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ABSTRACT

If an institution's goal is cultural diversity, the institutional response must go beyond a core curriculum that transmits culture or a multicultural curriculum which transforms culture, and embrace a curriculum which enhances individual differences. The core curriculum has an unabashed European cultural bias and requires assimilation to the majority culture. Its power to boost minority students' academic performance is limited since it does not consider the nature of minority students' cultural diversity. The multicultural approach attempts to provide a culturally affirming environment and transform the national culture by reconceptualizing other cultures. The result, however, is either cultural tokenism or an emphasis on multicultural courses and events that have little bearing on minority student skill attainment and academic success. To truly embrace diversity, an institution must first embrace individual differences and diversify the environment by over-representing the currently under-represented groups in the student body and teaching corps. By affirming individual differences, individuals from minority groups can experience an affirmed self-identity which can overcome negative expectations caused by the dominant culture. Institutions which show high minority success rates, such as West Point where 68% of black cadets and 66% of white cadets finish their baccalaureate degree in four years, do not necessarily affirm any cultural or multicultural identity, but do affirm the individual student's self-identity. Contains 10 references (KP)

Into the Institution's Soul: Individualization and Diversity--

Antecedents to Institutional Effectiveness

by

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Into the Institution's Soul: Individualization and Diversity--Antecedents to Institutional Effectiveness

On my first day on the job at a postsecondary institution committed to a multicultural mission, one of my colleagues stopped by my office to "just tell" me that the college had hired me to fill a secret and nefarious minority quota. This was two days before the defense of my dissertation, and three days before I started teaching five composition sections at this Texas community college. My well meaning colleague set the tone for my worst semester as a teacher. Too many of my minority students failed or just dropped out. Too many of my majority students slipped racially charged code words into class discussions and papers. As any good researcher should, I have since researched those students, studied my teaching style, and radically revised the content and curriculum of that course. The major fault, of course, was mine. I was too preoccupied with dissertation revisions to be an effective teacher. But there was something else. The students in this second half of freshman composition were extremely unprepared for the pace and standards of the course. And they were certain that they were prepared. The African-American students skipped class any time the scheduled discussion looked like it had anything to do with race. A few of my students seemed convinced that I was the affirmative action candidate and was therefore, incompetent. Later, I learned from students that another of my colleagues had encouraged this idea.

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Meanwhile, the College's Multicultural Committee, forgot to do anything for a year and nearly disbanded. African Americans and Whites rarely sit in the same area in the cafeteria; and should a student choose to sit with students from another race, he or she often complains of later condemnation from his or her same race sisters and brothers. African-American students protested a painting of a hangman's noose: they said it was racist; the painter, crying, said it was a statement against suicide. The painting was removed from display, even though it had no noticeable actual or symbolic references to any person or any person's race. Through it all minority students still pack remedial courses and rarely reach graduation. The percentages of African American and Hispanic males enrolled is dropping, even while their populations in the area high schools rises. Other than a call for more data, the faculty and professional staff response seems to be either bewilderment, befuddlement, or outright criminal apathy. " Well, you know there's a lot of racism here," said one professional staff person. Another said, "We're open admissions; everybody has a right to fail."

Imagine-- all this angst in the happy hunting-ground of multiculturalism.

However, dwelling on the gap between an institution's public face and private realities can lead to a kind of fearful and angry paralysis that interferes with the college's prime function--helping students learn the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to serve our changing national community. This prime function is the soul of the institution--teaching knowledge and skills achievement coupled with the appropriate attitudes. To survive and thrive amidst such a swirl of contradictions, institutions should focus on the individual, helping him or her discover his or her unique

cultural contexts as a foundation for understanding while insisting upon the student's understanding and adopting a core body of necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes. My solution to the above ideological paradox is to avoid the old ideological dialectic altogether, opting for a paradigm that focuses more on the real operations of the institutions, teachers, and students and less on unexamined pedagogy or metaphor and anecdote.

If the institutional goal or reality, unintended or otherwise, is cultural diversity, then the institutional response must go beyond a curriculum that transmits culture (core curriculum) and beyond one which transforms culture (multiculturalism) to one which enhances individual differences. Successful student learning is a complex process rooted in each student's perception and response to the institutional context. The effective institutional response must be to address and shape these individual student perceptions and responses of what the at-risk may perceive as a hostile environment. The test of success is improved academic performance. This link between institutional effectiveness, diversity, and accreditation is vital. For example, in 1991 Baruch College of the City University of New York lost it accreditation because it had a minority dropout rate of about 50%. Texas may move away from contact hours as a basis of funding to performance funding for community colleges and technical colleges. The formula will probably be weighted toward minority success rates.

Beyond accreditation concerns, failing or succeeding minority students today will affect all aspects of our national life, from who goes to jail to who is on welfare to who is a tax payer. The Hudson Institute study, Workforce 2000, noted that 80% of the new

entrants into the workforce will be minorities, and most of the new jobs awaiting them will require postsecondary education. Finally, serving all students, is a moral act. Clearly needed are strategies, programs, and procedures that produce academic success for minorities. The choices are the core curriculum, multiculturalism, or a focus the individual student.

First the core curriculum unabashedly has a European cultural bias; it cannot help but offend the growing number of students who do not trace their ancestries to Europe. Yet, the core is solid, sure, tried, and tested; and most importantly, its results are vividly and concretely in evidence everywhere one looks.

The very notion of a core curriculum requires assimilation. By "assimilation" I mean ". . . the adoption by one group of another's culture traits, language, religion, diet, and so on (Marger, 1985). Advocates of the core curriculum are called "assimilationists" (Ogbu, 1992). In the process of assimilation, two cultures exchange culture traits, but almost always, the minority culture accepts the culture traits of the majority (Marger, 1985). Complete assimilation occurs when " . . . there are no longer distinct ethnic groups. . . . there is a homogeneous society in which ethnicity is not a basis of social differentiation and plays no role in the distribution of wealth, power, and prestige" (Marger, 1985).

The assimilationists' goal is for the U.S. to become something like what has occurred in Japan, Germany, South Korea, and Taiwan, where there is a core curriculum and where superior general education for all is considered to be the direct causal agent for their post-World War II economic and technological growth and

development. Since these systems have high standards and high expectations for all students in preparatory schools, the educational systems are highly competitive. They meet longer than U.S. high school students, study more, and are steeped in science and math. The assimilationists seem to say that if we could only emulate those educational systems, then we could recreate the economic and technological paramountcy we once had and transmit it to succeeding generations. Can this possibly be bad? All cultural minorities need do is shake off the burden of their cultural identities and all will be well.

However, a core curriculum's power to boost minority students' academic performance is limited because it does not consider the nature of minority students' cultural diversity (Ogbu, 1992). The wave of higher standards symbolized by high school exit tests and state mandated college entrance tests has smashed against the reality that in pluralistic America; a curriculum with an ethnocentric superstructure just will not work for all students--especially minority students. For example, Florida was stopped from using a minimum skills test for high school graduation because of significant differences between white and black students' scores. In Texas, white eleventh graders taking the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) for the first are twice as likely to pass it as minorities Researchers at the *Austin American Statesman* found high correlations between students' socioeconomic status and test performance (cited in Brooks & South, 1994). These results are mirrored by the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test, that serves as a college entrance exam. Students who fail any part(s) of the test must remain in continuous remediation and can

take no more than nine regular college hours. Gen. Louis Becton, Jr., president of Prairie View A&M, an historically black college, had this to say: "Compared to white students, we are doing a poor job of educating [African American] children, especially when you consider that a third to two-thirds of our students at Prairie View come in needing remedial and developmental work" (Hawkins, 1993, p21). Though the latest reports indicate that black students are making great gains on the TASP in the last few years, minority students still are over-represented in developmental studies programs. Also, minorities are under-represented in all public colleges in Texas (41% of the state's population is minority; 26% of college enrollment is minority) (Hawkins, 1993).

More than reading certain European texts and memorizing lists of words and facts is needed. Ogbu correctly notes that in our already diverse society, what students bring to the college--". . . their communities' cultural models or understandings of 'social realities' and the educational strategies that they, their families, and their communities use or do not use in seeking education are as important. . . " as the core curriculum, because the core curriculum does not address the fact of minority differences (5).

On the other hand, multiculturalists want the educational institutions to produce a new educated person who respects other cultures' special and unique contributions to the ascent of humanity. The logic of the multiculturalists is that if minority students are to achieve, then educational institutions must provide culturally affirming environments. A "culturally affirming" environment must be one where either the vast majority respects others' cultures or where there are some provisos for "centric" education (e.g. Afrocentric, Hispanic-centric, and even multicentric) or both have been

provided. Ultimately, the multiculturalists want to transform the national culture by helping students to reconceptualize what they think about other cultures.

In fact there are five approaches to multicultural education: (1) Teaching the exceptional and culturally different; (2) human relations; (3) single group studies: (4) multicultural education; and (5) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist (Grant and Sleeter, cited in Grant, 1992).

Curricular multiculturalism in educational institutions is a necessary goal of a culturally diverse nation if that nation is to avoid a bitter and destructive balkanization of classes and ethnic groups. Logically, one would think that this idea "goes without saying." But what is multiculturalism? Unfortunately, its multifarious definitions are rife with metaphor, tautology, obscurity, and ambiguity. Who has not heard of the ethnic "quilt" or "mosaic" as definitive descriptions of multiculturalism. Simultaneously, it is rationale, methodology, and aim. Meanwhile its proponents, at worst seem rabid in their defense of it, viciously snapping at any and all criticism. At best, proponents do anything (usually the same old thing) and just call it "multiculturalism." First, the result may be cultural tokenism. For example, some multiculturalists are satisfied with ostensible institutional demonstrations, like ethnic clubs, Cinco de Mayo, African-American history week, and international fairs. If multiculturalism is the philosophical paradigm that it represents itself to be, surely it must reach deeper into the institutional soul than that. Second, the result may be an activist multiculturalism that demands that all students take a special multicultural course, that minority students must have separate dorms and special "multicultural centers" if their self- and cultural identities

are to be protected.

If the prime function is to enhance students' knowledge, and skill attainment, then multiculturalism as it is currently practiced has little demonstrable merit. It is not panacea; and like the core curriculum, it has problems too.

Multiculturalism has the fundamental problem that makes it an inadequate singular strategy for addressing the sine qua non of institutional effectiveness--academic performance. That is, ". . . multicultural education generally ignores the minority students' own responsibility for their academic performance. . . . school success depends not only what schools and teachers do but also on what students do" (Ogbu 6). The solution is not to throw away multiculturalism or to say that instructors and staff need not understand different cultures and include them in curricula. It is to say that making these students merely the objects of institutional multicultural efforts can amount to no more than a dangerously benign paternalism that results in something quite malignant--the academic failure of huge proportions of minority students.

Multiculturalism is an abstract concept aimed at changing attitudes which should lead to changed behaviors which should cause a more tolerant and diverse educational environment. Diversity, on the other hand, requires that institutions get at least representative numbers of the under-represented on the campus, then institutionalize the proper inter-ethnic and inter-social class behaviors. Eventually, the attitude changes will follow. That is, first change the environment, then change behaviors, and attitude changes will follow.

Though we live in a culturally diverse society, we must recognize that it is a culturally stratified society, stratified by race, region, economic status, and ethnic heritage. The assimilationists see this stratification as a weakness, an attack on social cohesiveness, arguing that only students must change their ways if they are to be successful in school (Gibson 374). However, this stratification is a reality, just as its accompanying racism. Our institutions must reflect this national diversity while illuminating the problem of racism.

First, multicultural studies must be grounded in reality (instead of nostalgia and myth) and must have rigor. Next, most institutions must strive to over-represent the under-represented stratifications of society in the student body and in the teaching corps, if our hoped for national goals are to be realized. Over-representation not only should be a college's recruiting goal, but should be a college's retention goal--retention to successful graduation.

The Quality Education for Minorities Report (cited in Lang and Ford 1992, 3-4) says that minority enrollment must be raised from its present 14% to 25% of total enrollment in higher education. By 2000 this report targeted increasing the number Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees from 88,000 to 264,000 by the year 2000; and since 43% of black students are enrolled in two-year institutions, increasing their minority students' transfer to four-year institutions from 15% to 30%. Reaching these types of targets on the campuses will radically change the campus environments, far more than any weak-willed commitment to multiculturalism. Increasing the physical pluralism on the campus is the beginning of increasing achievement. Something

similar happened with the heavy matriculation of black athletes at predominantly white universities during the late 60's and the 70's: successful white coaches altered the campus sports environments, changed their behaviors, and eventually changed their attitudes about black athletes and blacks in general. Though racism and its accompanying exploitation still persist is college sports, these coaches are probably more multiculturally aware and multiculturally literate than any of their colleagues on the other side of the campus.

The unsuccessful coaches in the 70's, who resisted changing their environments, behaviors, and attitudes about the new influx of black athletes in their programs, naturally selected themselves out of coaching. In a similar fashion, multicultural studies at predominately white institutions where the combined Hispanic and black population is under 5% and falling, is a fantastically cruel hoax. In fact, I can think of no more ironic a symbol of the hoax as the professor of Black Studies at a flagship university where many black students can barely get in; and when they do, they fail to persist in disproportionate numbers. Like those successful coaches who can keep players eligible to play for four years, colleges and universities must recruit under-represented minorities until they are in fact over-represented and then retain them to graduation.

Taba (1962) framed the argument long ago. Some educators believe that the function education is preserve and pass on Western culture: today we would call them the assimilationists. A second group believes that the role of education is to transform culture: these would be the multiculturalists. Finally a third group framed the purpose

of education around an emphasis on the development of the individual.

Taba (1962) notes that

> According to this concept [development of the individual] the school must not only introduce the students to the skills and powers necessary for survival or for self-realization in our culture; it must also act as an integrating force in shaping beliefs and attitudes to make them coherent with the requirements of the democratic way of life. It needs to act as an integrator of the pluralistic and contradictory values and expectations engendered in a stratified society. In a sense the school functions at once as a conserving force on behalf of human democracy and as an innovating force by helping individuals rediscover democracy in an environment which is in large measure undemocratic (29-30).

Compare Taba's analysis with John Ogbu (1992) who says that the primary root of the problems of minority students have little to do with genetics or cultural environment or language and cultural barriers or economic and political discrimination--although they play important roles in the problems minorities face. He writes:

> Rather, the more academically successful minorities differ from the less academically successful minorities in the type of cultural model that guides them, that is, in the type of understanding they have of the workings of the larger society and of their place as minorities in that working order" (7-8)

It would seem that successful minorities have learned how to negotiate (in Taba's

words) " . . . the pluralistic and contradictory values and expectations engendered in a stratified society " (29-30). In not viewing minority students as a monolithic block perpetually framed by Jensenism on the right and Afroctricity on the left, educational institutions can escape the logical flaw of seeing the issue of the minority student on campus in terms of competing ideologies. When schools face the realities of the complexities of American culture and choose to engage it by helping minority students to individually develop strategies for successful achievement, the goals of the multiculturalists will be realized and as well as those of assimilationists.

The most troubling of the realities that educational institutions and minority students must tackle is the self-fulfilling belief systems of why minorities fail. Minorities argue that low status occupations and low wages confirm white institutional barriers, that these barriers justify a high rate of school failure. Many minority students go the school expecting to fail. On the other hand, in the belief system of dominant whites, high rate of school failure and low status occupations and low wages confirm the intellectual and cultural inferiority of minorities (Ogbu, 1974). The result is the same; students fail and drop out. Reginald Wilson a senior scholar at the American Council on Education has echoed this conclusion in several lectures--that if the students themselves have low expectations and the schools have low expectations of students, how can it be surprising that these students actually fail?

Successful or unsuccessful "involuntary" minority students employ **several** different strategies (Ogbu 1992) when negotiating what many see has a hostile environment--the university. All do not work.

They are as follows: 1. Emulation of whites-- high psychological costs 2. Accommodation without assimilation 3. Camouflage 4. Involvement in church 5. Attending private schools 6. Mentors 7. Protection (the securing of bullies to help deflect negative peer pressure) 8. Remedial and intervention programs 9. Encapsulation -- high failure.

What both Ogbu and Wilson seem to promote is the idea that an affirmed self-identity can overcome negative expectations caused by dominant and subordinate belief systems. If this is true, high academic achievement is possible.

First, College teachers must realize that minority students come with frames of reference that are oppositional to their own in many cases (Ogbu, 1992). Second, they need to study these cultural and language frames of reference so that they can understand "why these factors affect the process of minority schooling, particularly their school orientations and behaviors" (Ogbu, 1992 p. 12). Third, they must have high expectations of these students. Fourth, there must exist special counseling and intervention programs that ". . .help minority students separate attitudes and behaviors enhancing school success from those that lead to linear acculturation" (Ogbu, 1992, p12). For example, Ogbu favors the "accommodation without assimilation" strategy that his research shows works best with involuntary minorities. In this strategy, students learn to participate in two cultural frames of reference for different purposes " . . . without loosing their own cultural and language identity or undermining their loyalty to the minority community (p12). Fifth, In the spirit of this model, I believe that the cause of underprepared minorities will be better served with accelerated intervention

programs rather than the typical watered-down regular class remedial programs.

Notice that the key to success in the above model is not the college's affirmation of the any cultural or multicultural identity. What is affirmed is the individual student's self-identity. There are examples to support this model. At West Point, there is no multicultural program yet black students outperform whites. In an essay in *Curriculum*, Reginald Wilson points out that West Point requires a minimum of 1100 on the SAT and a GPA in the top 25% of the high school class just like a typical Midwestern flagship university. "At West Point , 68 percent of entering African American cadets complete their baccalaureate degree in four years, compared to 66 percent of white cadets. There is no statistically significant difference in retention and graduation rates. At the Midwestern flagship university, . . . the white B.A. graduation rate after seven years is 70 percent; the graduation rate for black students during the same period is 34 percent (p15). The difference, says Wilson, is high expectations and an interventionist program that strives to keep students in the institution, rather than washing them out.

Similar examples exist in small liberal arts Catholic schools. In the description of one such school, the strategies employed by one school emphasized "*individual attention and cultural sensitivity from recruitment to commencement*" (Zingg 1991 41). This successful college had a population that was 52 % Hispanic and 23% African American. The school's comprehensive program started with partnerships with high schools, on-campus programs for high school students, bilingual counselors, a comprehensive orientation, assessment, skills building, and monitoring program . The school has highly personalized interventionist programs, including tutorials,

individualized learning plans, and an early warning system. The key to the success of the program was the support of the faculty which was primarily white. They worked to adjust curriculum and instruction, and openly supported the strong administration commitment to serve minority students. In the words of Zingg, "Rather than phrasing its initiatives as measures to forestall crisis and conflict, Saint Alpha (sic) sees them as a way to strengthen its own community and to enrich both the church and the larger society 41).

Programs like those at this Catholic college and those at military academies work. What is striking about both examples is that their approach to shaping their environments, and the behaviors and attitudes of students, faculty, and staff indicates that the student's right to fail is dead. Also, these institutions seem to have an obsessive commitment to their mission. Because they see education as a moral act, failure is not an option. To educators at these institutions, there is no better affirmation of self-identity than high individual academic achievement. Surprisingly, what is lacking is more comparative research between programs that work and those that do not. Equally surprising is that what we empirically know about successful programs has not been employed at many more institutions. There is quite a bit of soul searching and research here for the thoughtful planner and/or institutional researcher.

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