The Commission developed the following conceptual framework which underlies its proposed plan for teacher preparation as well as the recommendations that emanate from it.

This framework is entitled, "Developing Reflective Teachers for Diverse Urban Populations." This conceptual framework is based on the work of John Dewey. Dewey defined reflective thinking as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it."³ The reflective process involves solving problems through inquiry about practical situations and shaping experiences by continually probing for better ways to identify, pose, and solve problems within given situations of practice.

Demographic trends clearly show that teachers will continue to teach incredibly heterogeneous groups of students making up the school population in the year 2000.⁴ Already in the city of Las Vegas over 42 percent of school age children are students of color. Accordingly, learning to teach in diverse urban contexts and incorporating learning experiences that enhance students' knowledge about how poverty, social class, race, gender and ethnicity affect school practices and student learning are central themes in our teacher preparation program. Therefore, teachers across professional fields in the college are encouraged to develop integrated and collaborative approaches to meeting the needs of diverse urban populations.

President's Task Force on Campus Culture, Equity, and Environment

This task force was formed in January 1996. The members represent all major groups of individuals who are part of the campus community: administration, faculty, professional staff, classified staff, and students. Four subcommittees were established and assigned to develop position papers on the following topics: Recruitment and Retention; Awareness of Diversity, Disability, and Public Safety; Curriculum; Affirmative Action Office.

Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee. This subcommittee identified the following eight goals:

1. Increase the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty and professional staff in each under-represented group substantially.
2. Increase the success of faculty and staff from under-represented groups in the achievement of professional fulfillment, promotion, and tenure.
3. Increase the number of under-represented faculty and staff in leadership positions.
4. Increase the number of individuals from under-represented groups in administrative positions.
5. Achieve an increase in the number of entering undergraduate students from under-represented groups as well as in the total under represented group enrollment.
6. Increase the retention and graduation rates of undergraduate students from under-represented groups.
7. Increase the number of entering graduate students from under-represented groups.
8. Improve the success of graduate students from under-represented groups.

The subcommittee expects that UNLV will endorse and put into action an aggressive agenda related to student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention within the context of diversity.

Subcommittee on Campus Awareness of Diversity, Disability and Public Safety. This group was established to address issues relating to awareness of diversity, disability, and public safety on UNLV campus. The committee identified seven goals and redefined diversity to include all aspects of the diversity represented in our society.

1. To project and encourage an open and just environment for all groups and individuals.
2. To diversify cultural programming on campus to reflect the institutional commitment to diversity and public safety.
3. To raise the awareness of diversity and public safety issues among new UNLV students.
4. To raise the awareness level of returning students in areas of diversity and public safety.

5. To raise the awareness levels of diversity and public safety issues among all existing faculty and staff.
6. To encourage the administration's allocation of financial resources to meet the additional demands upon departmental budgets.
7. To identify the individuals responsible for overseeing the implementation of the actions proposed.

These awareness efforts must be supported by the entire university, and the administration must make a conscious effort to articulate its institutional commitment to these ideals. Creating a campus community which is aware and accepting of diversity and safety issues requires that we focus upon creating an institutional culture and environment.

Curriculum Subcommittee. A number of different measures could be taken to increase diversity in the curriculum.

1. Add a diversity component to the core curriculum.
2. Ensure that courses which currently satisfy core requirements have a diversity component where possible.
3. Include a diversity component in the new teaching center.
4. Develop links between UNLV faculty and the public school system to encourage female and students of colors to enter other disciplines.

The above list of recommendations requires the concerted efforts of all departments and faculty and serves as a frame for curriculum changes. Recent proposed changes in the core curriculum have occurred.

Affirmative Action. The goal of this subcommittee was to determine how the university could enhance diversity efforts by improving and expanding the functions formerly accomplished by the UNLV Affirmative Action Office.

It was agreed that the office should adopt expanded goals and additional functions and that its title should reflect that. The Office of Institutional Diversity is responsible for implementing and monitoring the University Diversity Plan and the annual Affirmative Action Plan, as well as coordinating internal and external communication regarding diversity and ensuring that compliance requirements are met.

Summary

This report is a "story in process." Following an accreditation team's report of insufficient diversity in both the student population and college faculty, a major initiative was undertaken. The initiative was designed to bring both a short-term remedy and eventual long-term resolution. This university's experience with a six-part initiative is sufficiently positive to suggest that it may provide a useful model for other institutions. This is a multi-faceted problem which clearly will require multi-faceted approaches for resolution. It is our belief that the components described in this paper along with periodic addition of new initiatives to keep the need in sharp focus can ultimately lead to success. Given that some of the initial impetus came from the desire to meet national accreditation standards, this paper can echo the sentiments of Coombs and Allred: the accreditation process contributed significantly to the enhancement of our teacher education program, campus environment and school community.⁵

Notes

¹James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1994); H.P. Baptiste and C. Archer, "A Comprehensive Multicultural Teacher Education Program: An Idea Whose Time Has Come." In M.M. Atwater, K. Radzik-Marsh and M. Strutchens, eds., *Multicultural Education: Inclusion of All* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1994), 63-90; C.A. Bowers and D. J. Flinders, *Responsive Teaching: an Ecological Approach to Classroom Patterns of Language, Culture, and Thought* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990).

²G. Pritchey Smith, "Toward Defining a Culturally Responsible Pedagogy for Education: the Knowledge Base for Educating Teachers of Minority and Culturally Diverse Students," Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, Atlanta, GA, 1991.

³John Dewey, *How We Think* rev. ed., (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1933).

⁴Carl A. Grant and Walter G. Secada, "Preparing Teachers for Diversity," in W. Robert Houston, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 403-422; Harold L. Hodgkinson, *All One System: Demographics of Education--Kindergarten Through Graduate School* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership, 1985); Sonia Nieto, "Affirming Diversity: the Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education," *Urban Society* 26.1 (1992), 29-48.

⁵C. Garn Coombs and Ruel A. Allred, "NCATE Accreditation: Getting the Most from the Self-Study," *Journal of Teacher Education* 44 (1993), 165-169.

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