

Workshop Summary Notes
Best Practices in Diversity Strategic Planning Workshop

***Including Diversity: A Strategy for Improving Teaching and Learning in
All Courses and Curricula***

Wednesday, October 5, 2011

508 Rider Building

10:00-11:30 a.m. and 1:15-2:45 p.m.

Presenter: Dr. Thomas F. Nelson Laird

Associate Professor, Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

Welcome

Dr. Victoria Sanchez, Assistant Vice Provost for Educational Equity

Dr. Sanchez provided a brief overview of Dr. Thomas F. Nelson Laird's credentials.

Morning Session

Introduction

Dr. Thomas F. Nelson Laird

When he moved from mathematics to higher education...teaching and learning became his focus. During the time when Michigan was under fire for Affirmative Action policies, he became interested in including diversity into courses.

Some Initial Thoughts

- We focus on content too much.
- We simplify too much (Is it a diversity course or not? Diversity is just for certain fields, etc.).
- We often lack ways to organize our thinking about this topic.

The Concept of Diversity Inclusivity

Why include diversity?

- We need ways to take advantage of diversity
- We face complex problems

We need students who can think complexly: bringing diversity into classrooms helps students to consider empathy, agency, inequalities, and develop critical complex thinking.

Model draws upon the work of James Banks, University of Washington.

Moving along a continuum from monocultural education to a contributions approach

Spectrum idea: lack of diversity all the way through. Need an integrative approach. There are levels of diversity integration.

Problem: How do I move from one place on the spectrum to another when teaching?

Solution: Drawing from feminist movement, develop a focus on content and process. Think about the instructors and students as part of the process.

8 elements in a general course (Lattuca and Stark, 2009)

9 elements of a course (Nelson Laird, 2010)

Foundations/perspectives from diversity literature

Example: Do we teach Keynesian perspective in economics...or Marxist? What if we taught from both/multiple perspectives?

Elements and levels of diversity in the model move from less inclusive to more inclusive.

Consider how we adjust to cover material...are we trying to meet predefined goals as opposed to meeting students where they are?

Content is just one of the nine elements. What about your goals? The learners? How you assess? How do these elements encourage inclusion? Taking this approach gets us out of a dichotomous model and promotes planning.

This model is *flexible*. Any course can include diversity somewhere.

Making the Model Yours

Start with goals, content. Then build the materials and instructional processes later. Or vice versa. There are always aspects of diversity that we are not paying attention to. Do you use peer evaluations? Interview questions to ask one another: What are the purposes of your course? How can you make your course more inclusive of diversity? Self-assessment: work as partners. Pick one course. Where I am now and where I would like to be? Find a way to record some of what is going on in the classroom.

Comment from Schuylkill campus: We have a teaching and learning consortium in which we ask participants across disciplines to share information and best practices, with the idea that we can learn from the practices of other disciplines.

Cross disciplinary approach. Some things we can learn from other fields will be useful.

Comment from Harrisburg campus: The idea of a rubric, make that transparent to learners. Provide them with an insider's view of what is happening in the classroom. Of course, it takes courage to do that and time, but the payoff is worth it.

Even 5-10 minutes of observation can make a big difference. Have students in class complete a rubric.

Questions

Q: Who determines what constitutes a meaningful definition of diversity?

A: The assessment element will help determine what is meaningful for a particular course. From this, we make choices as to what is meaningful or not.

Q: How does this apply to lecture classes of 800+ students?

A: You may need to look at elements outside of instructional processes, such as goals, assessment.

Q: Some faculty do like a “bell curve” related to testing. Will diversity inclusion disturb the bell curve? Will they find that more students are getting higher grades and fewer are failing?

A: Sometimes a normal bell curve distribution *does* occur, even in a course that is highly diversified. Or put another way, just because a course is inclusive does not mean that everyone is going to get As. Assessment and evaluation are critical. There still may be students who don't learn or don't work to gain complete understanding of the material.

Q: How might you respond to accusations that diversity leads to “grade inflation”?

A: In this case, it is helpful to have the backing of leadership in your program/department. I do not recommend that junior faculty try to blaze the trail.

Q: In a class with 800 students, where the instructor is on stage, how can one be more inclusive?

A: In this situation, the instructional model is already set, so you have to look at other elements of the class. Can you add an online component? Or have student groups? How can you foster energy and excitement? How do we reach those last ten students? Envision a totally transformed course. Try to tap the learning that you sense is there.

Diverse grounding occurs *before* you enter the classroom, and focuses on inclusive learning. Surveys of self-reflective perceptions of faculty member vs. student perceptions bear this out. There is connection from the student side. Basically the two sides are in sync.

Students feel empowered in their learning... “I'm not a visual learner and everything in this class is visual.” Do students feel like they can engage the material in the classroom?

Discussion of Survey of Faculty and Students and Results from FSSE

- Definitions for terms in survey not included, wanted to leave it open to interpretation.
- When looking at racial/ethnic differences in student surveys, differences are not as big as one would think.

Q: How is the model being accepted by STEM courses?

A: Although there is a good deal of resistance, we are not telling faculty what to do. Many see diversity as something that is just not what they do and the models helps open up the door. Maybe they won't be able to change the content, but content is only one element.

Eighty-nine percent of faculty are trying to create an atmosphere that is inclusive of all students. This is an entry point for having a conversation about diversity inclusivity.

What diversity is can seem nebulous...faculty often struggle with content. They don't know what to exclude in order to bring in other voices.

Q: You seem to be avoiding a pointed definition of diversity. This broad concept makes it difficult to understand and renders it less volatile. Faculty **do** have difficulty diversifying the content of their courses. Why avoid political issues? Diversity **does** annoy students. They talk to their families about the new ideas they are exposed to in class and then the families are annoyed.

A: The intention of this model, to a certain extent, is to be subversive. If you start with the assumption that **every** course is a diversity course, then focus on some of the less “political” elements first, you may successfully bring others on board. Some courses are going to be

disruptive on the front. Some students **will** be upset and this **is** valuable. Other courses will have different approaches. However, a model of change that is more inclusive will be accepted and utilized among a wider set of faculty. This model strives to bring more people into the tent, then tackle difficult issues. Some faculty may choose to start with the class environment, not necessarily content.

Results from FSSE, Predicting Diversity Inclusivity

- Women and faculty of color use more effective processes more often than their white male counterparts.
- A higher course load is related to a higher rating of inclusive learning.
- Effective teaching scales are set to the mean of diversity requirement courses. STDEV units from diversity mean requirement.

Questions and Answers

Q: Can you give some examples of ways to add diversity to STEM courses?

A: Connecting geometry to the world. Avoiding culturally-laden examples in class (i.e., the tennis club, etc.). Revealing your own thinking processes as you work through problems.

Q: Helping faculty confront own bias. Does anyone explore their own biases? This could be a faculty development item. How to do this?

A: Use discipline tools to unpack self-bias. Be open to others' feedback in teaching, just as we are in scholarship.

Q: Issues in affect, communication. How to ensure diversity inclusivity on campuses, beyond what happens in the classroom.

A: Pay attention to atmosphere, goals, and learning about students. Keep classrooms integrated. Be vulnerable enough to show your thoughts and feelings. Be comfortable with different perspectives on diversity.

Afternoon Session

Turning a Model of Diversity Inclusivity into Course and Curricular Change

How to turn model into action. Began with brief review of model for those who were not present in the morning session.

Asked for examples of courses and programs people are teaching now.

First example: undergraduate course in family diversity

Overview of course:

- Taught using an ethnospecific approach, combined with a general approach.
- Evaluation includes online/ANGEL quizzes, a paper, mid-term and final.
- 40-60 students, cross listed with sociology.
- Background of students: mostly white women, approximately 12 men, 10% of nonwhite background.
- Offered 1x/year. Covers multiple ethnic perspectives.

What is currently done that is inclusive:

- The content familiarizes students with how different familial backgrounds came to be part of the U.S.

Suggestions to make this course more inclusive:

- Include experiences of men. How might that affect who attends class? Would it possibly increase the number of men enrolling?
- Have a fatherhood panel.
- Gather information about academic and family background from students. Try to tailor examples throughout this class based on this information. You may decide to structure activities differently and/or rearrange content.
- Involve students by giving context and explanation for new activities, including information gathering.

Second example: in Biology

Overview of course:

- Intro to Ecology, 70 students, co-taught.
- Required for biology majors. Few students actually care about ecology and environment.
- Evaluation includes 4 exams and cumulative final (multiple choice and short answers). Use of clickers, minute papers.
- Course content: populations, communities, landscape, evolution, world. Started out with lots of content over the 4 years teaching it, has become less content based. Focus is not on memorizing material.
- Background of students: Mostly first year, sophomores; gender 50/50; ethnic diversity in class reflects that of the university at large.
- NSF program. Integrates cooperative learning techniques. Lab component is taught by different people.

Suggestions:

- Students not doing well in course are a great source of information. Those not voicing their concerns may truly be impacted. Students struggling with courses or students from campuses may have difficulty with the disconnect between lab and class instruction styles.
- How do you reach them earlier? When students need to get help, no one comes to office hours. Many reasons why students are not seeking help. May be ashamed, learning difficulties, etc. Hold office hours in the classroom after class.
- Simple things: Say things differently one day to the next to reach someone who might hear the information better when it's presented in a new way. Ask yourself: How can I open up the door just a little more?
- Student testing procedures offer an opportunity to realign course. Grade more on homework.
- Offer online chat room for students.

Wrap-up comments:

The ground is changing underneath us, the standard ways we have taught are changing with technology. Brainstorm realistic goals/ideas, keeping in mind that we do not have unlimited resources.

Small Group Exercise

- Think of a course or program that already exists.

- Pick an element that can be more inclusive of diversity
- Work with a partner to think of key factors about the element and ways to make that element more inclusive.
- Consider how those changes could affect some of the other elements.

Some possibilities...

- Engage in surveys that connect to the 9 elements. Take the questions and use the slides; complete the survey of that course and share your responses with your colleagues. What would have made you mark 1 notch up? What would make that change in 1 or 2 of these elements?
- Some Different Decision makers include:
 - Instructor
 - Department/program chair
 - Deans
 - Curriculum committees
- Get away from thinking that 2 out of 6 courses have a diversity component. What happens in the other 4 courses? All should have this component.

Small Group Activity/Discussion

Regarding Penn State general education requirements: How would you decide what counts as a “diversity” requirement? What criteria would you use?

Responses

- Might use a diversity requirement as a lever for change. Look upon diversity courses to raise the bar by meeting expectations. Make being a required diversity course an honor.
- It should be an honor for an instructor to teach these courses. Instructor needs to demonstrate a level of sensitivity to students in the course.
- Possibly require prerequisites for diversity courses. Have upper and lower level courses, sequence of courses.
- Allow more time for discussions.
- What is being done at the graduate level to address diversity? Graduate students might benefit from learning how to teach such courses. Often, diversity training for graduate students is very minimal and has the tone/purpose of how to protect you and the university from lawsuits.

Think about how to construct changes as opposed to how to enact change in isolation.

Thank you. Two articles and the PowerPoint slides corresponding to these sessions are also posted.