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ABSTRACT

This course is designed to give university students an introduction to the varying social and cultural backgrounds of students in inner city communities. Materials in the areas of literature, music, and history are assigned and presented to these future teachers. Class presentations are used to help students to broaden their perspectives and sensitivities with regard to minority groups. In order to improve verbal communication between these students, who are usually from middle class, standard English speaking backgrounds and ghetto residents who may speak nonstandard English, phonograph records and tapes of black English are played in the classroom. Dramatizations and readings from ethnic history are used to help students to understand the struggle of minority groups for basic human rights. It is hoped that the increased understanding fostered by this course will result in improvements in urban education. (GC)

LECTURE-DEMONSTRATION--USING MULTI-ETHNIC CULTURAL MATERIALS TO PREPARE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO TEACH IN THE INNER-CITY

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Using Multi-Ethnic Cultural Materials To Prepare University Students To Teach In The Inner-City

Many urban universities send their students to work in field experiences in the inner-city, yet the majority of these university students have had little physical or social contact with inner-city areas of people. Although they may have the best of intentions, many of these university students face frustration and even a bitter disillusionment, if they are not adequately prepared to face a new and often frightening experience.

At the University of Missouri-Kansas City, a course has been developed in which students are given an introduction to the social and cultural backgrounds of several kinds of communities in the urban area. One emphasis in this course is on the historical and cultural contributions of minority groups to the development--and enrichment--of the United States. The faculty members responsible for the course have found that students turn away from all lectures on prejudice and racial stereotyping with statements such as "We know all that. We've heard it before" or "That doesn't apply to me." Yet these same students will often respond to direct experiences with the cultural expressions of people and may begin to question some of their preconceptions as they come closer to the feelings and perspectives of groups they previously have classified only as sociological statistics.

Materials in three areas are assigned and presented in the course: literature, music, and history. The materials are carefully selected in terms of quality, relevance, and relationship to certain basic goals. The staff has evaluated the effectiveness of what is used through student discussions and through written, unsigned evaluation forms and, as a result, may eliminate certain assignments and also experiment with alternative materials and experiences.

The staff has tried a variety of approaches: assignments to be read outside of class and then discussed in large or small groups in class; listening to music outside of class; giving extra credit for visits to exhibits at art galleries, and also for attendance at lectures and theatrical and dance events. However, the staff has found that presentations in class are one of the most effective ways of helping students to broaden their perspectives and sensitivities in regard to minority groups. Some samples of these class presentations are described below.

The use of literary materials is designed to achieve some of the most basic goals of the course. The staff carefully selects fiction and poetry to help students realize that minority groups have produced literature of a high quality, literature that is not just propaganda for a specific time but that has qualities of endurance. Some of the poetry of Langston Hughes is read in class, lyrics such as the hushed and tender "Dream Variations", while images in silhouette are projected on a screen from an overhead projector. Such experiences can also

help students to realize that certain basic emotions go beyond racial or cultural dimensions and limitations. These shared human emotions can be communicated in many ways, from many times and many places. One of the most moving of all love songs comes from the Indians of the northern forests--two lovers, in a dream, watch together on a mountain as the sun goes down and the moon, "the Night Traveler," rises "about the shining mountains," while "the little Stars" are following their Chief" and the Northern Lights are "playing their game of ball in their cold, glistening country." Oral poetry from Africa is also used to illustrate that even some of the most isolated groups in the world, such as the Gabon pygmies, have chants which can echo the experiences of an American in the twentieth century. Since these chants require a leader and an answering chorus, the students themselves can participate as this poetry is read. The lights in the room are turned off, and there is only light from a red bulb which represents a campfire. The life of this group of pygmies is briefly described; then a teacher and students join in a chant for the dead. The teacher reads: "The bird flies, it passes, it dies. And it is the great cold. The students respond: "It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark." The interchange continues until the poem reaches its climax: "The man has passed, the shade has vanished, the prisoner is free."

Literary materials can also help students begin working toward a third goal: the development of an understanding of a life perspective different from one's own, from this can come the beginning of empathy. A story by Ann Petry ("In Darkness and Confusion") about people caught up in a riot situation, an account of parents who try to prepare a child to go to a school where he is not wanted ("Neighbors" by Diane Oliver), and materials by Chicano and Jewish writers are assigned in this area.

There are many opportunities to use music to increase respect for minority groups and help make students aware of the degree to which American music--both popular and classical--has been influenced by ethnic minorities. It might be well for educated students to become aware of the originality and skill of musicians who had little opportunity for formal training, such as Scott Joplin and Louis Armstrong.

The problem of how to communicate with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds has produced much anxiety among some of our students. Since most of our students are middle-class and use Standard English, they become questionably concerned about the kinds of responses and verbalization between pupil and pupil and teacher and pupil when a class in an inner-city school is observed. It is in many of these inner-city classrooms that our middle-class students hear words like "rap", "splib jive", "bread", and "pretty hipped." There are sentences which lack agreement between subject and verb such as "He done put the hurt on me", and sentences with no verb at all, for example, "That Lavern she something else". Note also the double subject. Some inner-city children form plurals by adding an "s" to a word whch is already plural as used in Standard English such as a switch from "men" (standard English) to "mens" (inner-city and ghetto dialect). The following sentences have perfectly clear meanings to the inner-city and ghetto child: "I'm suppose to git

the job I be chasing", "You go poke around the neighborhood", and "Charles, how come you keep poking me with them books?"

Middle-class practicum students, unaccustomed to this informal or non-Standard English, are puzzled about how they should react to and evaluate such communication, should they teach in an inner-city school. Thus it is also within small group sessions that practicum students discuss the meaning of a second language, used by inner-city children, as compared with a second language for example French, Spanish, or German in which university students enroll for credit.

The practicum staff has found among the effective ways to get middle-class students to understand and accept whatever communication skills inner-city children have is to play phonograph records and cassette tapes which contain verbalization of minorities from the slum, ghetto, and inner-city. One such tape recording, "The Dialect of the Black American", taken from an album produced by Paul K. Winston and directed by Jeffery Berman specifically states on the cover design that "At a time when interracial communication and understanding are assuming enormous importance, this record hopes to help explain for listeners of all races what black dialect is and how it functions. The intent, is, simply information. The difficult goal is to let us all, as we talk with one another, hear with open ears."

Listening to "Negro Prison Songs from the Mississippi Penitentiary Work Songs and Blues, edited by and annotated by Alan Lomax, have also increased the understanding of suburban students as they seek to analyze and hear without a "language prejudice" how black people communicate.

The class sessions which center on which ethnic history are designed to help students realize that what they may consider basic American rights have often been achieved only through long and determined struggle, often by humble people of surprising courage and strength. Selections from the book The Other American by Kathleen Wright treat various periods of American history from the point of view of the American Indian, the Black, the Jew, the Chinese and Japanese Americans, and the Chicano. In the area of direct classroom experience, one class session is given over to the dramatization of the life of Sojourner Truth, who more than a hundred years ago fought for racial equality and women's rights. Toward the end of her life, she went to Kansas and tried to help settle black people there as free men and women on land of their own. In the face of indifference, she spoke to a crowd of polite people. (and, over the years, to university students, who may be just as polite and indifferent): "With all your opportunities for reading and writing, you don't take hold and do anything. My God, I wonder what you are in the world for!"

If students can begin asking themselves this question, perhaps urban education will become more than the neglected almost hopeless area it has become in too many communities.

Using Multi-Ethnic Cultural Materials To Prepare University Students To Teach In The Inner-City

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such composers as George Gershwin, Kurt Weill, and Ernest Bloch (all influenced by both black and Jewish sources) can also provide not just enlightening, but also entertaining, experiences for students. As Marshall McLuhan has indicated, that which is pleasurable may also be highly educative.

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Listening to "Negro Prison Songs from the Mississippi State Penitentiary Work Songs and Blues", edited and annotated by Alan Lomax, have also increased the understanding of suburban students as they seek to analyze and hear without a "language prejudice" how black people communicate. Included in the notes on the back of the Negro Prison Songs Album, Lomax explained that

"In the pen itself, we saw that the songs, quite literally, kept the man alive and normal. As the gangs 'rolled under the hot broilin' sun', the roaring choruses of the songs revived flagging spirits, restored energy to failing bodies, brought laughter to silent misery. The rhyming works leaders were always improvising something new about women--women faithless and faithful--women coming with pardons--women, a worrysome and wonderful thing to a poor prisoner. He laughs to think...

'When she walks, she reels and rocks behind,

Ain't that enough to worry a convict's mind...'

'Then his mind turns to his own despair...

'I'm [illegible]oppin' in this bottom with a hundred years,

Tree fall on me, I don't bit mo' care.'

'Many of these prisoner rhymes reveal their artistry only when one hears them sung. The flow of the vowels, as voiced by these singers, is music itself. The syncopated clash and bite of the consonants creates its own counterpoint to the rhythm of the work. The imagery is often brilliant, the language Homeric and dry in its directness.

'Be my woman, gal, I be yo' man,

Ev'y day be Sunday, dollar in yo' hand.'

Now many of our middle-class suburban students admit that they are more willing to accept verbal contributions from inner-city children rather than constantly interrupt them to insist on the use of accurate Standard English. This new attitude about black dialect [illegible] outgrowth of small group discussions by practicum students and instructors, has been reinforced by J.L. Dillard in Black English (1972, p. 270):

"A student would not be asked to give up his home or peer-group dialect as something shameful; rather, he would be taught Standard English in the dialect most advantageous to him--as a second, alternate system. This seems, also, somewhat more equitable: the school system would make the student able to use a second dialect if he chose to do so. If he preferred not to use it outside school, no teacher could find fault with him. And no student would have to go through the pathetic process of confessing that he spoke "bad" English and was basically inferior to middle-class

students in such a fundamental activity as language." One notable example among many come out of our discussions. Middle-class practicum students now realize that "job getting" and "job security" of inner-city youth may well depend on working closely with these youth to get them to communicate with others (perhaps middle-class employers) so the encoding and decoding, the entire verbalization and communication process with words and expressions will be acceptable. However in a less formal setting it is also acceptable for the inner-city youth to still converse by making use of "off the wall", "How you go baby", "Hey man", "He be cool", "right on", and other inner-city internalized expressions.

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