

## Part Two: Heart & Soul

*Writings more deeply rooted in autobiography*

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## **What to Do “When in Rome:” My Journey to a Revised Understanding of Intercultural Communication Competence**

Growing up in a small, homogenous farming community in the Midwest, I had limited exposure to cultural diversity. In elementary school, junior high, and high school, all of my classmates were Anglo-European Caucasian. With very few exceptions, they all lived in traditional, nuclear families, in which the fathers farmed or worked in one of the handful of businesses in the small town and the mothers were housewives. Eighty-five to ninety percent of my classmates even shared the same Mennonite religious heritage.

Although the homogeneity of my childhood community did not offer much ongoing exposure to cultural diversity, the values communicated to me through my church and family did include a clear appreciation for individuals who were different from us. We grew up singing (and believing) that “Jesus loves the little children; all the children of the world; red and yellow, black and white,” and I still remember the round story cards from Sunday school about “Pedro from Peru” or “Kim Lee from China,” stories that told us about a world that was very different from ours and assured us that these children were our “neighbors” and also part of God’s family. These messages from Sunday school were reinforced at home. My parents were very supportive of the Civil Rights movement, and each summer as I was growing up, our family hosted a child from the Fresh Air program, a program which brought African-American children from the inner city to rural areas for a week or two. All in all, the messages I received throughout my childhood placed strong emphasis on valuing cultural diversity, but my actual encounters with people who were culturally diverse were limited.

As I reflect on the understanding of intercultural communication competence that was communicated to me through these early experiences, I can see the construction of what I will call the “When-in-Rome” mentality, a mindset that operationalizes the popular saying, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” This approach to cultural diversity assumes that in an intercultural encounter, one culture is the “host” and the other culture is a “guest.” According to this perspective, it is the responsibility of the “guest” culture to adapt to the values, beliefs, and practices of the “host” culture.

So, if I am an American visiting Rome, the adage admonishes me to adapt to Italian culture - to do things the way a Roman would. Of course, the inverse is implied as well, suggesting that I can expect anyone from another culture visiting me to do things “my” way. This approach to intercultural communication, which is represented in Figure 1, is quite prevalent in America, I think, and it is the attitude that characterized my

childhood experiences related to diversity and provided the foundation for my earliest understanding of what it means to be a competent intercultural communicator. In the model of diversity taught to me by my church and family, people from different cultures were very welcome at our table - as long as they believed, thought, and acted pretty much like we did. I see now, although I did not see it then, that my family, church, and community were probably less willing to welcome diversity if that meant that “we” would be changed.

I brought this “When-in-Rome” approach to diversity with me when I left my small farming community and went away to college. Here I encountered diversity on a regular basis for the first time. In the dorms, I lived with Native Americans and African Americans, and in my classes I had the opportunity to interact with people from several different countries and a variety of religious orientations. I appreciated these encounters with students and teachers from other cultures; I enjoyed hearing about life in Uganda or Japan, or in the big city, or on the reservation. However, I see now that while I valued - even sought out - interaction with people from different cultures, these experiences, too, were under girded by the “When-in-Rome” mentality, because I expected them to adhere to “my” culture’s norms and practices. After all, they were “visiting Rome,” so it was their responsibility to adapt.

I recall one instance in particular when a women’s quilting group at my home church had invited a student from Uganda to speak at one of their monthly meetings, and I was asked to provide transportation for the student. I welcomed the opportunity and arranged with the student to leave campus at a time that would get us to the church without any chance of being late. The agreed upon time came and went. I waited 10 minutes, 20 minutes. I tried calling the student’s room unsuccessfully. I called the church to let the quilting group know what was happening. I waited some more, becoming increasingly nervous and frustrated as the minutes passed. Finally, at the time when the program was scheduled to begin, the student walked in - as if nothing were wrong. And, in fact, in her mind, nothing was wrong. Now I understand that different cultures have different temporal orientations, and that not all cultures place the same value on punctuality as American culture, but at the time, I was irritated by what I saw as rude and inappropriate behavior. I was expecting her to adhere to the temporal orientation of my culture. “When in Rome.”

In graduate school, I enrolled in an Intercultural Communication course, and, as I began to study culture and communication, my approach to diversity began to change. A key change was in my conceptualization of what it means to be a “competent” intercultural communicator. One of the first assignments given us by the instructor in this class was to write an essay, making an argument for whether America

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The  
“melting pot”  
eliminates cultural  
differences, making  
a completely new  
“culture” out of  
all of the cultures  
that have been  
mixed together.  
The unique  
characteristics  
of the original  
ingredients end  
up being virtually  
unrecognizable.  
In a “salad,” on  
the other hand,  
the individual  
ingredients  
maintain their  
uniqueness . . .



should strive to be a “melting pot,” a “stew,” or a “salad.” At first I dismissed the assignment as “silly,” but as I began thinking about it, I realized that each of the three metaphors makes quite different assumptions about what the goals of a culturally diverse society should be, and that answering that question was integral to understanding intercultural communication competence.

The “melting pot” eliminates cultural differences, making a completely new “culture” out of all of the cultures that have been mixed together. The unique characteristics of the original ingredients end up being virtually unrecognizable. In a “salad,” on the other hand, the individual ingredients maintain their uniqueness. They are tossed together, but lettuce remains lettuce, tomatoes remain tomatoes, and broccoli remains broccoli. In a “stew,” the individual ingredients are transformed, but they maintain their uniqueness to some degree. The potatoes, meat, and carrots are cooked together in a way that blends the flavors, creating a “new” culture that binds all the ingredients together without completely sacrificing their individual identity.

I had some difficulty determining which metaphor was promoted by the “When-in-Rome” mentality I had been exposed to as a child. Was the “we welcome you, but we expect you to adhere to our cultural norms” attitude creating a “melting pot,” in which “outsiders” were totally absorbed within the dominant culture? Of course, in a melting pot, as new ingredients are added, the constitution of the original substance changes, which is not completely consistent with my childhood experiences. However, by keeping the infusion of “foreign” ingredients to a minimum, the purity of the meld can be maintained. Or were we the embodiment of a version of the “salad” metaphor, one in which the ingredients were all processed through a salad shooter, with my culture controlling the settings on the salad shooter. The ingredients in the salad could “look” different, but they all were expected to be essentially the same.

Through my contemplation of melting pots, stews, and salads, I began to shift my understanding of intercultural communication competence from the “When-in-Rome” mindset of my childhood to one that did not expect either culture to “become” the other. Rather, I began to see the goal of effective intercultural communication as being the creation of a third cultural space that brings together elements of all cultures, while allowing the individual cultures the freedom to maintain their identity. This revised understanding of intercultural communication is represented in Figure 2.

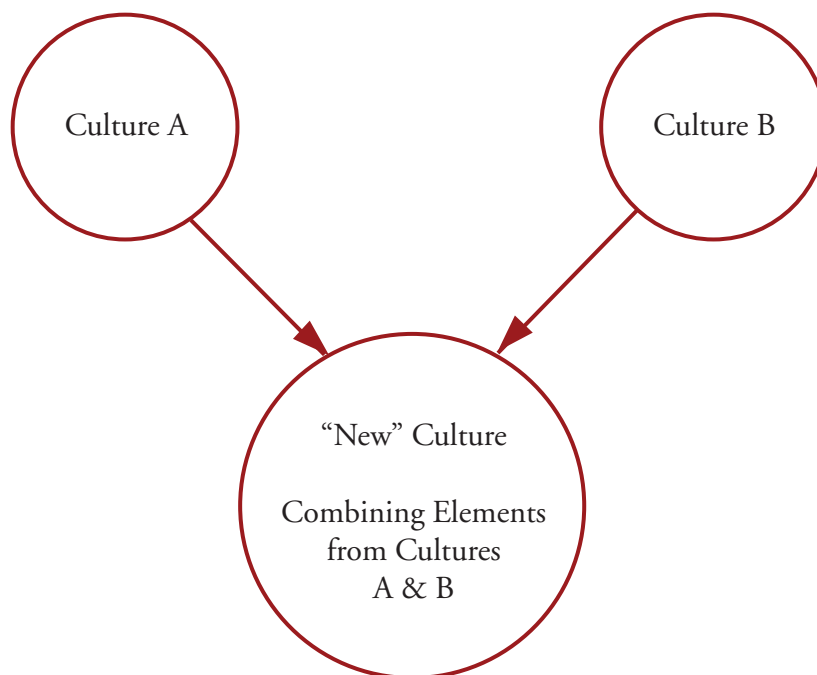
In this revised model of intercultural communication, neither culture is assumed to be the “host” culture, so the expectation that one culture should adapt to the other is eliminated. This approach maximizes

the benefits of diversity because it encourages communicators to look for ways in which cultural difference can expand behavioral repertoires rather than expecting communicators to adhere to the behavioral norms of the dominant, “host” culture. Of course, this approach assumes that all of the participants in the interaction have a basic understanding of the dimensions of cultural variability as well as an appreciation for the potential benefits of different ways of thinking, being, and doing, emphasizing the need for strong intercultural communication education.

**Figure 1:**  
**The “When-in-Rome” Approach to Intercultural Communication**



**Figure 2:**  
**Revised Model of Intercultural Communication Competence**



*Elizabeth Goering, PhD*  
*Associate Professor*  
*Department of Communication Studies*

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For information about this work, please contact the Center for Teaching and Learning at IUPUI ([opd@opd.iupui.edu](mailto:opd@opd.iupui.edu))



## **Social Class, Age, and Religion: Turning Marginality into Empathy for Students**

As a product of the working class and being part of the first generation in my family to attend college, being a nontraditional student, and being an evangelical Christian, as an undergraduate I often felt like a stranger in the strange land of higher education. The vocabulary of professors in my freshman level courses challenged me. They were using words I had never heard at home. (What *does* he mean when he keeps saying “infrastructure”?) I came to college as a nontraditional student who had completed high school seven years earlier. The youth of my classmates left me wondering if I was as well prepared for college as they.

Finally, I came to the world of higher education as an evangelical Christian - a group that is sometimes characterized as the antithesis of what a well-rounded, educated person should be. Occasional hostility from faculty toward the religiously devout left me puzzled. These differences of social class, age, and religion made me feel marginal to the world of higher education. While sociologists Robert Park and Georg Simmel argued that marginality is often a wonderful place from which to conduct sociological investigation, it is a position that can be quite uncomfortable for a student. However, over time these experiences of marginality have become a source of empathy for my own students who often come to IUPUC feeling marginal for many of the same reasons.

As the product of a working class family, I frequently felt estranged from faculty members whose current and past experiences were so distinct from mine. Even as a senior seeking input regarding my graduate school application essay, I remember being advised to say something like, “coming from a family that has always valued and been a part of higher education...” However, my father was an eighth grade drop out who worked in manual labor jobs his entire life. My mother did graduate from high school, but I quickly determined that I would need a different angle for the essay! Likewise, my blue collar family took a “meat and potatoes” approach to meals. Rice was considered an exotic dish and never served at home. The local chain steakhouse was fine dining. Later when I attended professional conferences and joined faculty colleagues for dinner, I never knew how to respond to questions like, “Do you like Indian (Thai, Cambodian, etc.) food?” I didn’t know. I had never gone to an Indian (Thai, Cambodian, etc.) restaurant before and had no idea what to order once I got there! The lack of familiarity with the social class norms typical of university faculty left me feeling insecure and on the margins.

Growing up in a working class family in the 1970s, a college education, while not ridiculed as unnecessary, was not emphasized as essential for success despite the fact that I was a good student throughout

my elementary and secondary years. Thus, I attended a small private liberal arts college for a single semester immediately after high school, but dropped out to work full time. After a career in radio broadcasting, I turned to factory jobs for a couple of years. It was seven years after my high school graduation when I returned to college. This time I attended a regional commuter campus of a state university. Having been out of school for a while, I worried that my academic skills would lag behind those of the typical student. I quickly discovered that I identified more with my professors than my 18-20 year old classmates despite the distance in terms of social class. I was a much more focused and motivated student than the majority of my younger classmates.

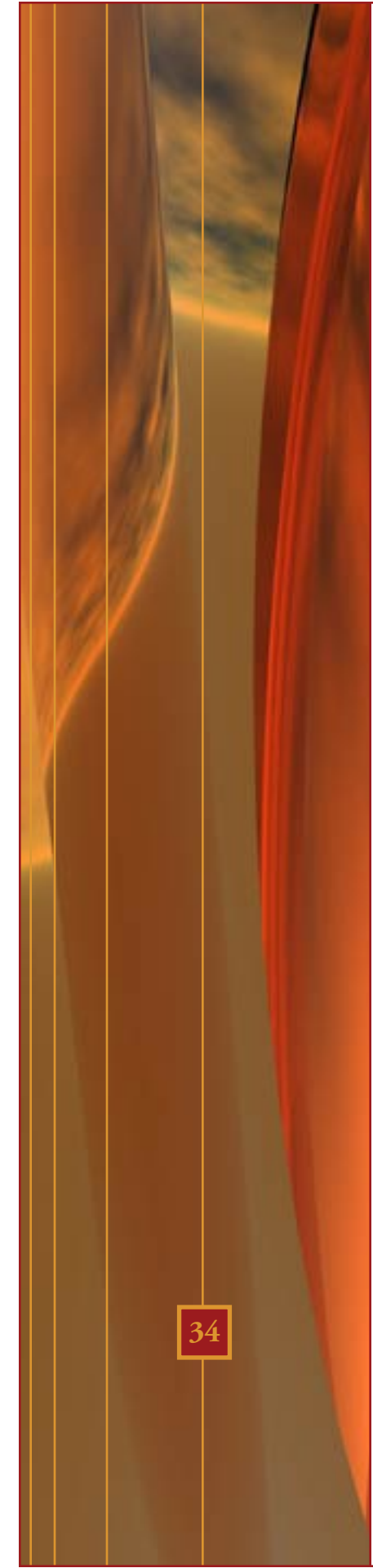
Despite my academic success and the approval of my professors, I was marginal among my classmates. When my research methods class was assigned the task of creating a single survey, it was three nontraditional students who stuck around to do the task while the majority of the class disappeared during our supposed working sessions that the professor did not attend. I got a quick lesson in the “free rider” problem that makes group work a challenge. The younger students were content to trust that the few older students would do a more than adequate job for them. We received an “A” for the project, but the three of us who did the work felt that we were exploited.

Occasionally, my classroom experience also left me feeling marginal because of my religious orientation. As an evangelical Christian, I occasionally encountered faculty members who would make disparaging remarks about how intelligent and educated people could not believe in God. Given my own confidence in my beliefs, I tried to ignore such remarks and often left class feeling as if I didn’t belong. However, occasionally I would challenge my professors on their claims. I was pleasantly surprised that I could enter into a debate about hermeneutics and what topics science can and cannot appropriately address and be received with respect. I think faculty members hostile to religion were often surprised to discover that intelligent students capable of critical thinking could take their religion and spirituality seriously.

These experiences of marginality in higher education have made me a more reflective teacher. I find that I can readily relate to my first generation college students, many of whom are from working class families. Ironically, my wife is fond of pointing out how I now “speak like a college professor.” When introducing new terminology in class, I jokingly tell my students they are “getting their tuition money’s worth” as we learn “college vocabulary.” I try not to assume that students will know the meaning of words that I commonly use in conversation with faculty members. I also share my working class background with my students as I illustrate sociological concepts. I believe that it helps build students’

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My research in the scholarship of teaching and learning has explored differences in the participation of traditional and nontraditional students in classroom discussions. Without a doubt, traditional students are likely to sit back and let the nontraditional students speak for the class. I combat this tendency by learning student names and calling on the quieter younger students to participate. I also get nontraditional and traditional students talking to one another by placing them into small groups for discussion of assigned readings. In order to maximize participation grades in these groups, one must ensure that all members of the group have spoken up. This strategy creates both social pressure for all students to speak up and encourages talkative students to invite quiet students to join in the discussion. It helps solve the “free rider” problem while getting nontraditional and traditional students talking with each other.

Finally, I seek to respect my students’ religious orientation or lack thereof. This can be challenging when teaching courses like the Sociology of Religion. The last time I taught the course I had everything from a “practicing atheist” (his words) to a fifty year member of a local Baptist church. Such diversity in religious orientation makes inclusive teaching challenging. We set ground rules that included no proselytizing during class time, respect for one another’s beliefs, and a careful recognition of the questions a social scientific approach to the study of religion could and could not address. Given the security these ground rules provided, students were quite interested in one another’s diverse religious experiences as they applied to topics in the course.

I am a better teacher because of my experiences of marginality in higher education. These experiences, while sometimes leaving me feeling estranged from faculty colleagues who come from very different backgrounds, have given me great empathy for my students who frequently come to higher education feeling marginal themselves. I hope to enable them to become comfortable and successful in what often feels like a strange new world for them.

*Jay R. Howard, Ph.D.*  
*Professor of Sociology*  
*Head, Division of Liberal Arts*

## **From Ghetto to Ghetto: Growing Through The Past into the Future**

I was born in the ghetto waterfront community of Buffalo, New York. Most of my neighbors did not “look” like me. They were of African, American Indian and Latino descent. My parents were simple people. They worked all of their lives in low paying, low prestige positions. My father, who had no education beyond high school, still possessed a wealth of worldly knowledge. He taught me to respect experience as much as book learning. He taught me to see beyond the outside to the inner core of a person. He taught me to promote human relations regardless of the exterior package in which I was to find these experiences.

My father marveled at simple things. He and I would sit for long periods at the end of a day simply watching the sun go down. We watched parades and took walks in the neighborhood. We talked to people as we went by. While I was informed that not all people were trustworthy, I was also reminded that all people were to be given that assumption, at first. My father said I needed to honor and revere other realities as well. This was not an easy thing to do. I grew up “poor”, but until I went to college and was informed that I was poor in my Introductory Sociology class, I was unaware of my status. These experiences reminded me that “reality” is as much definitional and perceptual as it is “factual.”

My neighborhood was a real mix of people. I was ‘white’ in a neighborhood dominated by people who did not look like me. I did not realize how “different” I was because it was never pointed out to me. When someone wanted to do something for you usually you said ‘thank you’ and that was that. It was only later that I found out that to be white and male was an ‘honor’ to maintain, to savor, to defend against all new comers. I was to learn this when I went to college in Iowa.

There I was, a poor city boy who grew up on the waterfront of a major urban environment. So, like anyone in a strange environment, I sought out people who had what I considered familiar faces. This group included African, Latino, and Native Americans; poor people who did menial labor such as janitors, day laborers, and women - as many of my close relations were female. The student population was about 95% white, a few Asians, and even fewer Africans and African Americans. Most of the students were mainline Protestants with a few Roman Catholics and even fewer Jewish students to make the mix a mix. And then there was me.

When I sought out people who were “like me,” people who looked like me accused me of not sticking to “my own kind.” Well, I

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thought that I was with my “own kind.” It was just that my definition differed from the definition of others. So I associated with Africans and African American students. I spent time talking with janitors, grounds keepers, and secretaries. I had to choose between my image of reality and those of others who wanted me to “purchase my reality in terms of my friends, not in terms of what I saw in front of me.” Again, my choice was an easy one to make. But the greatest education was to come to me during my sophomore year at COE.

Organizers for what was to be called ‘freedom summer’ came to COE to recruit students to travel to the South to help African American citizens register to vote. Now this seemed to be an obvious activity for a person with my background. But it caused changes in me that are to this day still a fundamental part of who I am. These experiences - positive and negative - and the people I met, both Black and White, are images I hold dear to this day which help orient many of my activities inside and outside the classroom. I spent that summer, and the following summer in many small Southern towns and rural areas.

So how does the above story relate to how I teach? I learned that there is always more than one way to view reality. I learned that difference is natural. I came to trust my experiences as foundational to understanding my ideas; and discovered that ideas are, in fact, a combination of personal experience and ‘facts.’

We teach and reach students through books and personal experiences. When we link the personal and the public, we connect people to the community around them in ways that they can connect for themselves. When people are able to connect the dots themselves this is the most powerful and most lasting type of teaching one can accomplish. Democratic education engages and involves people in realities both close at hand and far a field. We create realities that show why and how we are connected to a community of like-minded but diversely prepared people.

My classes are created communities, however brief they may be in time and space. I treat my students as enfranchised adults even when we disagree as to the pieces of those communities. Rules are set to act as guides, not as brick walls, because I realize that we need structure, but also that structures are there to facilitate learning. Rules change because experiences that people encounter also change. Change and innovation of practice facilitates best learning because life is a constantly moving target. It is a combination of the usual and the newly discovered. Classes are a microcosm of that broader cultural reality, and thus needs to reflect those other realities.

Classrooms that value diversity of all types work when we can convince students of the importance that all people are involved in

mortgages and dental appointments, and that we all draw lines between these two realities. We can do so when we realize that, as my father said, “We are all after the same things in life, we simply approach the attainment of those things in different ways.”

I have learned that diversity is not political or even economic but relational. I found that we need to become aware of the whole person and not just their cover. I have come to understand that we have to teach people and not subjects. We have to become involved in the lives of our students to be able to teach them concepts and ideas. I realize that as a white male I can teach courses on African Americans and women if I am willing to listen to individuals and groups as they live their lives, and then add my observations about my relation to their lives. I teach politics as if we are all part of the problems and the alternatives. I learned all of this from where and how I grew up, and this is how I teach. I teach by remembering the walks my father and I took, and the lessons he taught me on those long ago inner-city ghetto walks.

*Paul Kriese, PhD*  
*Associate Professor of Politics*

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## “A Path of Inclusion”

The following autobiographical vignette presents my mindset at the time I began teaching Business Communication at the Kelley School of Business. At that time, I was leaving a career as an immigration attorney working for Catholic Social Services.

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I'm a lawyer. I try to make people talk about bleak periods in their lives. Some won't. Some almost can't.

I remember one Liberian woman who told me Charles Taylor's rebel troops forced her from a line of death-marching women and children. Being separated from the group usually meant rape, torture, death...words I don't fully understand. She told me how the troops raped her and how she became some sergeant's "woman;" how she cooked cassava for him; how she suffered everyday. I recall the ease with which her eyes went blank. When this happens, you know that person somehow has left your presence.

One day she left me like this for five or ten minutes that felt like an eternity: her voice changed. She was frightened. She told me how she JUST ESCAPED from the sergeant. She wanted to know how I could help her. After she came back to me, she was withdrawn. I convinced her to meet with the staff psychologist. His diagnosis: She lives in a time warp; She cannot at times distinguish between now and then; She suffers bouts of weeping, but cannot explain why; She manages to struggle through everyday life, as long as nothing reminds her of then; She cannot maintain long term relationships...and on and on for three pages. How could I help her?

My only answer even now: by doing my job well so that she received asylum. So, she and I had to rehash this torturous period of her life so many times that five years later, I likely recall the details of her life as a slave better than I recall most details of my own life.

And I remember a Salvadoran woman, who routinely saw her deceased parents hovering in a pasture near the pick-up-truck camper she called home. She lived off a dirt road in nowhere, South Texas. You couldn't find her home without counting mailboxes after turning off the highway onto a paved road that cut through mostly undeveloped land. Her little camper had no running water, a port-a-potty bin, and a rusted stove. The camper was raised on cinder blocks. One of her neighbors let her grow corn in a 20 by 20 foot patch of hard dirt. She kept about twenty little dogs. She walked miles a day to the closest town to get food handouts from a church pantry. She preferred this life to the one she left.

At least once a month, she would hitch hike to the non-profit law office where I worked to tell me that a dark Jeep Cherokee drove by her and that the people inside were watching her. Every time she would remind me that the death squads often use dark Jeep Cherokees. She would tell me how a death squad showed up at her house because a neighbor, who was married to a military man, hated her and spread rumors about her. How the *esquadron de muerte* killed her dogs and used the blood to write “dogs” on her squat, thatched-roof mud house, then rounded up as much of her family as they could, raping the children in ways I won’t describe, and shot them. How she fled to Mexico. How she fled from Mexico when after close to eight years there, she began seeing suspicious people, people dressed like death squad members, in shirts with embroidered stripes. The first I heard of the shirts was when we were in court and she was trying to convince a judge not to send her back to El Salvador. I can never forget the precision of her testimony, how chests opened up like red rosebuds, how she crouched behind a waist high palm plant...the dripping red word “*chuchos*” on her home. She can’t read, but to me her words that day described life and death more clearly than I’ve ever heard before or since. I can never forget how she saw her parents hovering above the cows in the pasture. They talked to her.

I remember all the people that I’ve tried to help and the parts of their lives they don’t ever want to talk about again. I can tell you more ways to cut peoples’ souls than I ever dreamed existed. I’ve crawled into a dark corner of my house late at night and brooded about what I wish I didn’t know, but do know, because I’m a lawyer.

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The mindset in this vignette is easily traced back to my high school experience. The highest award at my all-male high school was not “valedictorian.” It was the “Man for Others” award. My teachers prodded for non-self-absorbed thinking; the curriculum included a lot of community service. The result: my high school experience sent me down the path of seeking and discovering otherness, a path of inclusion. Traveling this path became an inextricable part of who I am. Some may find it remarkable that my high school experience did this for me. But it did.

And this remarkable high school experience meant that I expect my teaching to help others reach or travel the path of inclusion. Aim high, right?

But mindsets are limiting.

When I began teaching, I thought that I could bring the world to my students. I had supervised several recent college graduates in my legal

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These days, as I sketch a plan for a given semester, as I meet my students for the first time, as we walk the first awkward steps of the semester, I see the most important part of my job is to give my students **avenues** to be heard, **confidence** to speak, and **feedback** on how to make their voices more significant.

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career, and they were always into what I had to say. They always engaged passionately in the conversations about our clients' harsh lives, the strategy about cases, the cold legal system, et cetera. I came to the school of business to teach communication with incredible stories to share about the power of communication. My students reacted; they either loved or hated the world as I presented it to them, a world with grim surprises waiting to change their lives for better or worse.

I am aware that many teachers who try to shake up their students run into the love/hate reaction. For years I struggled to find ways to avoid this reaction because the price of negative affect in our students is often too high. Finally, I had an insight about my teaching. The path of inclusion does not demand the bipolar reaction if you teach in an inclusive way. Students, like all people, need a significant voice, meaning an opportunity to be heard and an audience that listens; that's what I did for my clients, and I needed to do the same for my students.

These days, as I sketch a plan for a given semester, as I meet my students for the first time, as we walk the first awkward steps of the semester, I see the most important part of my job is to give my students avenues to be heard, confidence to speak, and feedback on how to make their voices more significant. Beginning on the first day of class, we consider the importance of everyone's need to feel significant. These days, as I teach, I chart my students' participation; I note their ample willingness to engage in conversation, to listen, to react, and most of all to consider possibilities that they did not think of alone. I see my students starting down the path of inclusion, and I see myself continuing along the path with them.

*Michael C. Morrone, Esq.*  
*Lecturer, Business Communication, Kelley School of Business*  
*Indiana University Bloomington*

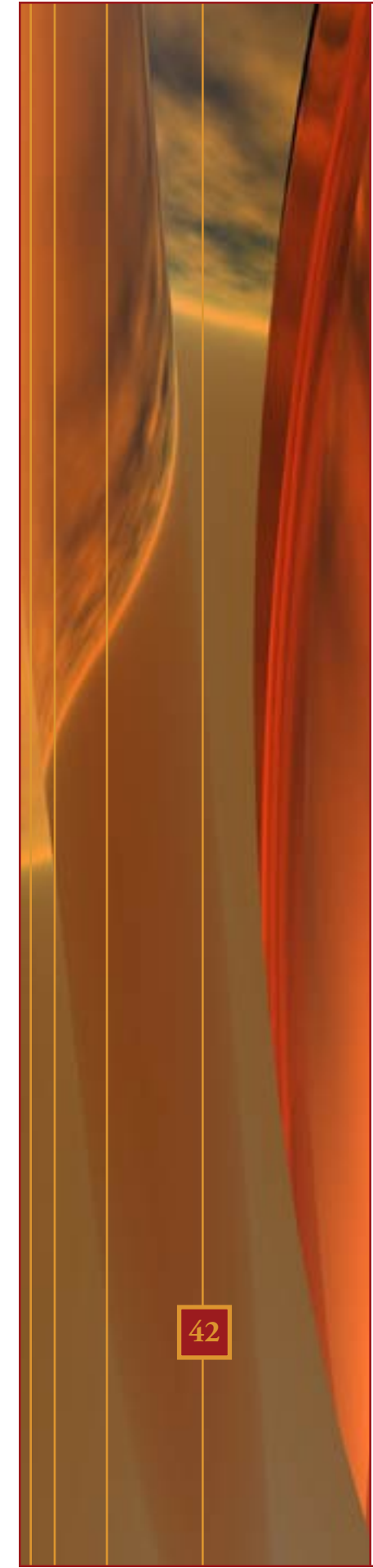
## **Meeting the Other: Autism, Emotional Disability, and Learning to Teach**

In September, 1971, I got off an airplane in Detroit. As an eighteen-year-old first-year student at Antioch College in Ohio, I was embarking on my first co-operative study experience: assistant teacher at a private school for children identified as autistic and emotionally disabled in suburban Detroit. The position was to last three months; I was to assist the school in working with these children while living with the family of one of the students. The only requirement for the job was to be interested in working with children, which was fortunate as I had no prior teaching experience or background in special education or disability.

The intent of the cooperative study program at Antioch was to give students an opportunity to experience the world beyond college as a college student, as well as engage in learning activities that would support academic work and career choices. In each of these ways, my experience at Tim-Ro-Nan-Go School that fall of 1971 fulfilled these expectations, having a profound effect not only on my career choice, but also on my evolving perceptions and understandings regarding American society and culture. Through my work as a teacher with and of these children, I initiated the imperative life-long process of understanding how disability relates to multiculturalism in a general way and how my subsequent professional life has been framed by constructions of equity, disability, and student-centered teaching and learning.

Although recent critique and scholarship has begun to address disability as a fundamental social and cultural aspect of the human condition, disability has not been traditionally viewed as a central aspect of multiculturalism in the United States (Davis, Winzer, Longmore and Umanski, Safford and Safford, Baynton, Biklen, Osgood). Race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion have all gained recognition as fundamental elements of diversity and multiculturalism in this country, generating a substantial stream of scholarship and critique regarding the ways in which each of these constructs contribute to perceptions of “otherness” among us. Yet, disability has not. This omission has been a mistake, both in my opinion and in those of other scholars of disability and special education. Through historical, social, ethnographic, and other modes of research, disability has repeatedly been shown to constitute an aspect of cultural and social experience, whereby those who are labeled “disabled” have faced discrimination, prejudice, hostility, contempt, pity, and misunderstanding as a consequence of their constructed condition.

The children at Tim-Ro-Nan-Go School exemplified this fact quite clearly. These children were rejected by the Detroit Public Schools because of their perceived disabilities, conditions that the DPS were



neither prepared nor inclined to address in regular education classrooms. As this was prior to the Federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the Detroit Public Schools were technically within their legal right to deny access and services to these children and their families on the basis of their disability. With an unwelcoming and unconcerned public school system not an option, these children were enrolled in TRNGS (named for the first four children enrolled) in hopes of providing some form of formal education and socialization opportunities. With a staff of four licensed teachers and several assistant teachers (four of whom were from Antioch), the school attempted to provide activities, therapy, and curriculum that would allow these children to grow and adapt to their social worlds as much as possible.

From early September to late December in 1971, I worked with about twelve children ranging in age from 4 to 15 on an intensive, daily basis. I was responsible for assisting with four hours of in-school time, as well as three hours daily of driving five of the children to and from school. The children displayed a wide range of ability levels in terms of communication skills, social skills, personal hygiene, and cognitive ability. Many were identified as having autism and exhibited the typical spectrum of behaviors associated with clinical definitions of the condition. Others exhibited behavioral disorders manifested in aggression, anger, and withdrawal. As teachers, we used a wide variety of approaches to working with our students, including group activities, functional (or “life skills”) curriculum, and intensive one-on-one intervention.

My experience as a young, neophyte teacher proved almost overwhelming. My learning occurred not so much in terms of teaching skills or knowledge of categories of disability - limited as they were to two or at most three general categories - but in terms of how I viewed my relationship as a teacher with students and, more importantly, how I came to view disability as a complex and unique characteristic of the human condition, lessons from which I continue to learn to this day.

The first two weeks on the job were confusing, exhausting, and frustrating. I did not understand how these children could behave in the ways they did, having never encountered individuals with similar patterns of behavior and self-expression. The screaming, biting, shouting, repetitive practices, and physical actions of the children startled me. The need to communicate expectations and ideas through ways other than words challenged and at times angered me. The experience and patience of the licensed teachers contrasted sharply and dismayingly with my absence of these qualities. Daily consultation and weekly Friday afternoon staff meetings at first did little to console my sense of inadequacy on multiple levels.

But as has been recounted frequently in the literature on cultural competence and on the value of exposure to and involvement with diversity on a continuous basis, my intensive immersion into the worlds of these children soon began to yield significant benefits for them and for myself. To begin with, the on-the-job pedagogical training, while quite tiring, exposed me to the power and vitality of student-centered learning - the idea that all teaching first and foremost should be designed for the sake of the student, not for that of policy, administrative ease, fiscal efficiency, or individual whim. These children, rejected by a public school system comfortable only with predictability and regularity, blossomed in their own significant, if not spectacular, ways within a caring and adaptive educational environment that focused on the whole child and respected their individual needs and assets. Prior to any formal course work in educational philosophy or learning theory, this experience nonetheless cemented my belief that in any classroom, the student must come first. That has been a cornerstone of my own approach as a teacher ever since.

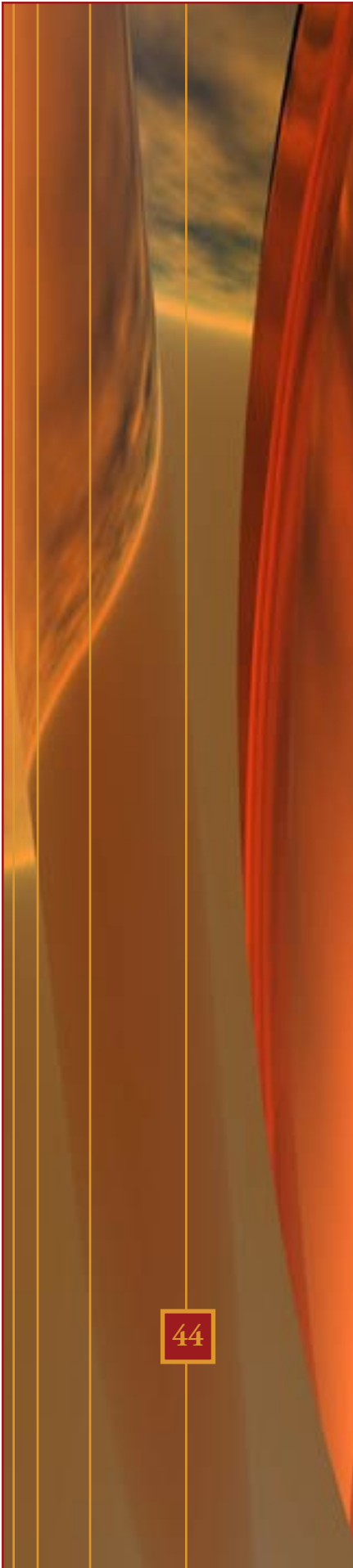
Even so, it was the opportunity to experience disability as a reality and as a series of possibilities, opportunities, and assets, rather than as a *Problem*, that changed my view of human interaction - in the classroom as well as out - in stark and essential ways. For the first week or two Terry, Alan, Shiela, Annie, Mark, and even Kim - with whom I shared a house and meals daily - were undecipherable beings, infused with drives and rationales for action that I could not begin to appreciate. Yet, in my opinion, it is impossible to engage in such intense contact with other human beings without gaining substantive insight into their approaches to life and human interaction - both in terms of differences and similarities. I saw these children become confused, angry, happy, hungry, tired, excited, bored, and overjoyed. I saw them enjoy learning for learning's sake and become underwhelmed by my attempts to communicate. I met their sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandparents; I saw their homes and neighborhoods. I learned what they liked and didn't like for lunch. I watched them behave in ways that puzzled me, yet satisfied them wholeheartedly. And ultimately I came to see them as real kids, real students, and real friends.

In the world of disability, the competence, value, and even humanity of children for whom life offers different possibilities and modes of interaction have been severely and consistently questioned. The notion of "normal" is potent and comfortable; those who exist on the margins of that zone experience the world in vastly different ways. The literature on diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural competence consistently emphasizes the need to respect difference and value alternative perspectives. This is especially true for teachers, in whose classrooms - and hands - so much of the rich diversity of our communities lies. And it has proven especially valuable for me.

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... it was the opportunity to experience disability as a reality and as a series of possibilities, opportunities, and assets, **rather** than as a problem, that changed my view of human interaction ...

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This personal experience of just three months thirty-four years ago has transformed little in my memory. The sights, sounds, smells, and thoughts remain vivid and vital. When I talk to students about their decision to work with children and families shaped by disability, I refer to my time in Detroit often and emphatically. It constituted a rare opportunity to learn about a profession and about a community simultaneously, and the whole has truly proven to be more than the sum of its parts. As a historian, teacher, and advocate for the better understanding and appreciation of disability and the qualities of those so labeled, the children from Tim-Ro-Nan-Go taught me much. And I continue to appreciate their mentorship.

*Robert L. Osgood*  
*Associate Professor of Education*  
*IUPUI*

## **The Open Door: For Persons with Disabilities**

Over the course of my lifetime I have observed and experienced a broadening of opportunity within the teaching profession, particularly for those teachers with handicaps. This broadening has resulted from the efforts of determined individuals working diligently at many levels to develop policies and legislation which identify and protect the rights of teachers to function fully within their profession in spite of what in earlier years were seen as limitations. Doors that once were shut in the faces of many teachers are now being held wide open for them.

### **The 1930s.**

My mother was an elementary school teacher in the 1930s, a time of economic depression in the United States. After two years of teaching, she and my father decided to get married, but the policy of the time dictated that a husband and wife could not both be employed because there were not enough jobs to go around. My parents took the Interurban train to a small town in southern Indiana and asked a local minister to marry them. His wife shut off her iron to attend the ceremony as the sole witness of their wedding, and they kept their marriage secret for two years in order to save enough money to buy a house. Their story has always seemed a very romantic one to me, even though what they did was in violation of the “policy” of the time.

### **The 1960s.**

In the spring of 1967 I was teaching English at Howe High School, and before my pregnancy became noticeable, policy dictated that I take a leave of absence so that my students would not be negatively affected by being in the daily presence of a pregnant woman. My husband was just finishing his last year of medical school and preparing for a residency in obstetrics and gynecology, so money was tight. Thanks to the moonlighting jobs my husband found, we managed to pay the bills.

### **The 21st Century.**

These stories are part of the “lore” of our family, and we like to retell them with fondness at family gatherings. The policies behind these stories no longer exist. In our more enlightened times, I can appreciate the progress represented by the elimination of such policies. In the fall of 2003, however, I became even more aware of how much more inclusive society in general and education in particular had become, specifically regarding policies affecting the handicapped.

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That fall, I was teaching freshman composition at Indiana University – Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). One November evening, I was responding to a set of student papers, writing comments on the drafts as I read them. Quite suddenly, I could no longer read Vincent Thomas’ paper! I had experienced an incidence of Anterior Optic Neuropathy (AON), resulting in permanent partial loss of vision in my left eye. I had had a similar episode in 1996 in my right eye, and now I had the condition in both eyes, leaving me with vision so limited that I could no longer drive a car, and I fearfully struggled to face what seemed the certainty that I would never again be able to teach as I had for much of my 62 years.

Luckily, I soon discovered that recent sociological and technological advances would make it possible for me to continue teaching. These advances had been made mostly without my conscious awareness of them, and I am still discovering additional advances that promise even more assistance for me in my situation.

#### **Sociological Advances.**

One piece of legislation which has offered handicapped persons opportunities to adapt to their disabilities is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted on July 26, 1992. According to the website of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (<http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html>), the ADA

prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions and privileges of employment.

A “qualified employee or applicant with a disability is an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job in question.”

My disability left me no longer able to drive a car, and I was delighted to learn that one result of the ADA was the initiation of the IndyGo Open Door program by the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation Board. This program provides door-to-door bus transportation for handicapped persons in Indianapolis. For the past year and a half, I have used this service to get to and from IUPUI and feel a little guilty that I no longer have to undergo the sometimes extensive daily search for a parking place my colleagues face.

To assist me in adapting to my disability, the English department allowed me to reduce my classroom teaching load. In the spring of 2004, I worked full-time in the University Writing Center (UWC), tutoring, consulting, and mentoring undergraduate tutoring “fellows.” In the fall of 2004, I taught one class and continued to work additional hours in the UWC. In the spring of 2005, I taught two classes and worked in the UWC. In the fall of 2005, I will teach three classes and work in the UWC. This is the same schedule I had at the time of my AON incident, so I will consider myself at that time back to my normal routine. Additional accommodations have been made for me by the English Department. My classrooms and office are now all located in Cavanaugh Hall, making it no longer necessary for me to trek all over campus and possibly risk tripping or falling due to my limited vision.

### **Technological Advances.**

I have been amazed by the number of technological devices that have been developed for people with limited vision. ZoomText icons now appear on my office computer screen and on the screen of one of the computers in the UWC. When I click on this icon, a program is uploaded which magnifies anything on the screen as large as I wish, from Oncourse postings to email messages to surf-rides on the Internet.

My low-vision specialist at the Indiana University Indianapolis Eye Care Center introduced me to a wide array of technological devices to choose among for additional equipment to assist me with my vision. I finally decided upon a FlipperPort device, a small closed-circuit television camera which can be “flipped” into adjustable positions to focus on anything I want to see more clearly. The televised image is displayed on a portable screen, and I can adjust the image in several modes and multiple sizes to magnify any item and see it more clearly than possible even before my AON episode.

In the fall of 2003, my suddenly weakened eyes seemed to focus on a door closing on my life as a teacher. I am grateful to have discovered, instead, that the door was actually opening onto a new world that still includes the teaching that I love and also a new awareness of just how far humankind has come in its quest for ever fuller actualization of human potential.

*Mary Jo Pride  
Trustees Lecturer  
Department of English, IUPUI*

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I am grateful to  
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was actually  
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new world . . .

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## **IUPUI Resources**

There are two specific entities at IUPUI which assist students, faculty, and staff who have disabilities:

### **Adaptive Educational Services**

Cavanaugh Hall 001E

(317) 274-3241

<http://life.iupui.edu/aes>

### **Adaptive Technology Center**

Informatics and Communications Technology Complex

Room 131

(317) 274-4580

<http://www.indiana.edu/~iuadapts/>

## A Multicultural Advisor

I have dealt with multiculturalism for many years as a college student and as an advisor. I immigrated to the United States 28 years ago and went to college. Multiculturalism was not talked about and students were left to deal with these issues on their own. Having a name that is different and speaking with an accent are not easy things for a student to deal with. Faculty, staff and students did not know how to relate.

Things have changed tremendously, and I have experienced these changes just by observing how other advisors and students relate to me personally. Coming from a different background makes me more sensitive to multicultural issues and more at ease working with those students. By writing this article, I hope to provide a new perspective on the issue.

Some of the things that I have learned from working with multicultural students and from my own experiences as a multicultural advisor are:

- We need to listen carefully to the student's needs. Adjusting to a new place to live and dealing with the pressure to succeed in college are overwhelming experiences.
- Do not use slang language. Students might speak fluent English, but have a limited exposure to the language. Most of it is through high school English classes, or TV and movies. They do not have many opportunities to practice spoken English.
- Do not use higher education language without an explanation. Sometimes we use the words we are comfortable with and know what that word means. An example will be "pre-requisite," "waiver," or "certification." These words don't mean much to a new student, and may be difficult to understand for a multicultural student. I often write a word down and explain it, and also encourage the student to look it up in the dictionary to get the whole meaning of the word.
- Tell a student to ask for help when he needs it. It might not be acceptable in a student's culture to ask for help; it is most likely considered as a sign of weakness, especially for male students. We need to be aware of that, and encourage a student to ask for help. Faculty members might also be seen as authoritative figures and

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We are trained on how to deal with academic, family, and emotional issues, but are **unprepared** to deal with multicultural issues.

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unapproachable, not as a person who has an interest in their academic success.

- Encourage students to belong to student organizations. Multicultural students tend to make friends from the same multicultural group. It makes them more comfortable because they can relate to the other students since they share the same background and language. They need to be encouraged to experience the different opportunities available on campus to give them a sense of belonging.

- Be sensitive to a student's personal issues. As an advisor, I find myself involved in students' personal problems. We are trained on how to deal with academic, family, and emotional issues, but are unprepared to deal with multicultural issues. For instance, I found myself showing a student at the Jag Junction cafeteria what "deli meat" means.

Things we take for granted are not obvious for these students. I hope this gives insight into some of the issues that the students might face. We can improve the quality of our service and help the students be successful just by being aware of the different needs of multicultural students.

*Ragheda "Anne" Rabie, BSEE, MBA  
Academic Advisor, University College  
Pre-Professional Advisor, School of Science  
IUPUI*

## Colin's Vision

It was my second year in an academic teaching position, and I had just been observed by one of my peers in several of my classes. Following a lengthy conversation, an exhaustive examination of teaching materials and a thoughtful review of my teaching philosophy, she asked me a question. The way that I approached quantitative methods was different from anything she had seen, and she was curious to know how I had happened on this specific method. I had been able to explain my philosophy and the evidence indicated that my methods were successful; but, I had not explained how it had evolved. It was some years before I was able to answer the question that my colleague had posed.

We need to walk back several years down memory lane to a time when I was a graduate student. It was the end of summer and I was in the final year of writing my doctoral dissertation when I first met Colin. A friend called to inquire whether I would be willing to tutor Colin in econometrics. As I had not taught this particular course, I suggested others who had taught the course before, and agreed to meet with Colin and help with introductions if necessary. A week or so later, an African American in his early thirties walked into my office, introduced himself as Colin and proceeded to explain the purpose of his visit.

Within the next hour I learned that Colin wanted to learn econometrics because his life's ambition was to secure a federal job in Washington D.C.; a job that required forecasting and modeling. Colin had followed up on the list of names I had provided, but was unable to find someone willing to work with his special needs. It wasn't until Colin explained gently that he was almost blind that I understood what he meant.

Colin had examined the syllabus for econometrics and spoken with seniors who dissuaded him from taking the course because it was difficult. It was an elective, but Colin wanted to work in a field where econometrics was required. He was left with one remote possibility at this point - which happened to be me. I pointed out that I lacked both the experience and the skills to guide him. I was not a trained tutor and I had no experience in working with special needs. Colin responded that he had heard that I enjoyed teaching and learning, and that I just might be the right person to work with him. I promised to think over the request.

I could sense the courage and the strength of purpose that Colin possessed and I was touched by his faith in me. When Colin and I met the next time, I suggested we start working on a trial basis. Colin would be my guide and mentor just as much as I would be his. If our experiment did not succeed, Colin would withdraw from the course.

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And so it was  
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with **words**.  
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For the first few weeks, Colin and I worked on finding effective ways of working around our limitations. Since it was impossible for me to master Braille in such a short span of time, I could not use chalkboard illustrations or writing. Colin suggested meeting weekly for a two hour session and taping our conversations. And so it was that I learned to paint pictures with words. I used examples and applications so that Colin could develop the intuition and understanding to begin visualizing mathematical equations and models in his mind's eye. It became a challenge that occupied most of my leisure time. When I needed a break from research, I would ponder on the best way to communicate a concept efficiently so that Colin could build on it. Each week, Colin would return with questions, eager to move forward, for he was both motivated and disciplined.

In time, as I began to know Colin better, the extraordinary character that I had glimpsed at our first meeting became evident. Not once did I hear a complaint or note the slightest trace of self-pity. Colin had balanced his failing eyesight with a compelling vision for a future filled with new challenges. Just knowing Colin helped me, for I threw myself into my thesis with renewed vigor and confidence.

When the mid-term results were announced, Colin was at the top of his class. Since most of the class complained bitterly about the exam, the instructor requested that Colin speak to the class. Colin shared his story and his courage and determination became a source of inspiration.

As Colin grew more confident with econometrics, our conversations began to extend to new topics. When we had finished our work for the week, Colin would ply me with questions about India. Why are Indians good at mathematics, he asked; and I tried to present a viewpoint encompassing the economic situation, the brain drain, the value of education in Indian culture, as well as self-selection and sampling bias. Another time, he wanted to know more about the system of arranged marriages and we talked about dowries and bride prices, the joint family system, gender equality and the status of women. Soon, there were more questions from Colin and I was sharing details of my life in India and my impressions of America.

By the end of that semester, Colin had picked up enough about India and Indians to surprise his friends. As for me, Colin's enthusiasm to explore different cultures and values taught me to value the heritage that I had taken so much for granted. I marveled at Colin's wisdom in opening this door for both of us.

These conversations laid the foundation for my career in teaching and learning. The relationship between Colin and me hardly conformed to the typical relationship between a student and teacher. Instead, we

were both learners, bound by a shared and mutual commitment to learning. In working with Colin, I grew adept at creating a framework with examples and applications before presenting formal mathematical models; a trait that was to become a hallmark of my teaching philosophy. Furthermore, in extending our discussions beyond econometrics, Colin and I crossed the narrow boundaries of subject matter and content, and engaged in authentic conversation where both answers and questions were complex and ambiguous and required us to look deep within ourselves. Just as Colin drew me out and taught me the value of self-knowledge and authentic inquiry, I learned to look for opportunities to draw out personal stories and weave them into our learning interactions.

For instance, it was my experience with Colin that led me to encourage one of my foreign students in sharing her account about the country of her origin and her experience with political and economic turmoil. Her narrative explained hyperinflation, and her personal stance helped the economics class begin thinking about different cultures and political systems with empathy. It built a bridge of cultural understanding, and helped her gain confidence as she tried to adjust to a new country. For her fellow classmates, her story opened a window to a new world.

It was the same concept that helped me guide learners in their independent projects. I encouraged learners to find personal meaning in the topics that they chose and to share the interest and excitement of discovery. In later years, I learned to reflect on my own experiences and visit them anew in the context of pedagogy. My experience with Colin had trained me to assume the role of ‘teacher as facilitator.’ In responding to Colin’s needs, I had grown accustomed to seeing things from the viewpoint of the student, and I had adopted a ‘student-centered’ approach. In looking for personal meaning and creating an environment where learners could interact and share experiences with one another, I had begun to value the ‘learning community.’

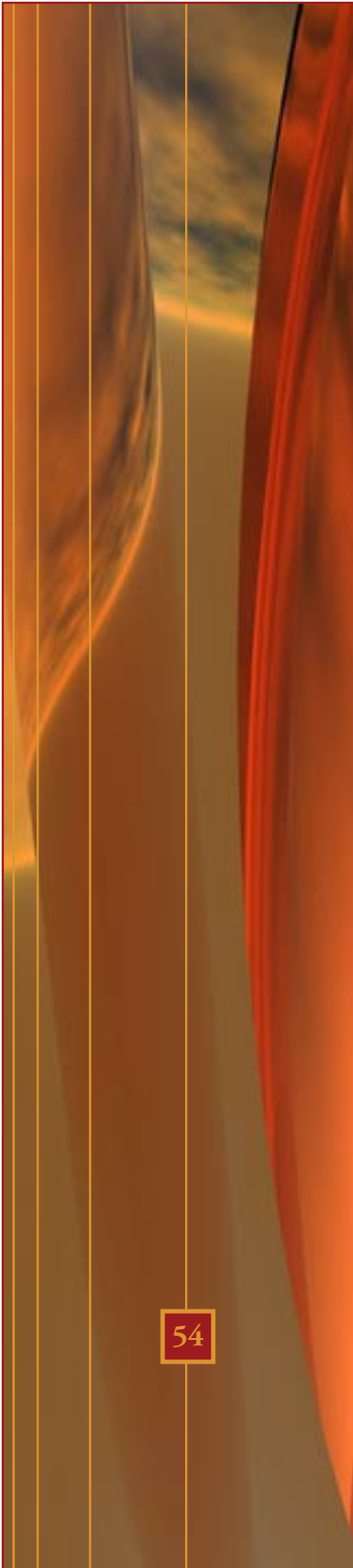
The next semester, Colin applied for and got the job of his dreams; and around the same time, I got my first teaching position. As we prepared to say farewell, I expressed my gratitude to Colin for all that I had learned from him. Colin did not understand why I thanked him and at that point, I could not articulate how much knowing him had meant to me personally and professionally. True, Colin’s courage had touched and empowered me, but that was only a small part of what I had received from him. It has taken me years of reflection to acknowledge the many lessons that Colin taught me.

Until Colin walked into my life, I was not certain that I was suited to an academic career. It was Colin’s faith in me that led me towards teaching and learning. I learned that the passion for excellence

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For her fellow  
classmates,  
her story  
**opened**  
a window  
to a new world.

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gives you the vision to touch and inspire others, just as Colin inspired me. I discovered that the path to excellence becomes a joyful path if you take others along in your quest, as Colin did with me. For all this and more, I thank Colin's vision.

*Vandana Rao, Ph. D.  
Associate Professor of Economics  
Division of Business and Economics  
Indiana University East*

## “Reflections on Diversity Practices: Surviving Student Resistance In The Classroom”

As a new Teaching Assistant at a predominately white mid-west university, I co-designed a course titled, “Love Through the Black Literary Experience.” The first class period materialized into “The Battle Royal.”<sup>1</sup> I did not anticipate the high level of student resistance I encountered when one student stated, “Not another course about whiney minorities.” Was I being challenged because I did not mirror the traditional college professor? I was young, black, and female instead of being older, white, and male. I felt disempowered. How would I regain my status as “instructor?” Instead of the liberal space I’d hoped to develop for my students and me, the classroom was on its way to becoming a very oppressive site - a boxing ring where I was an opponent and not the referee. My response was a few quick jabs: “this university is trying to do its part to ensure that students receive a well balanced education; therefore, it is important that you are exposed to different cultures. Furthermore, have you ever questioned the motives of an instructor who teaches literature written by and about whites?” The student’s come back was a quick right hook, “why are you and this university so intent on shoving diversity down our throats? I am not racist but it seems to me that offering a class on just black writers is reverse discrimination.” It was definitely time for a knockout, or I was doomed in my desire to remain “in control.” I stated, “This is the material we’ll be covering; if you don’t want to be here, feel free to sign up for another section of ENG112.” Interestingly, no one dropped the course, which was my green light to execute my diversity mission. This article examines how my efforts to ensure that non-dominant literature be taken seriously were interrupted by student resistance. I also outline the pedagogical strategies I’ve since implemented to survive student resistance.

My assumed victory highlighted above was short-lived. I went under the ropes and became an opponent yet again. As we analyzed the literature, my students’ misinformed knowledge of black experiences and lack of interest in gaining new knowledge was daunting. Students approached the literature with hostility and defensiveness. During an explication of Alice Walker’s “For My People,” one student exclaimed, “Why is the poet so angry? She’s trying to make white people feel guilty. I wasn’t a slave owner. Why is she harping on race? Racism no longer exists.” I was speechless. My student’s comment was no longer an affront to an author but a dismissal of my knowledge and experience as a woman of color in a culture where, as Cornel West writes, “race matters.” Was I knocked out, or would I recover before the countdown? I came to. After asking my student if he existed in a bubble, I informed him that even

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<sup>1</sup> Borrowed from Ralph Ellison’s “The Battle Royal.”

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I needed to understand that creating a progressive classroom would entail sacrificing some “power” and “control” of the classroom.

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though my presence in the classroom did say something about the improvement of race relations, it could never support his claim that racism is nonexistent. I lectured at my students with no mercy reminding them that they were not slave owners and I was far removed from being a slave but that the institution of slavery had left a legacy that placed them in a privileged position. The History and Legacy of Slavery 101 was in full swing as my precedent about interactive learning and a classroom where students are encouraged to share their ideas ended. I silenced them. I had surpassed referee status. I ruled. However, this position as ruler disturbed me.

Student resistance made me a very angry instructor who could not understand why my students were so “closed minded” and “culturally incompetent.” Too much class time was spent defending why I was teaching non-dominant literature. My students probably unconsciously challenged my authority in the classroom because I did not meet their idea of what the traditional professor should look like, and they ought to be held accountable for such shortcomings. However, instead of interpreting their resistance to the literature as their rejection of me, I probably could have had a more successful course if I had addressed why my students were resisting course materials.<sup>2</sup> In reflection, I only perceived my students’ resistance and what “they” were guilty of. I focused more on pointing out students’ misconceptions of black cultures and mythical ideas about the dynamics of race in American culture. Additionally, I felt the urgency to expose them to non-dominant literature at any cost.

I am still committed to “diversity initiatives,” but approach student resistance differently. First, I had to identify the kind of instructor I wanted to be. Did I aim to be the sole voice of knowledge and authority or the progressive instructor who encourages multicultural approaches to learning? I desired a learning environment where students’ contributions would be heard and respected. Why, then, was it so easy for me to silence my former students? An evaluation of my earlier teaching experiences revealed that I had an unconscious fear of losing student respect and control of the classroom. I needed to understand that creating a progressive classroom would entail sacrificing some “power” and “control” of the classroom. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks notes that as instructors, our styles of teaching need to be changed. We must face our fears of losing control “in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a single subject—only multiple ways and multiple references” (36). If I wanted to successfully expose my students to non-dominant

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<sup>2</sup> While I do agree to an extent that as instructors we should not interpret students’ resistance to texts/writers/subjects as a rejection of us, I am not sure this is a simple task to achieve. Quite often what we teach defines us.

cultures, I would have to meet the student where s/he is instead of where I believe s/he should be.

I also had to examine my students' responses to me and my teaching. My white students' resistance was not only about "having diversity shoved down their throats," but more complicated in that many of them had never had an instructor of color and thus had concerns of their own: will I be graded fairly? Will she think that I am a racist if I disagree with something she says? Fear was often at the center of my students' behavior. In my attempts to develop survival mechanisms that would prevent student resistance and address their fears, I queried: how can I present course materials without creating further anxiety among students or present texts in a non-threatening way? How do I help students to recognize the importance of engaging with texts that they claim they can't identify with or may challenge their former knowledge? I've survived by implementing the following strategies:

- It's important to challenge students, but in a non-threatening, non-silencing way. Instead of asking a student who states that racism doesn't exist with "do you exist in a bubble," I introduce them to texts that specifically challenge and complicate such beliefs. Students respond well to Peggy McIntosh's, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." They do not feel threatened in ways that they do when the instructor of the class lectures extensively on their misguided thinking/cultural incompetence. Let someone else challenge the student's thinking. This approach is successful in that as instructor, I don't have to go to war with students as was the case in my first teaching experience.

- Distribute handouts and other useful information early in the semester to broaden student's knowledge base. When teaching a course on Caribbean literature, for instance, I no longer assume that my students know where the Caribbean is located or have basic knowledge of its people and culture. I now issue a map of the Caribbean at the beginning of the course and offer what I've called the History of the Caribbean and Postcolonial Studies 101 during the first two weeks of the semester. Students are empowered in that they can apply this knowledge to issues that evolve in the literature.

- Inform students of their responsibility to be active participants in their educational experience. Remind them that their experiences and ideas matter and will be taken seriously by engaging them through questionnaires

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and other evaluative forms. My students are required to fill out a questionnaire at the beginning of the course where they state why they signed up for the course, and their expectations of the course and instructor. About mid-term, they receive the opportunity to state if their expectations are being met. We discuss these responses as a class and address any problem areas. Students are more open to learning when they are active participants in gathering knowledge and shaping their educational experiences. They are less resistant when they recognize that their views are being registered.

My classroom is no longer a boxing ring. I have accepted the risks of teaching non-dominant literature from a multicultural perspective by focusing more on approaches to learning and trying new teaching styles. Occasionally I still have the urge to retrieve my boxing gloves, but I've found that as long as students are allowed a space where their varied yet important views are valued, they are accepting of challenges and are more open to learn new knowledge even at the expense of re-evaluating their former beliefs.

*Jennifer Thorington Springer, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
School of Liberal Arts  
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis*

**“Reflections on Diversity Practices:  
Surviving Student Resistance In The Classroom”**

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## Sexual Orientation as One Component of Multiculturalism

Just how important is it that teachers acknowledge sexual orientation as a component of multiculturalism? Even as a gay man, it never seemed all that important to me until something happened, as often happens in life - in one dramatic moment - to change my view forever.

Even in 2005, debate continues in some circles about the role of sexual orientation in a discussion of multiculturalism. Newly introduced in mid-century, the term itself refers more narrowly to “culture,” but that narrowing often does not help much. However, the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), founded in 1990, includes in its defining materials a charge to educators: “Thus, school curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia.” While addressing issues of heterosexism does not seem necessarily specific, in its statement of philosophy NAME claims commitment to “the basic tenets of cultural pluralism” and further specifies that “multicultural education promotes equity for all regardless of culture, ethnicity, race, class, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or religion.”

“Thus, fair and full participation in a society’s institutions is paramount as both means and end in NAME’s philosophy. Xenophobia, discrimination, ethnocentrism, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia are societal phenomena that are inconsistent with the principles of democracy and lead to the counterproductive reasoning that differences are deficiencies.”

Having participated in the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and having taught afterwards for three years in West Africa, I felt my multicultural perspective was about as developed as any (white) American’s could be. But somehow, even after years of political activism in the San Francisco Bay area, I managed to maintain very distinct blind spots. In 1990, when I began teaching English at Indiana University Southeast, my own view of multiculturalism still did not include sexual orientation despite my being out at Stanford in graduate school. Indeed, arriving in New Albany, Indiana, after 18 years in California, the last thing I wanted to do was to make a point of sexuality: in my view, sexual orientation was separate from academics. I was a teacher of writing. Period. Besides that, I had tenure to consider.

Busy making other changes in the Writing Program (I was hired, in part, because of my training and expertise in Composition and Rhetoric), I decided to teach for my first semester from the previously established curriculum of First-Year composition: the textbooks had already been ordered and there would be plenty of time to make changes

in the course the following year. Consequently, one of the first courses I taught that fall was a W131, inheriting a set curriculum that included a textbook with essays and commentary on, among many other topics of contemporary interest, gays and lesbians. The syllabus in use by the department proposed that for a personal essay assignment, students might write about issues arising from sexuality or sexual orientation. Fifteen years ago I thought this an advanced state of affairs and was pretty much pleasantly surprised when about four or five of the 23 students, having been provided with a wide range of topics in that section of the course reader, chose to write about sexual orientation.

I gave no special instruction for any of the topics mentioned except to suggest that if students chose to write about sexual orientation, they might actually talk to some gay or lesbian folks to avoid writing drivel. Even though I thought this a sensible instruction, I didn't provide any sense of how students might actually achieve such contact, nor did I volunteer myself as an informant. Sometimes it's difficult to remember the very repressive social climate regarding gay and lesbian life just fifteen years ago, pre-"Will and Grace" and certainly pre-"Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," and before easy access to the multitude of resources to be had in several mouse clicks on the Internet.

The following week the first drafts came in. The few students who wrote about sexual orientation produced the predictable mix of stuff and nonsense: "I don't agree with lesbianism" or "The Bible says...." The notable exception was a paper from, call him Eric, a quiet but attentive student who shared his great interest in football during first-day class introductions. He didn't say much in class but was attentive and always looked interested. Given that Eric also looked the part of a fullback, I was surprised that he had chosen to write about sexuality. As a further point of interest, his draft was much better than the others on the topic with a strong voice arguing in a more than disinterested way for the need for acceptance of gays. In fact, the piece was a clear plea for a more accepting society, calling for tolerance in a world that seemed hell-bent on denying it. I was impressed with what seemed to be personal knowledge, yet the writer made no mention of specific friends or associates.

A week after submitting this first draft of a freshman composition essay, and before I could return it with comments, Eric committed suicide.

Utterly stunned, I tried to make sense of what had happened. To further compound the tragedy, because IUS is a commuter campus, Eric's death took place away from the university. Either unaware or unable to react appropriately the Student Affairs Office did not notify me nor did anyone intervene to offer appropriate help for the class. But more than

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that, I could not avoid facing the terrible possibility that some kind of intervention on my part might somehow have made a difference for Eric. But what would that have been?

Prior to this tragic event, youth suicide, for me, was an object of study, a political (and medical) issue, something not related to the real lives of real people. But I also knew of the work on teen suicide of researchers like Paul Gibson, Gary Remafedi, and others regarding the particular burden felt by many young males struggling with their sexuality. Being faced with seemingly crushing homophobia and not finding support or solace anywhere can lead to inevitable disaster. Here I was, a professional who took pride in knowing my students and in being accessible and in being able to run a supportive classroom, feeling horribly inadequate. That semester changed my academic outlook and my academic life forever.

In the weeks that followed, the class moved on, but I could not give up the notion that I surely should have done something that would have helped Eric. Might it have been something as obvious (and sensible) as providing a more systematic framework for writing about a topic as challenging as sexuality? Might it even have been something as simple as conveying a view, a value, a notion that issues around sexual orientation can be dealt with positively? To have consciously done that, I would have had to have accepted the premise that sexual orientation is as important a consideration as gender, race, ethnic differences, or any other dimension of multiculturalism that might have been present and accounted for in that classroom. The sad fact of the matter remains: I was not yet, at that moment in time, ready.

Classes where lively, meaningful discussions unfold are usually small in number. Given the work load of reading and responding to multiple drafts of writing, writing classes are especially limited. As a result, students and instructors get to know each other fairly well, and fairly early on. A great freedom to be honest and frank emerges, and discussions can become far-ranging. As writing assignments progress through drafts and class discussions, students may make claims and assertions about almost anything including matters involving race, gender, even physical appearance. Any good instructor becomes skilled at challenging underlying assumptions in claims that are illogical or that have embedded discriminatory beliefs. Prior to Eric's class, I found myself readily challenging assumptions based on race, gender, social class, almost any characteristic of separation *except* sexual orientation. The reason I made that exception would clearly take us beyond the scope of this essay, but the consequences of such an exception, I have decided, lead to potentially disastrous results. To put it precisely: sexual orientation is now as clearly a component of my multicultural view as any other aspect.

In the years following my major multicultural transformation, I became extremely proactive. First, I volunteered to advise Lambda, the fledgling GLBT organization on campus. In 1996, several members that year wanted to know why no course existed at IUS on gay and lesbian issues. The query prompted a colleague in sociology and me to create the first-ever such course on our campus, a one-credit reading and discussion course called, quite simply, Introduction to Gay and Lesbian Studies. Populated by students of every stripe, the class provides instruction on how questions about sexuality and gender get asked and answered. We will teach it again next spring, and I consider the course among the most important work I do at IUS.

In 2005, IUS, like most campuses, continues to struggle with issues around sexual orientation. Last year's Lambda president was publicly critical about the lack of support from the university's Office on Equity and Diversity for the group's campus activities. As part of my proactive stance as a faculty member and advisor to the group, I was able to encourage direct intervention by the Chancellor. More support has been promised for next year. In addition to these activities, I am now invited to lead discussions about sexual orientation as related to curriculum development for Diversity Seminars or faculty development workshops.

As with most folks, my personal path toward multicultural competence continues in surprising and powerful ways. However, I am still left with that unsettling question: what if, in 1990, I had been enlightened enough to accept sexual orientation as part of multiculturalism? Would my understanding have made any difference for Eric?

*William Sweigart, PhD*  
*Associate Professor of English*  
*School of Arts and Letters, Department of English*

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## Sexual Orientation as One Component of Multiculturalism

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## Born Again Mexican

I am a fifth generation Mexican-American. We did not speak Spanish at home; the Spanish I learned in high school was taught by a non-native speaking nun, and in college, by a very funny, native-speaking Spaniard. Both were good teachers, but neither, in the duration of 8 years of Spanish, gave me insight into my Mexican cultural roots and neither taught me the Spanish most commonly spoken in the United States.

It seems odd to me that in one generation, so much could have been lost. My parents both spoke English as a second language. When they began school, unable to speak English, they were punished and ridiculed. They felt they would have done their seven children a disservice to have spoken Spanish at home. They rarely did so, and only when they did not want us to know what they were saying. We all (including my parents) now wish we'd learned both languages as kids.

Oddly, I don't recollect having any sense of, or pride in, being Mexican growing up. I grew up in Gary, Indiana, in a predominantly Black and Mexican neighborhood, and attended a Catholic grade school that was also predominantly Mexican and Black. I didn't watch much television and really didn't have much, if any, sense of otherness as a kid. My family and those in my neighborhood looked similar to me. I had a lot of Black and Mexican friends and at the time, and in my neighborhood and school and home, I don't recollect much tension or any real discussion on race nor ethnicity. I am sure my folks had a sense of it, but it wasn't something that hit my radar much.

I went to a predominantly White high school in another town. The culture shock hit me like a tidal wave. It was here that I first had a sense of "other" and of being "less than." We were the kids who got bussed in from Gary and it was pretty clear that we were the undesirables. There were more Blacks than Latinos (but still very few of any of us) at my school and my best friend was the same best friend I'd had in grade school. She was Black, and two of my closest male friends were also Black and one was Mexican. There was also one White male who went from our grade school to our high school but I didn't hang out with him much. Upon starting high school, those were the only 5 people I knew. Because of my closest circle of friends, I didn't know until sophomore year that the majority of kids at my school thought I was a light-skinned Black girl. I learned this by a boy in my class telling me that his friend, upon whom I had a crush, would never go out with a Black girl. My closest circle of friends was predominantly White by the time I graduated from high school, but I maintained close friendships with my grade school pals and other kids from Gary.

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I felt as though I had unfinished business in Mexico and that I was returning home for a **better look** at myself and my roots.

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I married and had kids young and didn't go to college until my kids were three and four years old. As a mom, I attended a commuter college in northwest Indiana close to where I'd grown up. This campus had more Latinos than any other school in Indiana. I began working in student affairs there and as one of *only* two Latino administrators on campus; I quickly became the advisor to many of our Latino student organizations. We had seven Latino student organizations and I was the advisor to almost all of them, including our umbrella group, ALSO, the Alliance of Latino Student Organizations. Thanks to my students who were typically first or second-generation Mexicans or Puerto Ricans, I became more aware of my ethnic culture. Most of the students had a real sense of pride in their ethnicity.

In one of my final graduate classes, I had a Sicilian professor for an intercultural communication class. She was very into her culture and very interested in how culture informed identity. Prior to my work with Latino students and this faculty member, the concept never crossed my mind. As an assignment in this course, we had to research our race or ethnicity and prepare a presentation. I learned so much from my research as well from my classmates. I was the only Mexican in the class, but I also had 2 Puerto Rican classmates. We all spoke of the importance of family in our lives and interestingly, we all brought family members (as visual aids?) to our presentations. None of the other students in the class did that. All three of us did so without really thinking of doing our presentations otherwise. This course and my work with Latino students began my interest in, understanding of, and appreciation for cultural and ethnic diversity.

Fast forward nearly 20 years; I am currently the director of Campus & Community Life at IUPUI and have just completed the successful launch of a language and cultural immersion program in Mexico that I've been working to develop for the past *couple of* years. The experience has been personally and professionally defining and developmental for me. I have learned so much in this process. I have shared with people that the experience has allowed me to find parts of myself that I did not realize I were missing.

As I arrived in Mexico this past May, I had a lump in my throat driving in from Mexico City, and that lump remained there the entire time while in Mexico; it is still there every time I think about my stay this year. Coming in, I felt as though I had unfinished business in Mexico and that I was returning home for a better look at myself and my roots. This 4th trip to Mexico in the past 2 years has definitely come to feel like a second home, and a place that keeps answers to questions that I need to continue to explore.

Sometimes, when I watch particular events in the news or I'll catch something on entertainment or reality television, I want to pinch

myself and ask where I am, what year it is and is what I'm watching "real." Has American taste really become that shallow/bad? I often feel like I don't belong or like I don't understand what's going on, or more accurately, why it's going on. I often have a feeling of being in the wrong place or of living in the wrong time. I'm aware that I feel less that way when I'm in Mexico. Things just seem to make more sense. The language is sweeter, what matters most seems more real; the pace of time feels more sensible. I love the look and feel of things - rustic things, like the pottery, simple jewelry, the really rough pine furniture, and I love the vibrant colors of Mexico, and have them in my home here in Indianapolis.

I think we've all had the experience of eating something that seems too rich. For me, lobster makes me feel a little queasy. Almost on a daily basis, I have a similar, but non-physical reaction like that to life here in the USA. It feels like things are "too rich" and that we're gluttonous in too many ways. We don't recycle like we should. We want too much, waste too much, throw away too much, eat too much, have too many pairs of shoes and choices of breakfast cereals. The abundance and stimulation we get from all angles can be overwhelming at times. It's no wonder so many Americans suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome and depression, and have way too much "stuff" in their homes.

I keep hearing about a study that was done recently to measure happiness - to identify the happiest countries. That is, the researchers wanted to know where people felt most content in the world. The first country was in Africa, Nigeria, I think. Mexico was second and the next eight countries were all Spanish-speaking countries. In Mexico, people don't measure happiness and success in the same way we do in the United States. It has nothing to do with salaries, possessions, or status. In Mexico, happiness and success is based upon quality of relationships and the importance of family.

This past summer while in Mexico, my class learned the verb, *andar*, which means to walk around without any particular purpose. I was really fascinated by the word, and am aware that I've experienced people doing this in the town centers in Mexico, especially on Sundays. You see a lot of people at the Xocolo, often with their families, just enjoying the day and one another. By contrast, in the United States we also have a word for this. It's called loitering, which is often noted on signs as not being permitted.

Mexico is far from perfect in so many ways, yet my sense is that real things matter more and, despite the problems with governmental corruption, unemployment and poverty, people seem happier. The kids seem more like kids, and families are still families who are very in touch with one another; in general, people have reverence for one another -

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even for strangers and foreigners. I worry about how Mexico will change, as so many of its citizens are forced by unemployment to travel to and work in the United States to provide for their families. Will this really improve life quality?

During my most recent trip to Mexico, I didn't sleep well. I felt tired and sleepy a lot of the time. For me, being in Mexico demands a lot of reflection and coming to terms with internalized oppression and pride. After my first trip there last year, I told my mom that I needed to write a story called “Born-Again Mexican.” Again, that sense of finding pieces I was unaware were missing.

Despite wanting to return for service work this summer at LaLagunilla (very “poor” in social economic measures, but rich on the “relationship and sense of community” meter) I did my service work in Xoxocotla. This community is about 40 minutes from Cuernavaca and is inhabited by indigenous people of Mexico who don't appear to be very interested in opening to, nor exploring, “modern Mexico.” For the most part, Spanish is a second language to the people in Xoxocotla. Nahuatl is their first language. We visited this community last year, but were unable to do service work there because of transportation issues. This year, we worked in Xoxocotla at a very small grade school with over 50 children. Our primary goal was to teach basic English.

We had to have an introduction to the community by someone from within. Our primary point of contact was a man named Gigio. Gigio is an engineer and supervisor at a peanut and snack packaging company in Xoxocotla. He cares deeply about his community, and wishes to be involved in improving the quality of life in Xoxocotla, while preserving the community's strengths. We always had at least 6 IUPUI folks at this service site and for the first year, our work there was extremely positive. The school was very small, only 3 classrooms. During our final week, I was happy to see that construction had begun on 2 additional salons with three additional rooms in each.

The kids there were beautiful. They were curious and interested in learning, despite extreme heat and lack of any moving air. The rooms did not have fans, let alone air conditioners, and there were no computers. Each afternoon, a herd of cattle would mosey down the road in front of the school. It was hot in Cuernavaca that summer, but I think it typically had to be close 100 degrees on the days we were in Xoxocotla. We drank all the water we brought with us before we finished our service session, and had to stop for more cold water before we got halfway down the road. The kids seemed relatively unfazed by the heat. We were melting.

On the last day we went to do our service work, there were a lot of parents at the school. We had brought snacks for the kids that day to

have a little “fiesta” with them in all three of the rooms. After the kids finished their snacks, we went outside and the parents had put chairs against the building for us to sit on. They had put together a “school program” and we were the obvious guests of honor. They began by giving us homemade popcorn (not the microwave variety) to enjoy during the program. The kids spoke, sang, danced and played the flute. During the break between “acts,” the parents continued to give us gifts. It was so unexpected, and quite frankly, a bit overwhelming. They were so incredibly generous and intent on honoring us. Though I’d only known the kids for 2 weeks, I felt the same depth of emotion and pride as when I’d watched my own children in their school programs.

Despite being advised against giving the kids school supplies, we did give them a pencil “box” with a few school supplies. Their lack of supplies sometimes hampered our work because they’d share pencils and erasers. The kids and parents appreciated the gifts. On our final day at this site, this “reserved and closed” community had certainly opened its doors and hearts to us, and asked us to return “muy pronto (quickly).” The parents also gave us their permission to take photos at the site. We’d obviously been accepted.

I was pleased to see Gigio again, in attendance at the final celebration. He shared with me that Xoxocotla was the “real Mexico.” I told him that the kids were beautiful and that I’d really enjoyed working with them. He told me their beauty was “because their hearts were pure, unspoiled by the fast-paced world.” Those were both good explanations of the place and people of Xoxocotla. I learned a lot from the kids and parents of Xoxocotla, and they all inspired me to want to improve my Spanish so my level of connection with them will be stronger and deeper next year.

Real Mexico - that statement really hits me when I think about it. I find learning more about the real Mexico informs me about many of the things in life that are important to me. I do love my time spent in Mexico and have begun researching how to retire there. A respected, native Mexican friend of mine tells me that those of us who did not grow up there romanticize Mexico. I know there is truth in this, and clearly see so many of Mexico’s needs for change and development. Nonetheless, I look forward to continuing to work on my Spanish and developing my understanding of Mexican culture, and in so doing, my understanding of myself.

*Michelle Verduzco, Director  
Campus & Community Life, IUPUI*

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For information about this work, please contact the Center for Teaching and Learning at IUPUI ([opd@opd.iupui.edu](mailto:opd@opd.iupui.edu))