# Education in a Culturally Diverse Post-Secondary Classroom: A Space for Potential Transformative Learning for Sustainability

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**Abstract:** This conceptual article examines how teaching and learning has changed and continues to change as a result of the increase in cultural diversity in post-secondary classrooms. It focuses on how students' and instructors' culture and traditions impact the teaching and learning experience in culturally diverse post-secondary settings. Providing evidence from theoretical perspectives, this review assesses the need for and the potentially transformative nature of education that is sustainable.

English may be the *lingua franca* on North American university campuses, as well as on many campuses around the world, but since students and instructors come from many different backgrounds, just because English is the predominant language does not necessarily mean that education based on Western principles is the only way to do education. International students and instructors come from countries where education may be conducted differently and since the North American university system requires learning to be demonstrated in certain ways, it puts students that come from different systems at a disadvantage. Therefore it would seem that North American universities could benefit from the tenets of culturally sensitive teaching that Gay (2000) suggests as comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transforming, and emancipatory.

**Keywords:** cultural diversity, human rights, ideology, post-secondary education, sustainability, transformative learning

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**Introduction**

At the turn of the 20th century, as North America attracted more culturally diverse people groups, historian Ellwood P. Cubberley (1909) asserted that "illiterate, docile, and not possessing Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order, and government, … served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civil life" (p. 15). The school's mission then was to assimilate and amalgamate diverse people groups, both immigrants and Indigenous, and to implant the Anglo-Saxon understanding of "righteousness, law and order, and popular government" (p. 15). The thinking behind an assertion like that was that democracy was only possible if everyone shared a common culture. Diversity and unity seemed like opposites and conflicts ensued.
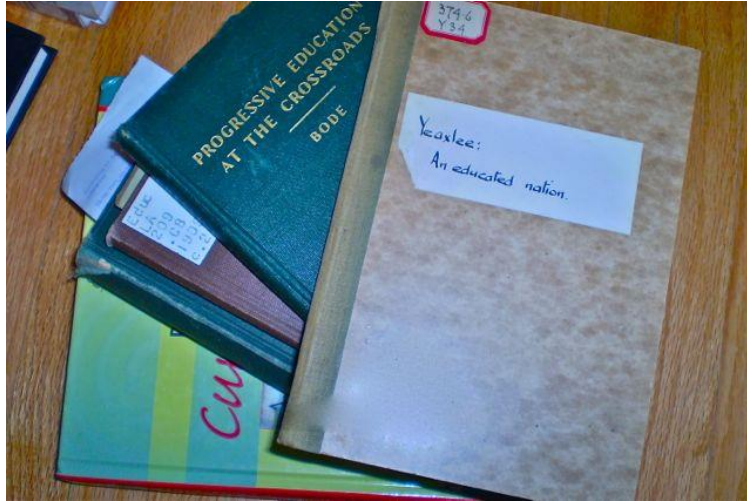


What to do about diversity? Schools can be places that silence voices when they legitimize only one understanding of knowledge at the expense of and exclusion of a different point of view (Banks, 2001; Henry & Tator, 2009). Historically that has been a role of the school, which has lead to much trauma, not only in the Indigenous boarding school experience, but for many other students as well (LaRocque, 2010; Schapiro, 2009). Granted, educational curriculum developers now recognize the importance of including Indigenous history, oral history, and traditional knowledge into the curriculum, but it is a slow process to implement those changes when education has been done in a certain way for so long (Robinson, 2009).

The contemporary debate continues with similar themes. Tanner and Tanner (2007) maintain that the current struggle concerning multicultural education is one of the most emotionally laden curriculum struggles since the 1990s. How and what to teach are important questions to ask especially when our classrooms, communities and country are populated by people that come from diverse backgrounds and expectations, all with the right to education. Curriculum discussions address problematic issues that recognize that the right to education is not just basic literacy, but a constant learning of new things in an ever changing globalized world (Lindahl, 2006). With the increase in urban living and diversity in society, Woolman (2001) suggests that schooling should also be diverse to reflect the cultures, values, and contexts that it represents. How does the cultural diversity in North American universities affect how and what we educate?

This article examines how teaching and learning is changing, although cultural diversity in society is not a new phenomenon. It focuses on how students' and instructors' culture and traditions influence teaching and learning. Providing evidence

from theoretical perspectives this review assesses the need and potential for transformative learning in a culturally diverse post-secondary classroom that is sustainable.

Aronowitz (2000) challenges a society that studies and systematically categorizes the disenfranchised, to go beyond what he calls psychologizing and pathologizing. Rather than a long string of "izings" his challenge is to instead address structural inequalities with that researched knowledge. With that reminder, I realize that I also must tread carefully and gently in my search and structure my inquiry, keeping in mind a theoretical framework that leads to empowerment instead of further disenfranchisement, pathologizing, and otherizing.

## Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework presented here is based on Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformative learning. Providing evidence from the transformative learning theory this review assesses the need for and the potential applicability of this framework in the culturally diverse post-secondary classroom. Mezirow (1978) says that transformative learning happens when a person is confronted with a situation that challenges tacit assumptions. This experience leads to a period of disorientation, then a questioning and analyzing of presuppositions, which leads to critical reflection and a change or reinforcement in thinking, and eventually a change in action (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). This theory "attempts to describe and analyze how adults learn to make meaning of their experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 198). The goal is to help educators implement appropriate strategies for helping adults learn.

Transformative learning recognizes that learning does not happen exclusively in traditional settings, but realizes that alternative languages such as art, music, and dance illustrate other forms of expressing meaning (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2003). The learning can happen in both small and big ways that is not necessarily linear, but spiral (Cranton, 2000). Dilemmas can happen by reading new material and by being challenged in social interactions in the classroom or hallway that prompts students to change their thinking about knowledge and learning itself (Shapiro, 2009).

Since the premise for transformative learning is the confrontation of tacit assumptions with new ideas, it seems that a culturally diverse class is uniquely positioned to provide a transformative venue, especially when students are indeed given opportunity to engage with diverse ideas, cultures, ideologies, practices, and beliefs in a safe environment that Taylor (2006) talks about. If this interaction and environment offers the potential for self-reflection and change free of judgment and criticism, transformation is possible. When a student in an inclusive welcoming environment struggles with concepts to acquire new insights, that learning is not only transformative, but has the lifelong learning qualities that Lindahl (2006) suggests.

A classroom that promotes an environment such as that takes seriously human rights articles 18 and 19 that say: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference." Education with a human rights stance, like transformative learning, is more than "valuing and respecting human rights" but also about encouraging action as a result of a change in perspective (Tibbitts, 2005, p. 107). Students in university classes come from many different cultures and perspectives that all influence the educational experience.

## How Culture Influences Education

A question that educators struggle with is how culture impacts teaching in a culturally diverse classroom. One definition of culture is "a system of values, beliefs, and standards that is learned, shared, adapted to particular circumstances, and continually changing" (Au, 1993, p. 92). There is a difference between a culturally diverse class and an ethno sensitive class. A culturally diverse class is one where students and instructors represent a variety of different backgrounds but it does not particularly presume an ethno sensitive environment. An ethno sensitive multicultural class is one that incorporates an intentional focus on ethno sensitivity (Au, 1993; M. Bennett, 1993). Culture is not always obvious, but can be discovered through interactions. All students, but especially international and indigenous students, come with many traditions that are very different than the dominant culture.

The orientation and goals of teachers and wider institutions and their response and practice in culturally diverse classrooms can dramatically impact student experience. Understanding where students come from and the ideology that shapes their thinking can help instructors promote an ethno sensitive environment that makes transformative learning possible. In this section I look at ways in which the culture that students and teachers bring with them influence how and what gets taught. I address issues such as invisible culture, mutual accommodation versus social assimilation, an empowerment versus a deficit approach, gatekeeping measures, language use, vestiges of colonialism, the concept of freedom of expression, and forms of communication.

### Invisible Culture

Culture is not always visible or audible. Erickson (2001) states that "in a sense, everything in education relates to culture - to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention" (p. 31). Culture becomes habitual he suggests, and mostly invisible like a "primary human toolkit" (p. 32). Educators always address cultural issues whether they are aware of it or not and "white people are just as cultural as are people of color" (Erickson, 2001, p. 33). Another assumption Erickson makes is that "everybody is

multicultural" (p. 33). He says that although people's lives may appear culturally isolated, they still internalize their society's cultural diversity.

Multicultural education often focuses on the visible aspects of culture such as language, dress, food, and religion, all important facets, but only a small part of the wider issue. Many other invisible implicit issues play a role such as how one listens, appropriate topics of conversation, or tone of voice (Erickson, 2001). He goes on to say that if a person is dressed exotically, according to one person's definition of exotic, and speaks English with an accent, according to one person's definition of accent, we do not presume to know how that person thinks or feels, but if a person dresses the same way we do and speaks in the same accent, "we fail to recognize the invisible cultural orientations that differ between us, and a cycle of mutual misattribution can start" (p. 39).



Erickson (2001) maintains that in multicultural curriculum and pedagogy the emphasis is often on the visible aspects of culture at the expense of the implicit. Visible cultural expressions such as clothing, celebrations, and food are often isolated from the ideology and belief systems that accompany the visible aspects. "By treating cultural practices as sets of static facts, we trivialize them in superficiality and we make it seem as if culture were necessarily unchanging" (Erickson, 2001, p. 44). He encourages educators to stress the "variability of culture within social groups" (p. 44) and that these cultures are constantly changing.

Visible cultural differences have been a common explanation for low academic achievement among minorities and working class students when they have been defined as cultural deficiencies (Erickson, 1987, p. 335; Perez & Wiggin, 2009). Labels such as "socially disadvantaged", "intellectually impoverished" and "culturally deprived" are used to describe the reason for school failure (Erickson, 1987, p. 335). He talks about verbal and nonverbal aspects of interaction that cause not only miscommunication in the classroom, but can lead to a professional diagnosis that wrongfully categorizes a student

as unmotivated, detached or difficult. As students experience recurring failure in their school career, they disengage and alienate themselves from the school. "Consistent patterns of refusal to learn in school can be seen as a form of resistance to a stigmatized ethnic or social class identity that is being assigned by the school" (Erickson, 1987, p. 350). He calls for culturally responsive pedagogy whereby educators transform their routine practice in schools, as well as work towards change in the wider society. This can be done by analyzing "structural conditions by which inequity is reproduced in society" and by working "to change the existing distributions of power and knowledge in our society" (p. 352). It can start by educators promoting a culture of inclusion in the classroom and wider school community, which is addressed in the latter part of this article (Gay, 2000; Henry & Tator, 2009; LaRocque, 2010; Monture, 2009; Perez & Wiggan, 2009).



**Mutual accommodation versus social assimilation**

Already in 1980, Saunders talked about mutual accommodation rather than social assimilation of minority groups into the dominant culture. Unity or diversity? He suggests that mutual adjustment might be a more apropos term to define the process of acculturation for everyone involved. He maintains that the policies that promote the preservation of racial identity deny "both host and immigrant cultures access to the potential that each has for extending and enriching the other" (Saunders, 1980, p. 33). Ball (2006) also confirms the strong relationship between language, culture and writing. When teachers create a classroom community where students feel safe, feel encouraged to express themselves without fear of making mistakes, and where bridges are made that link home culture with school, students can thrive.

Cultural diversity on university campuses has prompted many debates and discussions on how to teach and learn in this milieu. Similar to Cubberley's thoughts in 1909, William Bennett, United States Secretary of Education in 1986 challenged education to a "back to basics" approach: "we must not abandon the teaching of our American traditions in the name of "globalism" or "multiculturalism." Instead we must be ready to hand these newcomers the instruction manual for our pluralist democracy" (p. 34) which may be merely a pluralist facade. Some of the back to basics tenets of

education may have value, but the fact is that culturally diverse classrooms around the world are populated with students that represent many different ways of looking at the world and basics have different definitions for different people. Therefore it is imperative that education explores new strategies and approaches to best serve and prepare both a diverse student population and a diverse faculty. It requires new basics, not necessarily in Math or Spelling, but in milieu.

The goal is not only to integrate students and faculty of diverse backgrounds, but to add value for everyone involved, especially for the enriching, expanding, and changing of mainstream thinking (Au, 1993; Henry & Tator, 2006, 2009). Erickson (1987) says that schools need to gain trust from community groups that are culturally alienated. He says that although culturally responsive pedagogy is not the complete solution to minority student success, there is much that educators can do to resolve miscommunication (p. 355).

**An empowerment versus a deficit approach**

Cummins' (1986) describes the deficit or disabling approach whereby learners are required to master the mainstream English content and style without any recognition of their own culture and language, as illustrated in William Bennett's (1986) back to the basics and Cubberley's, (1909) assimilationist approach. Teachers perhaps unconsciously and perhaps ignorant of any other pattern, expect students to adopt mainstream educational patterns and styles or norms. This sometimes requires students to give up who they are and repress expressions valued in their culture (Au, 1993; Ball, 2006). Educators that ascribe to the empowerment approach promote an ethno-sensitive culture in their classroom whereby they actively incorporate diverse cultural expression and language use into their program. Instead of seeing minority students as the problem, educators serve as advocates for students (Cummins, 1986; Erickson, 1987). The empowerment approach fosters a human rights environment, implements Mezirow's transformative learning theory, and therefore has the potential to foster student success.

Not only are educators called to an empowerment approach for sound pedagogical reasons, but also because federal guidelines require it. Ball (1995) challenges schools to meet federal nondiscrimination guidelines which stipulate that a school must consider a student's first language even though it is not the mainstream school language and that teachers should find ways to support the learning of all students in a culturally and linguistically diverse class. "In a civilized state" Watson (2007) says, "there should be no need to debate the right to maintain and develop the mother tongue. It is a self-evident, fundamental linguistic human right" (p. 252).

"A long- standing concern has been to develop classroom cultures that promote equity in opportunity and accessibility to learning for individuals across boundaries of class and ethnicity" (Ball, 1995, p. 298). That is easier said than done and actually employing those ideas can be very challenging as Stavenhagen (2008) states. Although people now recognize that social groups have the fundamental human rights "to live by their own culture," this does not mean that they are isolated islands (p. 162). "Intercultural citizenship" becomes "creative interculturality" which requires dialogue and interaction (Stavenhagen, 2008, p. 162). Through dialogue and interaction in a safe and respectful environment, that creative interculturality can be learned and practiced.

**Gatekeeping measures**

Universities have spoken and unspoken gatekeeping measures that welcome some students and disallow others to become part of the system. Educational systems indoctrinate students with a value of certain ways of expressing knowledge and at the same time act as gatekeepers for allowing or disallowing entrance to certain opportunities and privileges that the system deems appropriate. Although streamlining students into vocations based on predetermined qualifications has merit, it could lead to vocations that students do not even want to pursue.

Those gatekeeping measures vary around the world. Donohue's (2002) cross-cultural study examines the writing proficiency of incoming university students in France. She finds that the French system is shaped on ideology that focuses on equal opportunity for all, at least until university. The system is highly exam based, hence the structure is rather uniform. Students choose a specialty before completing secondary school and learn to write in that expected style. Therefore when they enter university they have developed a certain level of competency in that discourse with uniform expectations. Standardization driven education is not exclusive to the French system, but is also the norm in the Chinese, German, and British systems (Li, 2002; Foster, 2006; Scott, 2002).



When students come from structurally uniform systems, course selection variety and different teacher and class expectations may cause struggles for those students who are not accustomed to these differences (Foster & Russell, 2002). Universities use tracking systems with established rules and regulations to separate the students that they deem academically successful from those that are not (Foster & Russell, 2002). In China for example, the tracking starts as early as elementary schools by requiring entrance exams (Bahry, Darkhor & Luo, 2009; Li, 2002). The educational system that students come from influences how they learn in post-secondary institutions (Foster & Russell, 2002). Sociologists ascertain that a group strongly shapes and influences the behaviour of individuals where "groups possess a continuity that transcends the lives of individuals" (Banks, 2001, p. 13). Where students come from impacts which doors and gates are open to them in their future.

**Language capability and usage**

In many countries, although the language of instruction is sometimes English, post-secondary students are fluent in another language or languages (Foster, 2006; Muchiri, 2002; Shay *et al.,* 2002). For example, Muchiri says that since Kenyans are fluent in sometimes up to three or four languages, their English proficiency is perhaps not the same as an English only speaker.  They may be hesitant to write something in English but are competent to converse about it. Kenyan instructors, both in Kenya and in North American universities have different oral and written skills since their practice has been different (Hutchison, Quach & Wiggan, 2009; Muchiri, 2002). Hence, attitudes toward writing vary from culture to culture Muchiri (2002) claims. Since Kenyan society was traditionally oral, a Kenyan perspective would be that writing is permanent. This can be both good and bad; good when the account is positive but bad when the record is not.

A big problem that this poses for teachers in the Kenyan system is that students assume that what is printed is true and for them to challenge the printed word is contrary to their ideology. A related issue is that when an idea has been committed to print, it belongs in the public domain and accessible to everyone. This leads to what would be considered plagiarism in other circumstances since students do not see it as a necessity to acknowledge sources from what is public property (Muchiri, 2002; Gu & Brooks, 2008).

**Vestiges of colonialism**

Gates, Jr. (1986) says that it was during the age of enlightenment when knowledge was systematized and this led to the ideology of difference and subordination of one group over the other (p. 8). "Colonization colonizes minds and emotions as well as bodies, land, and labor" (Brown, 1993, p. 663). Brown says that settlers blamed intercultural communication challenges on the Native people's inability to speak and "this lack of essential humanity, was then deployed as a justification for domination" (p. 664). Muchiri (2002) ascertains that vestiges of colonialism are difficult to scrub from people's thinking since the English language was the official educational language and hence commanded a more authoritative stance. A problem in the Kenyan system, Muchiri says is the belief that English texts are more valuable and prestigious than texts in the local language, which have subordinate personal uses like writing letters and records (Muchiri, 2002).

On the contrary, in China the flood of foreign ideas and language from the West are seen as tainting the purity of an established literary heritage (Li, 2002). Students embracing new ideas and concepts lack the necessary language skills to express themselves and the product is often a disjointed mixture (Li, 2002). Ideology and resistance to the vestiges of colonialism inform and shape educational administration and practice.

**Freedom of expression**

Freedom of expression is a Western ideal and a foreign idea for many Aboriginal students and students that come from other countries where challenging texts is not part of their educational tradition (Brayboy, 2005; Li, 2002; Monture, 2009; Muchiri, 2002). In North American universities, where critical thinking and freedom of expression, are supposed to be encouraged, students that are not familiar with the concept nor encouraged to practice it, struggle with knowing how to do it properly. In their home country where they were not encouraged to think critically, to turn around and do so here, seems like a contradictory message.

Dominant culture tradition often expects students to actively and freely engage in classroom discussion, but this form of communication may be in direct conflict with students' cultural traditions (Brayboy, 2005). In an ethnographic study, Brayboy accompanies two Native American students to their classes at an Ivy League university and learns that how teachers evaluate student participation may be misguided, since how and when students participate is intricately connected to their traditional cultures. To assume that those students that are not actively speaking and participating in class are passive bystanders may be drawing the wrong conclusion and teachers need to be open to other forms of communication (Brayboy, 2005).

Bahry *et al*. (2009) talk about the Chinese Ministry of Education criticizing what they call the "uniformity of knowledge" since China delivers a unified standard curriculum (p. 110). Since geography and context in China vary dramatically, a unified curriculum for the whole country results in students not only failing in the examination based system, but facing difficulty in finding employment because the curriculum is divorced from practical applicability in local settings. Efforts are now being made to adapt the curriculum to recognize locality based cultural diversity "in which all are valued, and none need give up their individual ethnic identity" (Bahry *et al.*, 2009, p. 115). Since freedom of expression for students has not been one of China's trademarks, fortunately curricularists are taking initiative to implement change.

**Forms of Communication**

Paige (1993) ascertains that "Language is the major mechanism by which culture-group members communicate and share meaning" (p. 7). Communication challenges are prevalent, stemming from diverse traditions that students bring to the culturally diverse classroom. Often bilingualism has been considered a disadvantage rather than an asset (Muchiri, 2002, p. 259; Perez & Wiggan, 2009). This negative attitude stems from colonial education that claimed that English was the formal language of knowledge. Hence, in many places around the world students were punished for speaking their mother tongue on school property (LaRocque, 2010; Monture, 2009; Muchiri, 2002). LaRocque talks about the difficult relationship Aboriginal writers have had with the English language since it represents "500 years of cultural, linguistic, and political appropriations, exchanges, and confrontations" (p. 19). For colonized people who move from an oral tradition to a written English language, the appropriation seems like a continuation of colonization LaRocque suggests. Although English is the lingua franca, that does not mean that traditions are all the same. Students may all be speaking English, but they come with diverse traditions and expectations.

Another sociolinguistic issue for students that speak more than one language is the concept of code switching, which means that multilingual speakers use more than one language simultaneously to communicate (Muchiri, 2002). In oral communication they switch from one language to another or translate literally from one language to the other, sometimes resulting in miscommunication. If teachers do not know the mother language it can present difficulties in understanding both speech and text. If teachers are properly trained, they learn to identify these kind of issues and can help students resolve them more efficiently (Muchiri, 2002).

### Reframing the Narratives

LaRocque (2010) calls for a reframing of the narratives by "challenging Western intellectual conventions with their hegemonic, canonical assumptions of culture and

knowledge" (p. 13) to establish new traditions. Although frowned upon in intellectual circles today, the tradition of a colonizer mindset is difficult to erase and it surfaces in other ways than acquiring physical territories and enslaving people. LaRocque agrees that "in Canada, racism in textbooks is by no means a thing of the past" (p. 64) and that to this day Aboriginal people continue to be debased and misrepresented both in academia and popular culture. Effects of the dehumanization that the Aboriginal people suffered at the hand of the dominant culture are still present in today's society evidenced by lack of self-confidence, fear, and doubt (LaRocque, 2010).

Monture (2009) calls for a reframing of narratives as she chronicles her experience as a First Nations woman in a chilly and hostile academic environment. "The consequences for a person who is othered are quite devastating and totally contradictory to a commitment to living one's life in and at peace" (p. 77). White privilege, she says means certain benefits, advantages, and opportunities, whereas racism means detriments, denials, and disadvantages (p. 78). She says it is important to tell stories of tenure wars and address "systematic and structural barriers to building an inclusive, respectful, and peaceful environment for all" (p. 78).

Perez and Wiggan (2009) call for a reframing of narratives that address the issues of Hispanic immigrants. Perez, who grew up in a migrant worker family, was discouraged by her teachers to continue with post-secondary education. Against these odds, she completed not only post-secondary education, but went on to complete her doctorate in Curriculum and Teacher Education at Stanford University where she explored whether classroom status had an impact on the "participation and achievement of minority and low-income students" (Perez & Wiggan, 2009, p. 182). Perez sees it as essential that teachers have confidence in their students' abilities, capitalize on students' bilingualism, and make classroom work relevant by incorporating student experience (p. 196).

In summary how culture, ideology, and traditions are perceived, directly impact the interaction and instruction in culturally diverse classrooms. In an ethno sensitive multicultural class the instructor will promote an environment that allows for a diversity of expressions. Although English is the *lingua franca* on North American university campuses, as well as on many campuses around the world, it does not necessarily mean that the Western model of education is the only one. Many international students come from countries where there is a rich oral tradition and since the university system requires knowledge to be discussed and synthesized through the medium of writing, this puts bilingual and trilingual students that come from an oral tradition at a disadvantage. More research needs to be done to explore diverse ways of expressing knowledge, how to build on the assets that students come with, such as bi and trilingualism, rather than trying to fit them into a prescriptive mold. The next section discusses a transformative model.

**Culturally sensitive instruction: a transformative model**

*Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can choose to change the world.*
Nelson Mandela

At a recent seminar at Tetovo State University in Macedonia, future teachers and social workers examined ethnically integrated education. "The majority of teachers are unprepared to teach children from other ethnic groups," Schustereder (2010) states. A 2009 study of 4,000 secondary teachers showed that "almost half of the teachers tended to make derogatory comments about other ethnic groups in front of their classes" (Schustereder, 2010, p. 1). This shows that ethnically and culturally sensitive pedagogy is important not only in North America, but internationally as well. Transformative learning is a possibility if educators implement the tenets of culturally sensitive teaching that Gay (2000) suggests.



**Transformative Potential**

Nagata (2005) talks about the "transformative potential of intercultural" exchange (p. 46). Differences, she says, often illicit conflict, separation, tension, but it does not need to be that way. Differences can be "an invitation to develop higher awareness through intrapersonal and interpersonal work, an opportunity to increase consciousness and enlarge our sense of humanity and personal humanness" (p. 46). Being exposed to a

different way of perceiving and understanding the world and learning from that interaction has the potential for shaping intercultural competent people that experience what Mezirow calls perspective transformation (Taylor, 1994, p. 155; Teng, 2005). This final section examines the nature of culturally sensitive instruction that provides an environment for learning to be transformative and sustainable. Respect for basic human rights in the classroom provides the groundwork for positive transformative learning (Carter & Osler, 2000). The many ideological factors, kaleidoscopic cultural diversity, and varied traditions that congregate in university classrooms present an exciting opportunity for universal peace building.



### Characteristics and tenets of culturally sensitive teaching

Gay (2000) talks about culturally sensitive or culturally responsive instruction as one that incorporates cultural knowledge and previous experiences into the curriculum. It acknowledges that students' learning styles are diverse, which is a strength not a hindrance. Gay (2000) says that research findings indicate that culturally responsive teaching improves student success and highlights the following five characteristics of culturally responsive teaching:

**Comprehensive.** It recognizes that students are not just academic entities, but a fusion of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical facets. Stressing the importance of students' cultural identity and heritage and legitimizing those values in the curriculum, honours students' human dignity, encourages positive self-esteem, and gives students a sense of belonging. When students are held accountable for the larger group like a family, they take ownership of the process (Gay, 2000, p. 30). Gregory & Chapman  (2002) ascertain that students cannot learn when they are afraid and that they need intellectual and physical safety to be able to thrive in a classroom.

**Multidimensional.** Instruction is far more than just the content, textbook, and syllabus handed out on the first day. It is the curriculum, learning framework, classroom climate, student-professor relationship, instructional modus operandi, and method of evaluation. It invites student participation in all aspects from planning to evaluating. "To do this kind of teaching well requires tapping into a wide range of cultural knowledge of experiences, contributions, and perspectives" (Gay, 2000, p. 31).

**Empowering.** Culturally responsive instruction empowers students to be "better human beings" and to be successful in their academic endeavours both in the classroom and beyond (Gay, 2000, p. 32). It inspires students to have motivation and it does this by providing appropriate resources, professors being readily available to students, modeling the desired behaviour, and praising both personal and class accomplishments. This student-centred environment encourages students to see that what happens in the

classroom is just the beginning. Class acquired skills are meant to be used in everyday real life situations (Gay, 2000; Hicks, 1997; Shor, 1992).

**Transforming.** Culturally responsive instruction respects all students irrespective of race, colour, ethnicity, gender, or orientation. It sees differences as building blocks instead of impediments in the learning process and incorporates the strengths of the various ethnic groups so that the whole class can benefit from defining knowledge in different styles and accents. Education must be transformative to empower disenfranchised groups so that they realize that they have the skills and abilities to influence their surroundings (Au, 2000; Ball, 2006; Cranton, 2002; Gay, 2000; Hicks, 1997; Ilkkaracan & Amado, 2005; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Shor, 1992).

**Emancipatory.** Emancipatory education generates pride instead of humiliation in one's own cultural heritage as it validates diverse ways of knowing (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2008; Bloom, 2009; Brayboy, 2005; Gruwell, 1999; LaRocque, 2010). The result is freedom of opinion, thought, conscience, and expression, all basic human rights that everyone should have access to in the university. It challenges oppressive social systems to move from moral exclusion to moral inclusion, which erases the notion of 'other' (Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005).

Culturally responsive pedagogy establishes a community where everyone feels safe and accepted, where everyone's voice counts, where no one is invisible or isolated, and where students' potentials are unleashed (Davis, 2006; Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Perez & Wiggan, 2009). Culturally responsive pedagogy suggests what Dale (2000) calls a 'globally structured agenda for education paradigm' that cannot be assumed but needs to be demonstrated. His idea of a world curriculum recognizes that for education to be the vehicle for change in a globalized world, it must teach knowledge, skills, and attitude in four basic areas that Lindahl (2006) summarizes as: learning to live together in the global village, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be (Dale, 2000 as paraphrased by Lindahl, 2006, p. 11).

## Conclusion

Critical thinking skills, self-reflection, ethno sensitivity, transformative emancipation in a human rights model of education are not tenets that can be packaged in standardized packages and marketed in uniform chain educational institutions. Some post-secondary classrooms across North America promote cultural unity that Cubberley (1909) talked about one hundred years ago, while others view diversity as beneficial. Currently the percentage of post-secondary students on North American university campuses that self identify as minority ranges from 25 to 30% (Antonio, 2002; Student demographics: University of Manitoba, 2010; Snyder & Hoffman, 2000) while 88% faculty are white (Carter & Wilson, 1997), which demonstrates the slow progress of diversification in higher education (Antonio, 2002, p. 582). Much work needs to be done to eradicate structural racism, which occurs in "hiring, promotion, governance or research and curriculum and may sustain a biased status quo on campus" (Eisenkraft, 2010, p. 1). The challenge remains for post-secondary institutions to embrace an empowerment approach to diversity, implement the ethno sensitive strategies in classrooms and hallways discussed here, and move toward a transformative learning environment that that is sustainable.

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