

Diversity as an Orientalist Discourse
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The goal of promoting diversity is deep-rooted in the post-civil rights activities of U.S. educational institutions. Universities across the country attempt to foster diversity by seeking a diverse student body, creating initiatives that promote diversity, institutionalizing committees and administrative positions with the sole purpose of overseeing diversity, and implementing curricular strategies to support academic diversity. The pursuit of diversity is so integral to the survival and attractiveness of college campuses that some universities even lie in order to appear diverse to potential students and public supporters. Such was the case of the University of Wisconsin, Madison whose officials digitally inserted the face of a black student into an image of white football fans in order to portray a diverse picture of the university's student body. Demonstrating that diversity is valued is a staple of any academically competitive US university.

While U.S. universities engage in a variety of efforts to foster diversity in some cases these attempts are inadequate, insufficient, and/or misguided. In such instances, diversity efforts contribute to camouflage essentialist interpretations of cultural differences. In this article, I analyze the various definitions of diversity given by undergraduate students who enrolled in a course entitled "Cultural Diversity" in the U.S. Through this analysis I illustrate how pedagogical attempts to introduce alternative readings of diversity are undermined when they are part of loosely articulated efforts. Thus, I provide a critique of essentialist interpretations of diversity in educational settings by borrowing some ideas from Edward Said's work on Orientalism and discussing examples of classroom and curricular approaches that can overcome the limits of diversity as currently articulated in some institutions of higher learning.

Diversity as the New Orientalism

Two aspects of Edward's Said's work on Orientalism are pertinent to understanding the current ways in which diversity is deployed as an Orientalist discourse. One is his treatment of essentialism, the other is his explanation of hierarchical arrangements in colonized settings. In his seminal work Said (1978) argued that colonialism is sustained by the representation of cultural differences as binary opposites. Said showed that Orientalism was linked to the power of the West to authoritatively create and contrast the non-West. Said demonstrated that this essentialist practice was a mark of colonial epistemologies (Dirlik 2001). In addition, he suggested that colonial ideologies relied on the hierarchical organization of cultural differences by rendering inferiority to the colonized and seemingly inherent cultural superiority to the colonizer (Said 1989).

In the U.S. essentialism and hierarchization are evident in the ways in which cultural differences are currently debated. Orientalist discourses are reflected in discussions

about language, curriculum, representation, and immigrants' rights. Education has been the focal point of many of these arguments becoming the arena of debate about programs and practices that aim to maintain or challenge the legacy of colonialist ideologies in historically postcolonial conditions. For example, Donaldo Macedo (2000) described U.S. debates against bilingual education as a form of colonialism because in his view colonialism "...imposes 'distinction' as an ideological yardstick against which all other cultural values are measured..." (2000:16). In particular as he suggested,

If we analyze closely the ideology that informs the present debate over bilingual education and the present polemic over the primacy of Western heritage versus multiculturalism, we can begin to see and understand that the ideological principles that sustain those debates are consonant with the structures and mechanisms of a colonial ideology designed to devalue the cultural capital and values of the colonized (Macedo 2000:20).

Indeed, recent controversies about immigration reform in the US renewed colonialist dilemmas about the value of "foreign" cultures and languages other than English. These dilemmas revolve around questions about the extent to which the government should promote English proficiency among immigrants. In a presidential address delivered to the nation on April 2006, President George W. Bush outlined five objectives which he deemed necessary for an effective comprehensive immigration reform plan. The fifth objective urged the nation to honor the tradition of the melting pot by helping immigrants assimilate to "American" culture. This process of cultural assimilation could be partly achieved, as the President suggested, by encouraging immigrants to master the English language. Thus, as the President claimed in his speech, the US is willing to "honor the heritage of all who come here" only if that heritage is ultimately appropriated and transformed into behaviors familiar and recognizable to the "American" cultural yardstick.

Critical scholars of education such as McLaren (1995), Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) suggest that discourses of assimilation and common applications of multiculturalism in education are guided by essentialist scripts. They critique assimilationist versions of multiculturalism, such as the melting pot, because they reproduce, in their view, unproblematic and dominant visions of cultural differences. While these versions of multiculturalism can advocate for the inclusion of multiple voices in the curriculum (McLaren 1995; Nieto 1995; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997) they depict cultural differences as essentially the manifestation of the same phenomena. In many educational curricula diversity is devoid of historicity. Discussions of cultural differences are organized around prescriptive laundry lists of traits (McLaren 1995) that describe language, religion, customs as the essence of a people. While exposure to these traits may increase students' awareness of practices different from their own, they do not explain or challenge hierarchical rankings of cultural differences or question the processes by which such differences are assigned

meaning. In this way, essentialist versions of diversity currently in vogue in many educational institutions serve as “...exclusionary and marginalizing practice[s]... that provide the cultural content for the construction of binaries that differentiate us/them, self/other” (Torres, Miron, and Inda 1999:7).

Indeed as Bhabha suggested, “Multiculturalism represented an attempt both to respond and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference...” (Bhabha 1990: 08). Essentialist readings of diversity limit complex interpretations of cultural differences because diversity is defined in opposition to what is considered “normal” or not diverse. While diversity in this sense encourages multiplicity, this multiplicity is judged by a predetermined norm. In addition, in nations like the U.S. where race constitutes an organizing principle of social relations (Omi and Winant 1994), essentialist diversity scripts contribute to racialize rather than neutralize the “abnormality” assigned to cultural differences (Bhabha 1990).

Unproblematic celebrations of differences lead to feelings of guilt and resentment among some students who feel that they do not have a culture or even among students who feel that their culture does not fit pre-established parameters of differentiation. Enrolling in a diverse campus and attending courses in which students can learn about diversity seemingly provides many of them the ability to overcome their differential cultural deficits. The knowledge promoted under the banner of diversity is thus often uncomplicated (Darder 1991) because it does not critically address how culture is embedded in power relations and historical conflicts (Sleeter 1996; Miron 1999; Moya 2002). In this way, diverse cultural knowledge is trivialized (Ladson-Billings 1999). Current expressions of diversity in some U.S. college campuses “...tend to elide...differentials of power between dominant sectors and subaltern subjects, instead celebrating in unproblematised ways the crossing of...borders as supposed evidence of true diversity in our democratic society” (Aparicio 1998:7).

Specifically, in some universities the use of diversity reveals a “...particular organization of difference” (Appadurai 2005:428) that signifies failure to distinguish between “cultural diversity” and the “culture of diversity” (Appadurai 2005). As Appadurai (2005) suggested, institutions of higher learning tend to manage diversity by only using strategies of addition and extension. This usually involves isolated strategies such as adding to the curriculum, or recruiting “diverse” students and faculty. This “narrow” affirmation of diversity does little to transform essentialist readings of diversity and pedagogical strategies traditionally valued by the academy (Appadurai 2005). Cultural diversity at the university level “...has not succeeded in creating a habitus where diversity is at the heart of the apparatus itself” (Appadurai 2005:429). Thus many so called diversity efforts miss the possibility to create a culture of diversity because they are not driven by a conviction in the “epistemic value of cultural diversity” (Moya 2002).

The critiques of diversity I present here should not be interpreted as attempts to undermine diversity efforts aimed at increasing the representation of students and faculty of color (Gurin and Nagda 2006; Gregory 1998) or furthering the inclusion of our work in the

scholarly canon (Zúñiga, Williams, and Berger 2005; Anderson 2005; Gurin and Nagda 2006). I am, however, trying to caution that such efforts are actually undermined by the lack of institution-wide commitments (Gregory 1998), comprehensive initiatives (Troutman 1998), and the failure to take seriously the ideologically transformative potential of diversity (Haugabrook 1998).

At the university where I currently teach cultural diversity is in part accomplished through the core undergraduate requirement “Cross Cultural, Diversity and Global Studies.” The purpose of this three credit hour course requirement is to “Promote[] knowledge and appreciation of national and international cultural diversity” (Texas 2002-03). The courses that fulfill this requirement range in discipline and topic. For example students can fulfill this single course requirement by taking a course about “Race, Class, Gender, and Ethnicity” or about “The Free Enterprise System in a Global Environment.” While research has shown the effectiveness of curricular efforts on students (Zúñiga, Williams, and Berger 2005) when they are loosely articulated they may have no effect or actually work against other diversity efforts. As an example Anderson (2005) points out that despite the numerous efforts to increase the number of students of color in four year institutions the largest growth of participation in higher education is evident in two year colleges. In addition, Anderson (2005) argues that uncoordinated diversity efforts such as the singular “textual inclusion of multicultural and diversity works” actually work to provide cultural capital for white students. Such efforts may unintentionally further alienate students and faculty of color when they are not integrated into a coordinated plan.

The Challenge of Teaching Cultural Diversity

For the past three years I have taught an anthropology course titled, “Cultural Diversity in the U.S.” This course satisfies the three credit hour undergraduate requirement discussed earlier. Although many students enroll in the course because they are specifically interested in the topic, others, as is usually the case of required courses, enroll in this particular class because it allows them to get the diversity requirement out of the way. Regardless of their reasons, I approach this class as an opportunity to motivate students to think critically about diversity and to challenge their own assumptions about cultural differences. Thus I organize the course around four themes: 1) Culture and Diversity: What is Difference?, 2) Ethnic and Racial Categorization: What do all the Labels mean? 3) Sites of Identity Construction: How is Difference Currently Manifested? and 4) Current Problems and Possibilities. Through these themes I try to motivate students to think beyond the limitations of diversity by relying on an anti-racist/decolonial pedagogy. I attempt to create a “culture of diversity” (Appadurai 2005) by encouraging my students to understand and acknowledge the historically constructed underpinnings and current manifestations of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia in the U.S. Guided by anti-racist/decolonial counter-narratives I seek through my pedagogy to historically center the experiences that my students and I bring to the university classroom as legitimate sources of knowledge and transformation. Thus,

while students who enroll in the course Cultural Diversity in the U.S. are not assigned Edward Said's work, they are introduced to his critique of essentialism and his ideas about the hierarchization of cultural differences through the courses' themes, class activities, assignments, and readings. Pedagogically students are confronted with how power relationships shape constructions of reality through dialogic efforts to build community (Tatum 2000) and a specific emphasis on discussing culture as a concept (Moya 2002).

In my teaching practices I incorporate the use of experiences to challenge essentialist notions of cultural differences. I follow the emphasis of Critical Race Theorists on voice and narrative "...in order to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, [as] a first step in understanding the complexities of racism" (Ladson-Billings 1999:16). I utilize students' personal stories in my teaching to model this use of narrative and to give voice to multiple subjectivities. Under this pedagogy, I also engage my students as a Latina instructor to acknowledge and give voice to the embeddedness and intersectionality of race, gender, and class and frame the process of ethnicization as historical, constructed, and yet real.

I also ask my students to engage their personal experiences through a series of ethnographic exercises in which I ask them to describe their own sense of identity and to talk to family and friends about their specific family stories. Students, particularly white students, are often perplexed by how difficult it is for them to write about themselves in analytical ways. Furthermore, most white students also find it difficult to describe their identity in racial terms. Often they discuss their identity by lamenting that they have no culture, admitting that they never thought about it, and/or concluding that their racial/ethnic identity is "American." In many instances, white students and students of color are also surprised when they realize that the syllabus for a course on cultural diversity includes whiteness as a topic.

These experiences are not unique to the students enrolled in my course. They are evidence of the ways in which whiteness is masked as racial and cultural neutrality or normality in this society and of the difficulties of engaging whiteness in a curriculum about diversity (Hurtado 1999; Bonnett 1999). By asking all students to think and write about their personal experiences I create a pedagogical space where their cultures and identities become visible to them (Tatum 2000). Thus by critically engaging their personal experiences students begin to see their identities as reference points through which they can interrogate social and cultural formations (Moya 2002). This interrogation also takes place in community by anonymously sharing what students write with the rest of the class, through student-led discussions of the class readings, and group activities.

One of the most challenging and perhaps more revealing assignments for students who enroll in my version of cultural diversity is an assignment entitled "the gay pin exercise." This exercise was brought to my attention by colleagues who used it in courses about race, sexuality, and social inequality. For this exercise, I bring to class various buttons that exemplify gay pride. Some of the buttons simply show the colors of the rainbow flag others have slogans such as "gay rights are civil rights." The number of buttons that I make available to students purposely does not equal the number of students enrolled in the course.

Because of this, I tell students that the exercise is organized around teams. Each student in each team is asked to wear the pin for at least 24 hours and to write a short paper that documents the reactions they receive from others as they wear the pin. I provide each team time to talk to their group members in class so that they can organize their activities, follow the exercise guidelines, and complete the assignment by the given deadline. As each team discusses the logistics of completing the assignment, I walk around the classroom listening to their conversations and pretending to help them organize their schedules so that each team member can complete the exercise on time. However, the real purpose of this is to listen to the reactions students have about the assignment.

I have never encountered a student who directly refused to complete the exercise, although I have witnessed plenty of hesitation. Most of this hesitation tends to be shared in polite ways when I come close to the groups to listen to their discussion. Thus, rather than expressing their feelings about the exercise to me, most students try to come up with alternative ways to follow the rules of the assignment and minimize any potential discomfort. For example, student athletes often ask me “Do I have to wear this to practice or to the locker room? Other students ask, “Do I have to wear it to church?” “Does wearing the pin to bed count toward the 24 hour requirement?” I can tell by my students’ facial expressions and by the lowering of their voices as I walk by the groups that more sincere discussions about the exercise take place when I am not present to listen to their comments.

I allow students to work on the logistics of the exercise for about 20 minutes of the 50 minute class period. After that time I reveal to students that they do not actually have to complete the exercise. At this point, I often hear a collective sigh of relief and students begin to voice to the entire class the hesitations they shared about the exercise with their team members. During the collective discussion students are very candid about their feelings towards the exercise. Some students clearly voice their opposition to the imposition of having to wear a button that does not represent their beliefs. Other students find problematic the possibility that wearing the pin might send the wrong message about their sexuality. For example, often students comment that they do not have anything against homosexuality but they are afraid that people might think they are gay. Yet, other students are actually surprised by the hesitations and explanations of their peers. The possibility of having to wear a button with such symbolic weight leads students to envision, albeit momentarily, what it might be like to embody a contested marginalized identity. In the process of this discussion, “...students potentially reconstitute themselves as political/learning subjects, capable of questioning, resisting, and transforming dominant forms of discourse...” (Mirón 1999:83).

Some students actually request to do the assignment. Their experiences wearing the button are often painful and in some cases surprising as documented in the short papers they write for extra-credit. For some students the gay pin exercise allows them to encounter subtly or not so subtly the contested terrain of sexual identity and its “imperativeness” (Barth 1969) when interacting with others. In some cases, as one student suggested, they are surprised by the reactions they receive. One student commented the following about his surprise ‘I

thought this would be an easy assignment, ‘I do not know any one that will hassle me’, that is why I decided to do it. I was wrong.” Students who actually carry out the gay pin exercise experience the deep ingrained assumptions related to messages about sexual orientation. They realize, as one student put it, the “difficulties” of being at the mercy of someone else’s gaze, “The difficulty in this exercise came along when I went out in public to which no one knew me. This was difficult because I have never had people look at me as if I was voting Satan for president.” The exercise allows students to see their communities and their everyday interactions through a different set of lenses. Many students are surprised at the reactions they get from strangers and people close to them. As a student put it, “This assignment really did open my eyes that not everyone is as open minded as I thought.” In some cases the exercise leads them to openly discuss the taboo issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia with people close to them. In other cases, students are confronted by the painful reality of experiencing homophobia from their loved ones. I was told by a student that wearing the pin allowed her to realize her boyfriend’s homophobia. After a painful argument with her boyfriend the student ended the relationship. Ultimately, for some students the gay pin exercise allows them to connect multiple experiences of marginality. For one student this led to the realization that “...in time people will be more accepting of homosexuals, and they will get the rights that they deserve but right now they are going through their own type of civil rights movement like the black people did.” Students’ experiences with the gay pin exercise illustrate the validating and transformative potential of anti-racist/decolonial pedagogies when addressing cultural diversity.

Despite these potentially transformative incursions most students’ notions of diversity towards the end of the course remain grounded in fixed notions of cultural differences. In addition to the exercises described earlier, students enrolled in the course “Cultural Diversity in the U.S.” are given two midterm exams in which they are asked to critically reflect on the ideas and concepts presented in the readings, class lectures, and discussions. In an extra-credit component of the second midterm exam I asked students to answer the question, “What does diversity mean to you?” Given our engagement with the social constructedness of identities through experiential activities such as the gay pin exercise, I expected students to come up with definitions of diversity that challenged uncritical views of diversity as something to be appropriated or as a representation of uncommon differences or Otherness. As an educator committed to an anti-racist/decolonial pedagogy I was surprised by the majority of my students’ answers.

Their answers to the question, “What does diversity mean to you?” indicated their attempts to relate what they learn in my class to the essentialist scripts about diversity they encounter outside my classroom. For most students diversity simply meant different people. These differences entailed “color,” “race,” “religion,” “culture,” “ways of living,” and “thinking.” Thus diversity simply had to do with variety or the presence of a “heterogeneous population.” This variety, in their view, was measured against an unspoken norm they considered to be “...often times the most boring.” For some students defining diversity as

just variety lead them to think of diversity as something related to their cultural backgrounds. As one student put it, "In fact I'm pretty diverse myself, I'm all sorts of different kinds of European, and also Iranian." While an important aspect of understanding their situated positionings is recognizing the ways in which their lives are affected by cultural processes, for most students the recognition of variety in their lives was devoid of an analysis of the processes that make such expressions of difference more or less relevant to them and others.

In addition, the conceptualization of diversity as just variety was manifested in some students' notions of diversity as something that can be appropriated. For one student "Diversity represents the ability to befriend someone of color..., the opportunity to attend an African ritual, the chance to learn Spanish from a native speaker." Similarly for another student diversity was something to be acquired from designated diverse settings, "It would mean going to a festival-such as the Irish Festival, going to a meeting like the Star Wars convention, eating ethnic food such as at a Greek restaurant or learning another language." In this way diversity was another easily attainable commodity. As a student put it diversity "...gives me the opportunity to experience everything without leaving Dallas."

Students' definitions of diversity also reflected their views of diversity as the current state of affairs. Ideas of diversity as the status quo were related primarily to the nation. Diversity represented "being proud of our country," "who we are as a nation," "Diversity is what makes America such a powerful country because we can relate to others and others can relate to us." For other students diversity was the state of affairs in "this class," "this university." Diversity then was what brings the nation or the university together as communities of differences represented in people. These views of diversity suggest what it should be about, but assume that diversity has been accomplished. For some students cultural differences were something "good," "healthy," "positive," achieved through "peaceful and accepting coexistence." For these students their views of diversity were related to celebratory images of cultural differences that ignored conflict. As a student put it, "If you were to ask me what diversity meant to me last semester, I would have said something like 'peoples' differences. I'd like to think I've matured throughout the course of this class. To me diversity now means the differences and similarities between individuals as well as cultures. And I firmly believe it is something to be celebrated, not hidden."

Students' varying views of diversity reflect a push and pull between essentialist and non-essentialist scripts of diversity. For one student diversity meant contesting the norm, "Diversity is complex and intrinsic and is a necessity in society if you ask me. Along with being a difference diversity is also a norm, because when you really think about it homogeneity is a farce and can never truly be achieved—luckily." For this student contesting the myth of homogeneity provided the possibility to think of diversity as related to the processes that make differences meaningful. For another student challenging the myth of variety as related to diversity meant experiencing a different epistemology. As he put it, "But diversity can never fully be grasped until you stop *observing* (emphasis in original) it as if it were an issue of color, and start *listening to* it—interviewing a neighbor who is unlike you to

touch a life experience completely different from your own.” Thus for some students the contesting power of diversity came from its potential to “...be an entirely paradigm shifting.”

“Profound Signs” of Transformative Potential

After showing the film “Black Is/Black Ain’t” during class I was given the poem “Beauty of Being Black” written by Cheylon (a pseudonym) a student who felt inspired by the film. The poem included the following explanation, “This is a poem I wrote that I thought would go with the movie.” The film chronicles the life of Marlon Riggs as he battled and eventually died of AIDS. As a requiem of Marlon Riggs’ life the film explores both the cultural “beauty” and challenges of being a Black homosexual man. Riggs discussed profound questions related to community, sexuality, race, manhood, and sexism from the perspective of someone facing the ultimate human vulnerability—death.

Similarly, in her poem, Cheylon describes the “Beauty of Being Black” as “profound signs.” Cheylon chronicles the struggles of the past as the seeds of future empowerment. She challenges Blacks to “break free from society” by remembering “where we came from.” For her, slavery, poverty, AIDS are signs of societal oppression and ultimate expressions of its misinterpretation of Blackness. Cheylon characterizes these signs as “profound” because they are incomprehensible to “fragile minds” yet beautiful to those that are able to understand the “binds” conveyed by such signs.

For Cheylon the “profound signs” of Marlon Riggs’ experiences resonated with her interpretations of her racial identity. The film created a space for her to reflect and share how she felt about her blackness. Through her poem Cheylon was able to convey her own vision of what it means to be Black, thus, like Marlon Riggs, she used this creative space as a way to engage her agency as author of her own racial experiences. Although Cheylon had written poetry prior to enrolling in my class, up to that point she did not feel that poetry was something that belonged in a university or in a course about anthropology. She continued to write poetry and shared one more poem with me during the rest of the semester.

An anti-racist/decolonial pedagogy can be a powerful tool to challenge and transform essentialist scripts of diversity because it is “...an intellectual and political practice aimed at decolonizing racially exclusive institutional curricula and teaching practices in college and university classrooms” (Sanchez-Casal 2002:59). Discussing racism directly and incorporating experiences and multiple voices as legitimate knowledge constitute a “radical incursion” (Sanchez-Casal 2002:59) into epistemologies capable of sending “profound signs” of recognition and transformation to all students and instructors. In reflecting upon the legacy of Orientalism Edward Said (1985) considered that his work had the most impact in propelling the points of view of scholars marginalized by Western discourse. Said explained that “Orientalism reconsidered in this wider and libertarian optic entails nothing less than the creation of new objects for a new kind of knowledge” (Said 1985:91). This legacy, as described by Said (1985), resided in a “decentered consciousness,” an oppositional praxis,

and ultimately a political intervention written by those on the margins of intellectual discourse, cultural production, and political power.

When an oppositional praxis is articulated with the notion of cultural differences the possibility of a third pedagogical space —one that moves beyond established binaries—is created (Bhabha 1990). This kind of oppositional praxis is specifically articulated in Anzaldua’s *mestiza* consciousness (1999) and in the work of other feminist scholars (Haraway 1991; Hurtado 1996; Sandoval 2000). The anti-racist/decolonial classroom is about this “radical incursion” because by introducing the vulnerability and discomforts associated with personal experiences the classroom becomes a space in which feelings and the naming of injustices are validated and confronted by both students and instructors. The role of the educator as a positioned subject is integral to this pedagogical approach (Perry 1993; Giroux 1992). Feeling and experiencing in the classroom is certainly challenging to both students and educators who are used to thinking of the classroom as a neutral space. In the anti-racist/decolonial classroom students and instructors act as challengers and creators of knowledge (Nieto 1995) and defy the prevailing teacher/student binary (Sanchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002:7) as a way to encourage a “culture of diversity.”

The radicalism of the anti-racist/decolonial classroom occurs in “Naming *difference* as the theoretical subject of the classroom . . .” (Sanchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002:7). For Cheylon and some of the students in my Cultural Diversity course this “radical incursion” constituted a “profound sign” that allowed them to experience transformation through poetry, wearing a pin, and in some cases thinking about the term diversity.

This “radical incursion” also relies on a “pedagogical project of coalition” (Sasaki 2002) in which teaching and learning about the culture concept through a “culture of diversity” are used as instruments of social justice. As Sasaki defined it,

A pedagogical project of coalition is one that works simultaneously on two levels: externally with the aim of critiquing the institutional, cultural, and social hierarchies in which we are located, and internally, with the aim of interrogating how those locations inform who we are as both multiple and contradictory subjects. It involves helping students mediate these two levels of critical inquiry so that connections can be made along the lines of difference rather than sameness (2002:44).

This coalitional framework makes the classroom work of instructors and students political. Christine Sleeter (1996) identified the political interrogation that should take place in US classrooms when describing the ways in which multicultural education can act as a social movement. This alignment of knowledge as defying and transforming predisposed binaries of theory/practice, self/other, teacher/student, difference/sameness can be radical and liberatory (Poplin 1993; Sleeter and McLaren 1995; Gay 1997; Giroux 1997; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997). In this way, pedagogy can be used as a catalyst to help college instructors

and students engage in cultural struggles against the injustices of cultural essentialism (Freire 1998; Solorzano and Yosso 2001).

However, in some instances, as students' definitions of diversity revealed, this "radical incursion" is difficult to accomplish. This difficulty is exacerbated when efforts to promote diversity occur in isolation. For some of the students who enrolled in my class diversity continued to be solely associated with "...simply recognizing and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice" (Berlak and Moyenda 2001:92). Diversity was measured by the ability "to get along" thus the building of coalition and community in the classroom was evaluated through the premise of unchallenged variety and multiplicity. Recently I took students enrolled in my course "Race, Ethnicity, Identity" to talk to three student organizations that gathered in what is designated in my campus as a Free Speech Area. Two of the organizations present represented opposing views of immigration. One of them was involved in a contentious incident in 2005 because of their sponsorship of an event they called "Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day." Students in my class came up with three questions that they wanted to discuss with representatives of the organizations present in the Free Speech event. I wanted students to gather information about the organizations' purposes and to give them an opportunity to interrogate and explicitly engage in an event with important political ramifications for our university and local communities. I was interviewed by a reporter from my university's newspaper who was there to cover the event. The next day the presence of my class was hailed in an editorial piece as an example of relevant learning taking place on campus. The editorial piece described the event entitled "Invasion" as a success because "...it fostered debate and discussion about a contentious issue—in a way in which superfluous passions were deflated, providing the foundations for mutual understanding" (Editorial 2006).

The seeming success of the event could be attributed to the participation of students, absence of overt violence, and seemingly peaceful dialogue. However, the "Invasion" was ridden with conflictive views. The depiction of immigration as an "invasion" akin to terrorism acted as evidence of the discursive violence that immigrants and descendants of immigrants were subjected to during this "free speech" event. I heard one student who belonged to the group that depicted immigration as an "Invasion" say that Mexicans and other immigrants are "invaders" because they come to the US illegally and don't want to learn English. As I made a comment about his assumptions my status as a Spanish speaking immigrant remained unknown and concealed. The violence absent from the editorial's description of the event was visible and really apparent to some of the spectators and participants who did not share similar views. The assumption that consensus was achieved by the event marginalized other narratives, interpretations, and experiences of this "invasion." Furthermore, the equation of consensus with seemingly peaceful reactions contributed to reinforce and sustain opposition against interpretations that remained marginalized because they challenged the violence and racism explicit and implicit in the event. The problem with consensual versions of cultural differences as contained in essentialist discourses of diversity,

such as the one described in the editorial piece, is that they “...often end[] up neutralizing difference by way of appropriating it in the name of equality and inclusion...” (Sasaki 2002:32).

Although essentialist versions of diversity sustain resistance against the challenges voiced by students and educators in anti-racist/decolonial classrooms, there are ways to encourage a culture of diversity. One way to subvert the pressure exhorted against the transformative potential of anti-racist/decolonial pedagogies is to create required “Diversity Curriculum Clusters” to revoke the single course “diversity” requirement prevalent in some institutions of higher learning (Sanchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002). While sixty-three percent of colleges and universities in the U.S. have a diversity requirement in place most universities use a single course model (Humphreys 2000). A single course, as described in this article, can provide opportunities for instructors and students to foster a “culture of diversity,” however this opportunity is too minimal. By incorporating a series of required interdisciplinary courses the clusters “...would allow students to become self-reflexive about the progressive cognitive and affective stages they will confront in courses that analyze the social construction of racial, gender, class, and sexual identities” (Sanchez-Casal and Macdonald 2002:15).

A culture of diversity can be accomplished by requiring students to take courses from Ethnic Studies programs or to minor in Ethnic Studies. Certainly, offering a series of required courses rather than the single course “fix” to diversity can provide multiple spaces for exploration and challenge the disciplinary organization of universities. However, such a requirement cannot be conceptualized as a “twelve step program” towards some kind of landmark understanding and achievement of diversity. As Audrey Thompson (2004) warns, radical projects can not be measured by a predetermined road map or a progressive series of “anti-racist work zones.” The point of the requirement is not to crown students with the achievement of diversity as they complete it, but to model for them a project of coalition so that they can continue the process of coalition building outside university classrooms.

Since the project of deepening diversity in universities is also radical, another way to reflect and support its anti-racist/decolonial aims is by doing away with the term diversity. The required series could be named instead “Radical Curriculum Clusters,” “Decolonial Curriculum Clusters,” “Radical Ethnic Studies.” While many educators are engaged in this work in and outside their universities renaming the curricular context of their teaching can be a powerful way to encourage a culture of diversity in universities.

More importantly pedagogical and curricular efforts related to diversity cannot take place in isolation. Universities must acknowledge the epistemic value of diversity (Moya 2002) by creating a culture of diversity that is reflected in comprehensive initiatives and institution wide-commitments (Gregory 1998; Troutman 1998). Such commitments need to involve efforts related to structural diversity—“the numerical representation of diverse groups”—informal interactional diversity—“the frequency and quality of intergroup interaction”—, and classroom diversity—“learning about diverse peoples and gaining

experience with diverse peers in the classroom” (Gurin et al. 2002). These multidimensional efforts can be modeled on what Tatum (2000) calls the ABC approach. This approach involves affirming identity, building community, and cultivating leadership. Together these efforts can result in the transformation of higher education (Haugabrook 1998).

Certainly there remains much to be done in order to move beyond the current limitations of diversity. Many painful encounters with a culture of resistance remain. Nevertheless, college instructors must continue to offer “profound signs” to their students and communities and to this end universities should be prepared to leave behind their essentialist renditions of diversity.

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