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Teaching & Learning

# Dynamic dialogue: a multi-perspective approach towards cultural competence

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**Abstract**

Interculturalism and race relations are becoming more complex as America becomes more diverse. Recent attention focused on universities' admissions programs aimed at diversifying the student body only convey a segment of campus efforts addressing diversity. Curriculum development initiatives speak to diversity concerns through course topics centered on issues such as race and gender by stimulating conversations among students and the instructor. This article presents two models for integrating dynamic dialogues/conversations about race across academic curricula. These perspectives shed insight into the challenges of communicating in an intercultural environment. One model highlights attempts at integrating dynamic dialogue programmatically and the other approaches dynamic dialogue pedagogically, through instructor training. We use Banks' (2007) approach to multicultural curriculum reform to examine the pedagogic and curricular transformations for each institution. *Organization Management Journal* (2009) 6, 217–228. doi:10.1057/omj.2009.30

**Keywords:** diversity; race; dynamic dialogue; pedagogy



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## Introduction

Universities and the US court system continue to grapple with the use of affirmative action to achieve a racially diverse study body. Despite legal scrutiny of the role of race in admissions decisions (Hopwood v. University of Texas Law School, 1996; Gratz, j. and Hamadur, P. v. Bollinger, L *et al.*, 2003; Grutter, B. v. Bollinger, L *et al.*, 2003), these actions only convey a segment of campus efforts addressing diversity. Curriculum development initiatives speak to diversity concerns through course topics centered on issues such as race and gender by stimulating conversations among students and the instructor. Educational institutions design courses to increase students' understanding of individual differences they will encounter in the workplace. Labor force statistics support the fact that recent college graduates will join a work force filled with more diverse employees than previous generations. Slow growth among Caucasian employees contrasted with rapid growth projected among Hispanics, whose labor force participation rate is expected to increase to nearly 16% in 2014 up 3% from 2004, combined with continued growth among Blacks and Asians, means that the number of racial minorities in the workforce will continue to expand yielding an increasingly diverse workforce (Toosi, 2005).

In their report on effective and inclusive learning environments prepared for The International Association for Management

Education, DiTomaso *et al.* (1998: 20) stress that, “success in the global economy requires cultural competence with diverse populations of employees, customers and other stakeholders and an understanding of competitors.” As American companies develop ways to manage an increasingly diverse workforce they are also faced with meeting the challenges of a global marketplace. For many corporations globalization isn’t only focused on doing business in international locations, it also means employing a domestic workforce that understands their customers’ multicultural preferences. In their seminal work on the competitive advantages of managing diversity, Cox and Blake (1991) suggest that corporations benefit from the increased insight and cultural sensitivity that racio-ethnic minority employees and those with roots in other countries bring to the marketing effort. Moreover, companies with the best reputations for managing diversity will win the competition for the best personnel who are critical as the traditional labor pool shrinks and changes composition (Cox and Blake, 1991). Given these economic benefits, corporations who skillfully manage their workforce diversity are likely to see a positive impact on their bottom line.

In addition to the increasing workforce diversity, there is likewise an increase in the racial diversity of students in institutions of higher learning. College enrollment rates at 4-year institutions increased across minority groups during the last decade. Comparison of the percent change between 1998 and 2003 indicates that Hispanics led the increase across all groups with a 38.4% increase in enrollment (Cook and Cordova, 2006). Blacks experienced the second highest change with a 24.6% increase, followed by American Indians (22.7%) and, Asian Americans (17.8%) (Cook and Cordova, 2006). White enrollment also increased, though at a slower rate (7.4%) (Cook and Cordova, 2006).

As the cultural landscape of universities and colleges continues to transform, there arises an increased need to find ways of helping students and faculty understand and appreciate the racial diversity on campus and the diversity they will face when they leave the halls of academia. Orbe and Harris (2000), in their book *Interracial Communication*, argue that we must begin to think critically about how our personal, educational, and professional relationships can benefit from the change that is represented by an increasingly diverse nation in which we now live. Pierce (1993) asserts

that the increases in US diversity make diversity education a critical responsibility of colleges and universities. “More and more colleges and universities across the nation are transforming their curricula because college leaders increasingly recognize that knowledge about the diversity of American history and culture and knowledge about international diversity are essential for today’s students” (Humphreys, 1998: 1). Proactive educators focused on contributing to the changing employment demographics have translated these education and labor-force projections into their classroom curricula (DiTomaso *et al.*, 1998).

In addition to heightening student awareness regarding differences, research findings suggest that diversity in the classroom positively affects learning outcomes (Astin, 1993; Gurin, 1999; Maruyama *et al.*, 2000; Hurtado, 2001; Gurin *et al.*, 2003). Despite increased appreciation of the positive benefits of including diversity-related topics and course content, faculty often struggle with how to address diversity concepts. It has been argued, by both scholars and practitioners, that one of the ways to ensure that students and faculty embrace diversity is to identify ways to include diversity across the curriculum because few institutions currently embrace a holistic intercultural approach to teaching. “Dynamic dialogue” is offered in response to this pedagogic need in that it provides a framework within which to isolate the teaching, learning, and curricular approaches to systematically including conversations, content material, and perspectives that center on topics that are controversial and difficult to discuss. Noonan’s (2007) *Discussing the Undiscussable* reinforces the need to focus attention on creating an intellectual space for difficult conversations. This notion of managing these “undiscussables” rests comfortably in the dynamic dialogue tool we propose.

### Dynamic dialogue defined

We propose the concept of dynamic dialogue, as a tool for addressing the issue of infusing concepts of diversity across the curriculum. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (2008) defines dynamic as marked by usually continuous and productive activity and dialogue as an exchange of ideas and opinions. Spender (1996) similarly describes “dynamic” as representing the constant, energetic movement toward a democratic notion of knowledge sharing. Building upon these definitions we characterize dynamic dialogue as an ongoing exchange of productive ideas centering on issues of interculturalism



that incorporate the democratic expression of questions, issues, concerns, and responses. Operationalized, dynamic dialogue acts as a communication tool and centers on the idea of the creation of intellectual and academic space which allows participants (students and faculty) the free expression of differing voices and perspectives which may lead to increased interactions promoting the healthy development of their intercultural selves.

Recognizing that it is often times uncomfortable and difficult for students to engage actively in interactions that involve discussions about race, particularly in intercultural settings, dynamic dialogue presents the opportunity to explore strategies to decrease the apprehension associated with such encounters. Likewise, faculty members continue to struggle with relative and effective ways to pedagogically introduce the issue of race and culture into classroom, and dynamic dialogue acts as a tool for exploring systematic inclusion. It is our assertion that dynamic dialogue as a teaching tool responds to the need to increase curricular diversity across disciplines by allowing for the intentional, systematic inclusion of conversations, exercises, readings, presentations and other pedagogic devices.

It is important to note that while the concept of dynamic dialogue is applicable to all aspects of diversity and diversity management, for the purposes of this work, we purposely restrict its application to race and racial differences. As such, this article presents two models for integrating the key aspects of race into university curriculum and culture thus creating an atmosphere conducive for dynamic dialogue. These models shed some insight into the challenges of communicating in an intercultural environment. One highlights attempts at integrating dynamic dialogue programmatically and the other approaches dynamic dialogue pedagogically, through instructor training. We use Banks' (2007) approach to multicultural curriculum reform to examine the pedagogic and curricular transformations for each institution.

### Academic curricula

As mentioned earlier, decisions regarding the inclusion of topics dealing with race are often isolated in particular courses and programs such as departments of Black, Latino/a, Asian and Native American studies. This isolation, or academic segregation as we will refer to it here, supports the faulty assumption that a "faculty without ties to a

particular subordinated community do not have the authority to teach about it, and that faculty of color are segregated to certain courses because they have a privileged access to certain knowledge and ideas" (Thompson and Tyagi, 1993: 85–86).

This mindset often renders programs and even entire institutions subject to the "selective responsibility syndrome," subsequently giving majority faculty an excuse not to diversify their curricula and placing the onus of teaching certain substantive areas such as race on faculty of color (Thompson and Tyagi, 1993: 86–87). Baker (2004) sums it up accurately in her argument that "when respectful, receptive learning environments are created and when members of the faculty are prepared, learning at a more complex level can be increased by exploring those differences" (p. 694). In the next section we present case examples from two universities who actively create a space for dynamic dialogue centering on race and race issues across the curriculum. Both institutions are located within 20 miles of each other in a county primarily composed of two racial groups, Black and White, where individuals from these two racial groups make-up over 90% of the population (US States Census Bureau, 2001), further justifying our race-based focus. Outwardly these institutions are polar opposites, one a large public research institution with over 30,000 students located in an urban section of the city, and the other a small, private, teaching institution with about 5000 students with its main residential campus located in the suburbs. Although different in their institutional missions and visions, their commitments to and interest in effective intercultural education and dialogue are very similar.

### Methodological approach

Adhering to the intrinsic case study methodology, this project provides information about and descriptions of the efforts of two specific institutions that have demonstrated some levels of success in fostering environments conducive to intercultural dialogue (Stake, 1995). The intrinsic case study methodology is appropriate because of its ability to hold up for inspection the research sites that have been identified. The purpose of this project is not to build theory, but instead, to examine the programmatic and pedagogic approaches that the two institutions of higher learning employed to assist in the lofty goal of cultural competence. Stake (1995) argues that

“case researchers seek both what is common and what is particular about the case” (p. 438). In the “seeking” process there is a need to establish research parameters that will assist in the systematic collection and analysis of data. For the purposes of this study we relied on qualitative methods to lead us to the descriptions that make the cases important to the existing body of knowledge that centers on dynamic dialogues in intercultural environments.

Within the qualitative paradigm we contextualized this study using an intrinsic case study; we simultaneously employ participant observation as a method to assist us in data collection. Rooted in sociology, participant observation is a qualitative method that was refined by sociologist William Foote Whyte (1955) in his seminal work *Street Corner Society* and has been widely used in most academic disciplines. Participant observation is appropriate for this research because it allows for observation in natural settings.

### **Case 1: Robert Morris University: small private teaching institution**

This small, private institution provides a high-quality education at a reasonable cost. The university has nearly 5000 undergraduate and graduate students and prides itself on its high job placement rate. With teaching as its primary focus, the institution has begun to attract a more racially diverse student body. Inherent in this institutional growth and development is the need to prepare students for the intercultural workplace by teaching them how to acknowledge and respect differences that exist among themselves and beyond.

In 1995 the institution was awarded a federal grant to develop and implement a communication program designed to equip graduates for a competitive, intercultural business environment. As an ancillary goal, this program satisfies the university's corporate partners' need to hire students that are prepared to meet the demands of a diverse and interconnected global economy. This program builds a real-world advantage for its students. Named the Communication Skills program, it requires all students to complete nine communication-intensive courses, four of which are general education requirements, prior to graduation. Competencies are acquired through instruction in reading, writing, listening, speaking, computing, group process, and interculturalism. The program structure encourages students to focus on the development of these competencies every semester.

To further enhance program effectiveness, class size is limited to a Dean's maximum of 20 students allowing for increased individual attention. All students are required to achieve competency in each of the four general education communication-intensive courses prior to graduation, students who perform below this threshold are required to repeat the course.

Recognizing that audiences are both varied and diverse, the program is divided into two major sections comprised of nine required courses. One set of courses is audience focused—for example, Argument and Research; Reading and Writing Strategies; Public Speaking and Persuasion. These courses focus primarily on the development of skills that increase communicative performance in the workplace and beyond and have been designated interdisciplinary. The other set of courses comprise within a particular major designated communication-intensive, such as Strategic Management in the Management major. These major-related communication skills intensive courses allow students the time necessary to develop proficiency in reading and interpreting, writing, speaking, listening, and applying rhetorical skills, within their academic school or major.

The curriculum and administration is managed by a program director that is responsible for staffing over 100 sections each semester. All instructors teaching in the Communication Skills program are managed as a separate faculty via the Faculty Evaluation and Implementation Committee (FEIC). Mandatory FEIC meetings held twice per semester act as an opportunity for instructors to seek assistance with problems, share best practices, and likewise recommend modifications to the curriculum. These meetings are used to ensure some level of consistency across experiences. During these meetings instructors are organized into interest areas to maximize instructor interaction. Typically, it is here where instructors who tend to “do their own thing” are identified and managed. For each communication skills course there is a program syllabus that instructors are required to use as a base, although faculty are encouraged to incorporate teaching supplements that play to their cultural or pedagogic strengths. For more information on the RMU communication skills program, visit [www.rmu.edu](http://www.rmu.edu).

Specific to this research project is the Intercultural Communications Skills course. Originally designed in 1994 the course is described as providing an opportunity for students to consider factors



that emphasize how complicated “We” is when the variations of individuals and groups considered view audiences as having ethnic, gender, linguistic, occupational, and cultural differences, additionally the course introduces group process and the difficulties of achieving consensus in changing situations; and perceives research as a quest for alternative viewpoints, including those of other countries and cultures. This approach to teaching and learning contributes to the ability to engage students in such a way that their fear of discussions centering on race and race issues are minimized, thus moving students closer to cultural competence and effective intercultural communication.

By design, the Intercultural Communication Skills course forces students to reconceptualize their ways of thinking about culture and race. It contextualizes globalism and helps students understand that the world in which they currently operate may not be representative of the world within which they will be expected to compete. Students often describe this course as life-changing in that it contributes to the enhancing of their world view. The applied nature of the course forces students to engage in analytic exercises and assignments that they can connect to anticipated workplace and interpersonal conflicts. It is in this context that dynamic dialogue is introduced, managed, and processed. It is designed to “push buttons” meaning that the uncomfortable topics of race and culture can be explicated in ways that most students are not used to. One of the challenges of managing a curriculum with multiple instructors and sections is the ability to replicate experiences, especially in a culture-sensitive course like this. Administratively, there is pressure on the director to hire full and part-time instructors that have achieved some level of cultural competence. As suggested earlier, faculty are expected to bring to the class the diversity perspective that represents their strengths in teaching. Seeing that race, as a construct, is a common perspective it is typically a topic that most cultural instructors can discuss and process. The intercultural course is taught by both domestic and international faculty with Indian, Asian, African American and, Caucasian representation.

The course offers two opportunities to process experiences which may help give us a closer glance at the use of dynamic dialogue. The first experience includes a dynamic dialogue encounter with students in an Intercultural Communications Skills

course that centered on the use of the “N” word on campus. Many majority population students were confused by the fact that some African American students use the derogatory term regularly and publicly to refer to themselves and or other African Americans, a common issue in American society as indicated in the work by Asim (2007) in his book titled *The “N” Word: Who can say it, who shouldn’t, and why*. Asim (2007) argues the value of its rhetorical nuances both as a derogatory utterance and an in-culture term of endearment. The class, which was made up of predominantly European American students, struggled with the fact that this was a legitimate topic of discussion. In a journal entry a student expressed gratitude for allowing for the free discussion of an issue that had plagued her since high school. She admitted that she did not anticipate that she would ever have the opportunity to explore, this subject interculturally at such a non-emotional, non-threatening level. The course provided the context and skills necessary for empowering students to understand that they can communicate effectively in an intercultural setting using the general skills of empathy and sensitivity. Dynamic Dialogue centering on this “undiscussable” (Argyris, 2004) was an empowering experience based solely on the creation of an environment that had been established as culturally safe. As dangerous as the use of the N word may seem to non-culturally competent instructors, those with experience in cultural teaching recognize it as an excellent opportunity to engage students “where they are.” It is important to note that all instructors may not be interested in explicating the culture implications of this particular word but may choose other words from other experiences (gay, lesbian, disabled, women, etc.).

Another transformative example used to supplement the text book is the use of a teaching tool called the “differences exercise.” Although not department syllabus based, this assignment is popular because it acts as an excellent exercise to help teach the skill of empathy and the concept of privilege. It requires students to identify a cultural group that they are both unfamiliar with and interested in. Students are encouraged to choose a cultural experience that they have never been exposed to and an experience where they will be clearly identified as different. Upon instructor approval, they must superimpose themselves into that cultural experience, to get a sense of what it feels like to be “different.” After having interacted

with the cultural group, they must complete a written assignment that highlights their experience with feeling different. Most students take the exercise extremely seriously and oftentimes talk about having a deeper understanding of privilege as it relates to what it feels like to feel different. A good example of a difference experience based on race was one described by a white female student who is self-described as Roman Catholic and attends an all white church. She chose to visit an all Black Pentecostal church as representative of her difference experience. In her paper and associated presentation, she talked about the fear associated with the culturally unknown. She was amazed at the warm welcome she received, including the Pastor's invitation to spend time with her after the service for a face-to-face interview. In her presentation she shared that she would like to return to the church and would invite others to attend with her, thus representing an increased level of cultural competence.

Another important teaching tool is the textbook. *Communication Between Cultures* (Samovar and Porter, 2004) is one of the leading undergraduate textbooks for intercultural communication learning. The book focuses on both domestic and international cultural competence and provides a thorough examination of culture. As with most textbooks, students tend to have mixed emotions about the structure and content of the book, most commonly arguing that the authors spend too much time explicating the obvious. The authors, Samovar and Porter, make the assumption that students come to the course with very little knowledge about the cultural differences that exist among and between cultures, both domestically and internationally. By the end of the course students typically have a better understanding of the need for this baseline approach and overall, they agree that the work provides timely and relevant examples of how race and culture impact our everyday lives.

To the university's credit the course was officially adopted as a part of the university's core curriculum as an indication of the commitment to intercultural education. As a university core course, it is necessary to offer multiple sections of the course, requiring substantial adjunct assistance. Efforts are made to ensure that instructors of the course have a background in intercultural training, most often intercultural communication since the course was initially housed in the Department of Communication. Additionally, all instructors are

provided with a departmental syllabus which outlines the course objectives, goals, and the general approach to instruction, to provide continuity across student course experiences. All instructors, both full-time and adjunct, are required to attend faculty evaluation and instruction committee (FEIC) meetings once each semester where program assessment and teaching strategies are shared.

### **Case 2: University of Pittsburgh: large urban research institution**

This major research institution offers a wide range of traditional academic programs along with professional graduate programs to over 30,000 students with minority students making up approximately 12% of the student population. Founded over 200 years ago, this institution continues to maintain and further a tradition of offering quality teaching, research, and service. A decade ago this institution made a concerted effort to assist faculty in making their courses more inclusive in terms of race and gender when it developed the Faculty Diversity Seminar.

This seminar sponsored by the Office of the Provost with assistance from the Provost's Advisory Committee for the Faculty Diversity Seminar and the Center for Instructional Development and Distance Education (CIDDE), engages faculty in a 2-week dialogue focused on course development. University administrators including Deans and Department Chairpersons are asked to encourage faculty members, especially those who teach undergraduate courses, to apply for acceptance into the program. Faculty seminar applications highlight course topics, activities, readings and assignments, and the potential impact on students' understanding of diversity. In addition to considering the obvious selection criteria such as the potential for wide-ranging impact on student thinking and learning, match between course goals and the larger goals, and mission of the Faculty Diversity Seminar, the selection committee takes into account a variety of factors in evaluating the seminar's long-term impact. For example, the committee considers the applicant's:

- role in the course revision and implementation process;
- willingness to share information learned during seminar with faculty in their department/school;
- and potential to translate skills learned during the seminar into future courses and interest in curriculum redesign/revision.



Inclusion of these selection factors addresses the university's goal to ensure that participants' learning has a broad reaching impact on students and faculty and possibly a long-lasting impact on the curriculum. For more information on the Faculty Diversity Seminar, visit <http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/diversity/seminar.htm>.

The 10 faculty participants selected annually receive a nominal stipend and upon completion of this seminar are required to produce an enhanced course syllabus that meets the standards of their respective fields of study and addresses aspects of diversity in classroom activities, assignments, and pedagogy. During this 2-week seminar, held during the early part of the summer term, participants devote 8 h a day to scheduled seminar activities. Throughout the experience, seminar participants read relevant literature, discuss their courses, and meet individually with librarians and instructional designers to identify teaching resources and draw on the intellectual and practical resources of speakers, and local experts. Prior to the start of the seminar participants receive a packet of relevant readings on topics such as interculturalism and the impact of race, gender, and socio-economic status on syllabus design and adult learning styles. Seminar readings offer participants a common starting point from which the dynamic dialogue tool could be applied for discussing race in their classrooms. Readings provide participants with a framework for initial discussions on the biological perspectives of race and social construction of race in the United States (McIntosh, 1989; Omi and Winant, 1994; Roediger, 1994; Harrison, 1995). Participants' comments often reflect personal definitions of race and ways that multiple viewpoints are shaped by differences in power and privilege.

After taking the time to more fully understand the impact of race in the social milieu, participants delve into developing and/or refining skills of introducing the undiscussable, the concept of race within the classroom. Articles on classroom dynamics highlight items faculty should pay attention to as they create opportunities for dynamic dialogues focused on race in their classrooms (Cannon, 1990). Again conversations among participants use the devices proposed in the readings to create methods for initiating and managing conversations regarding race within their discipline. For example, Kirkham (1989) asserts that raising undiscussable items such as race often elicits emotionally charged statements that ricochet

throughout the classroom; the author offers diagnostic questions useful in charting these emotional waters. As participants consider the mechanics of re-designing their syllabi the readings provide practical ways for selecting articles, developing and refining exercises and creating conversational space for classroom discussions (Dittmar, 1985; Schuster and Van Dyne, 1985a, b; Thorne, 1989; Lauter, 1994; and Hill, 1995).

When attempting a syllabus re-design to address racial diversity, a critical decision point is the method used to incorporate the new material. For example, faculty teaching organizational behavior could easily address racial diversity with the addition of a single unit on workforce diversity. While this method "introduces a new topic it does so in opposition to what is presumed to be the norm" (Dittmar, 1985: 38). An organizational behavior course syllabus designed in this format may consequently isolate and structure discussions of racial diversity as separate from management topics such as leadership, motivation, group dynamics, etc. Subsequently seminar facilitators and presentations by diversity teaching experts challenge faculty to steer away from adopting this approach and to instead encourage them to pursue a strategy that integrates the discussion of race in multiple topics.

The seminar provides participants with experiential training assisting them in making their course more inclusive in terms of gender and race in both content and pedagogy. Throughout the seminar participants actively redesign their courses and present a revised draft of their course syllabi at the conclusion. Overall, the readings and subsequent seminar discussions aid participants in the preparation necessary to facilitate and engage in classroom conversations and exercises that provide for the open expression of differing voices and perspectives. As a pedagogic tool, through instructor training, dynamic dialogue provides faculty opportunities to identify course content as it relates to racial diversity, but more importantly time to consider how the inclusion of diversity materials and activities may challenge their identities, loyalties, and ways of being in the world (Hill, 1995). Discussing race continues to be a challenging topic for many faculty. Thus, allotting faculty the time and space to determine their response and ways to manage classroom discussions highlighting divergent views on oppression and power may assist them in avoiding conversations around undiscussables. We agree with Baker (2004) that

without faculty preparation on how to constructively engage in conversations discussing the undiscussable differences often are ignored, suppressed or attacked possibly resulting in diminished learning.

Given the limited number of faculty openings, the selection committee works diligently to ensure diversity among participants in respect to gender, race, and academic discipline. Consequently, participants share and discuss the utility of pedagogical techniques used across the university. For example, one program participant discussed the case teaching method by applauding this method as an effective vehicle for raising contemporary issues in the classroom. Although participants shared that the case method was an effective teaching tool, they also highlighted two challenges associated with this method. One challenge was the difficulty in identifying cases with racially diverse protagonists, and the second challenge centered on the difficulty in facilitating a case discussion when the instructor is uncomfortable addressing issues faced by these diverse protagonists.

A fundamental component of the seminar is the follow-up that occurs once the seminar has ended. Throughout the seminar participants actively redesign their courses and present a revised draft of their course syllabi at the conclusion. During the following semester faculty teaching their re-designed courses are presented with the opportunity to engage in dynamic dialogue about

the impact of their course enhancements with the seminar directors and past participants. This dialogue helps reassure faculty participants faced with the challenge of attempting to deal with diversity issues in the classroom and serves as an opportunity to continue the ongoing process of course refinement.

**Banks’ multicultural curriculum transformation measure**

Banks’ (2007) “Approach to Multicultural Curriculum Reform” presented in Figure 1 provides a context for critically examining the pedagogic and curricula transformation efforts at these institutions.

Banks proposes a four-level typology and argues that intercultural teaching and learning can be assessed by identifying where teaching and curriculum reform efforts fall on the four-level typology. The typology advances a hierarchical list of approaches that can be utilized by institutions to move beyond intercultural neutral curricula to create environments that incorporate dynamic dialogue and intercultural curricula. The Banks’ (2007) typology begins with Level 1 and 2 approaches which he calls the “contributions and additive approaches.” At these levels superficial contribution and/or additions are made to curricula and programs that give the appearance of an emphasis on cultural competence. Typically Level 1 and 2 approaches to interculturalism include superficial things like ethnic foods, readings with

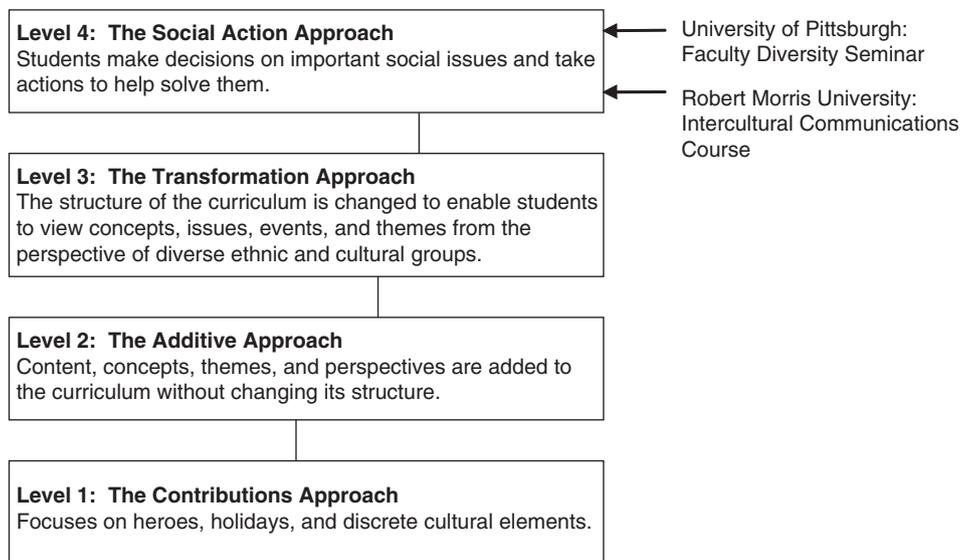


Figure 1 Banks’ (2007) four levels of integration of multicultural context.



diverse characters, cultural displays, etc. At this level cultural content is added to existing structures.

Levels 3 and 4 are the “Transformational and Social Action Approaches.” To reach Level 3 (transformational approach) the program must demonstrate a structural change either at the course, program or institutional level. With emphasis on transformation, this approach suggests a true commitment to diversity inclusion that includes time, and resources. Finally, at Level 4, the “Social Action Approach,” results are examined to determine the extent to which participants, both students and faculty, have been exposed to racial, cultural, and social issues, and the extent to which learning/exposure has resulted in action steps to help solve or at least respond to these issues.

### **Banks’ multicultural curriculum transformation applied**

It is our argument that the case examples presented represent the Level 4 approach in Banks’ model as indicated in Figure 1. Banks (2007) argues that it is at this level that the current materials, points of view and even voices are connected to a new and transformed curricular experience. At Level 4 there is a more formal commitment to moving from praxis to practice in that participants have gained a deeper understanding of the key concepts of multiculturalism and are prepared to incorporate these understandings into their everyday practices, whether in the classroom as instructors or in their lives as students.

We assert that there are Level 4 (social action) approach implications in the small private teaching institution case as demonstrated by the dynamic dialogue fostered by the university Intercultural Communication core course. While there are countless examples of the ways that students are encouraged to extend their learning beyond the classroom, the case example of the difficult discussion of the “N” word clearly explicates the extent to which the course has the potential to change lives by modeling effective ways to engage in dynamic dialogue about race and race matters. Likewise the “differences exercise” is an additional example of how the course contributes to the notion of social change. The extent to which students are engaged in experiential learning and are required to process it through evaluated writing dramatically contributes to their “ways of knowing” and has a potential impact on how they see the world and operate in it. Unlike many

university courses the Intercultural Communication Skills course heralds a goal of increased intercultural competence. Even students that do not totally “get it” come away from the class with an enhanced world view. By virtue of having been exposed to a dynamic dialogue environment they leave the course more aware of the impact of culture on society. Exercises like the “differences exercise” force students to immerse themselves in culturally risky situations that ultimately expose them to racial, cultural and social issues and the paper and presentation associated with the experience exposes them to processing/learning designed to result in Level 4 action steps to help solve or at least respond to these issues.

Similarly, examination of the efforts at the large urban research institution also indicates the Level 4 (transformation) approach. During the 2-week seminar participants spend considerable time deciding how their course can produce an impactful change on the University curriculum’s with respect to racial diversity. It is important to note that this is systematic change that is supported and encouraged by the University. While web resources aid faculty in identifying effective supplemental material, this in-depth seminar provides faculty with the necessary tools to go beyond superficial transformation described by Banks as the Additive Approach in level 2 and instead identify discipline-specific critical questions and assumptions. For example, re-design of a counseling course included readings on oppression and diversity early in the course to assist students in structuring their understanding of personal empowerment issues and to prepare them to better evaluate counseling theory from an intercultural perspective. In this vein, this seminar contributes to the creation of dynamic dialogues with faculty participants by assisting them in the re-design of their courses in a comfortable and intellectually challenging environment. While Banks’ (2007) description of the social action approach focuses on students as the primary actor for our purposes, we consider the faculty who participate in the diversity seminar as primary actors. We contend that these faculty efforts represent ways to address issues focusing on racial diversity in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

This article describes two perspectives that are currently utilized at institutions of higher learning to respond to the intercultural needs of its faculty,

staff, and students. To suggest that interculturalism is a critical life skill is fast becoming a given as institutions reexamine, redefine and reconstruct programs, curriculum, teaching methods and ultimately outcomes. Colleges and universities are aggressively exploring ways to foster intercultural understanding, communication and action.

Recognizing that there are many excellent examples of institutional approaches to cultural competence, this article focuses on two specific examples that highlight increased opportunities for dynamic dialogue. Because both cases approach cultural competence from two very different perspectives the need to compare them in regard to effectiveness is diminished. In fact, we argue that both institutions could benefit from exploring further dynamic dialogue opportunities. Based on the student's positive experiences in the Intercultural Communications Skills IV course, at the small, private university, we would recommend that the large public university explore the inclusion of a mandatory, proficiency-based course to their core curriculum, thus ensuring that all students are exposed to some level of intercultural training. Likewise, based on the success of the Faculty Diversity Seminar at the large, public institution, we would recommend that the small private university explore the creation of a faculty diversity seminar in which faculty members are encouraged, via incentives, to assess their course content for opportunities to incorporate diversity.

Our application of the Banks' Multicultural Curriculum reform model (2007) helps highlight the impact of the systematic inclusion of racial diversity topics in university curriculums. In the case of the faculty training program one of the weaknesses of the approach is the extent to which selection bias may impact the extent to which faculty both volunteer and are selected. That is to say that the faculty members that volunteer and are selected are oftentimes the ones that already have an appreciation for the power of diversity in teaching. Likewise, they are most likely the ones already making an attempt to include diversity in their teaching. The Provost's Diversity Committee actively encourages deans and department chairpersons to recommend and recruit seminar participants among their faculty, recognizing that outside of education departments, most graduate programs fail to actually offer courses in how to teach at the college level, and that new faculty members are often expected to come to the class-

room with an innate ability to teach effectively. Providing faculty the concentrated time to develop and refine their teaching skills through the dynamic dialogue pedagogic approach highlights ways to create an inclusive classroom environment applicable across disciplines and faculty teaching interests.

In the case of the small private institution that offers intercultural communication as a core course in the general education program, one of the weaknesses identified here centers on the ability to attract and retain culturally competent, committed part-time instructors and manage individual sections such that students are equally exposed to dynamic dialogue opportunities. It is not uncommon in core courses that offer multiple sections led by part-time faculty to have experiences where the vision, goals and objectives of the course and associated experiences is not fully achieved. While the program attempts to manage the process through its FEIC meetings, there is no effective way to ensure identical experiences.

The fact that both institutions are engaged in innovative approaches to cultural competence is promising. However, this does not suggest that the intercultural project is complete; in fact, the road ahead is probably both longer and more difficult to maneuver than the path we have traveled thus far. This research highlights two examples of sound programs and approaches, representing the necessary educational foundations for the intercultural paradigm change. With that foundation laid, the real challenge is in reconciling the instructor's ability to teach the critical elements of cultural competence with the core competencies necessary for student success in an increasingly diverse world. We argue that dynamic dialogue is the key to this success. The ability to both generate and moderate this dialogue is something that will not come easily or naturally to either faculty or students. These dynamic dialogues will begin to occur when instructors and students alike are equipped with sufficient knowledge such that the dialogue can be entered into in a contextually appropriate and safe environment. Imagine a classroom where a White student feels empowered enough to ask a Black instructor why some African American youth refer to themselves as "niggahs" with African American students in the classroom. Now imagine a classroom where African American students examine a course syllabus and feel a sense of relief because the readings, assignments and projects



connect with their lived experiences. As demonstrated in our intrinsic case study research, it is in

these dynamic dialogue environments where intercultural competence is more likely to be fostered.

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