

## **Social Change and Diversity Education: A literature review**

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Researchers recently asked the question, "While living in Canada how often do you feel that your rights have been violated?" and nearly one in four Canadians polled agreed that their rights had been violated sometimes (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2007). While many Canadians are proud of our tolerant society, it is also clear that some people who live in Canada face discrimination. Rapidly, our population is growing more diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, race, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Such increasing diversity may result in reduced social cohesion and economic inequity.

One way that Canadian post secondary institutions can address increasing demographic diversity and associated social problems is by offering courses about human diversity. Many diversity courses focus on the workplace, and deal with diversity among employees, clients, or customers. In particular, workplace diversity education considers a) reasons for increasing and dealing with diversity among workers, clients or customers; b) problems which arise when attempting to increase and respond to diversity; and c) ways of leading, serving or selling to diverse groups of people. Workplace diversity courses in Canadian universities and colleges tend to be delivered to upper year students within programs such as management, sociology, psychology, education, and medicine.

In this article I will review selected publications concerning diversity education in post secondary institutions around the world. I intend to suggest ways that post secondary teachers can help students learn about the changes and problems that are associated with increased population diversity.

In Tim Goddard's (1997) article on how teacher educators can help their students learn to teach ethno-culturally diverse students, Goddard indicates that three dimensions of diversity knowledge are required of teachers: cultural, pedagogical, and socio-linguistic. The author points out that the cultural dimension (including shared values) has often been emphasized, but he concludes that "the pedagogical and socio-linguistic dimensions deserve greater emphasis as teachers look for approaches that reach all students" (Goddard 1997, from the abstract). A more recent article about diversity education for pre-service teachers in the United States is by Todd Jennings (2007). Jennings' nation-wide survey indicated that "race/ethnicity" was the most emphasized diversity topic, followed by special needs, language diversity, economic (social class), gender, and sexual orientation. California, however, placed a greater emphasis on language diversity.

Jennings also points out the lack of relationship between the race or gender of faculty and the priority they place on diversity education; those in privileged groups placed the same amount of emphasis on these topics as their less-privileged colleagues. However, despite such findings, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2005) is concerned

about the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among teachers and education faculty members in the United States. She stresses that teachers must be culturally diverse so that students experience what it means to live and work in a multi-cultural and democratic society. Employing a diverse faculty puts the rhetoric about diversity into action.

Just as teacher educators are impelled to build awareness of diversity amongst teacher trainees, so too are educators within other professions. For instance, John Millar, a professor and director of newspaper journalism at the Ryerson University School of Journalism, reports on the genesis and development of "Covering Diversity", a writing and criticism course which was made compulsory in 1997 for all third-year journalism undergraduates at Ryerson. For Miller, asking journalism students to cover diversity in their news stories is an issue of accuracy because "many stories are not in context unless they take note of different ethnic, racial or religious traditions". When the "Covering Diversity" course was delivered in 1997, student response was negative, so Miller and colleagues re-focused on the non-minority students' feeling of threat in the classroom. Deciding to make the course more practical, the faculty assigned students to do content analyses to see how newspapers, television and radio programs reflect diversity, showed examples of how stereotypes lead to flawed conclusions, discouraged hasty conclusions about a story, and taught ways of debunking stereotypes. "We gave them more tools for their reportorial toolboxes" (Miller, 2000).

Another tool, advocated by a sociologist who teaches at the University of Melbourne, Jui-shan Chang, is "transcultural wisdom bank" (Chang, 2006). The bank is a metaphor that "describes the eliciting, reflecting, pooling, and exchange of cross-cultural insights and experiences about problems and issues that affect all humans." It contains possible solutions to recurrent social problems (such as those associated with sexuality, marriage, old age, and death) from many different cultures (Chang, 2006, p. 370-1). In order to fill the bank, Chang asks her students to introduce themselves in terms of their culture, noting that cultural diversity refers to differences between societies as well as those within societies, including regional, social class, gender and religious differences. In her article, Chang lists additional pedagogical strategies such as placing students among diverse peers for their group-work, accessing a cross-national survey databank, and examining a variety of cultural artifacts in the classroom. Similar suggestions are made by Moore, Madison-Colmore, and Collins (2005) in the context of social work education. The latter authors also point out the benefits of teaching diversity in a retreat environment.

Diversity courses must be taught with attention to the local context. Marilyn Bowman, a professor in the Simon Fraser University psychology department, writes of Canadian-American differences and their implications for clinical training and APA accreditation (Bowman, 2000). She indicates that the differences between Canada and the United States in terms of well-being, social policy, and the nature of diversity result in problems for Canadian clinical psychology programs seeking American Psychology Association (APA) accreditation. Quoting Thorn (2000), she says that "race normally dominates APA documentation about minorities, surveys routinely seek program information about diversity defined racially, and APA pressures its committees to incorporate this racially defined minority representation". Bowman further points out that

American examiners look for evidence that people of African origin are featured in training materials and settings. "Canadian directors have been asked by American examiners, "Where are your blacks?" and have been told "you all look pretty white to me." After offering statistical information on how Canadian diversity is significantly different from American diversity, she discusses implications for recruitment to clinical psychology programs, for training with minority patients, and for training in assessment and treatment. She summarizes by saying that American conceptions of diversity cannot be validly applied to Canada, and that Canadian culture, especially with respect to values, must be asserted within diversity courses (Bowman, 2000, p. 231).

Medical doctors are another group of professionals that have become more involved in diversity education in the last couple of decades. Dogra and Karnik (2004) noted that teaching about diversity can take a back seat to the "hard" sciences such as anatomy and physiology. In a recent research project, Dogra et al (2007) interviewed 61 diversity teachers, students, and policy makers in medical education, and found that teachers and students of cultural diversity felt pressured and needed more information and greater certainty. This concern about certainty tended to move the teaching-learning experience toward an emphasis on "facts" rather than on reflections about personal experience. The authors advocate an approach to diversity education that stresses that uncertainty associated with diversity does occur in clinical practice, and that students need to deal with it. This approach - living confidently with the uncertainty of diversity - appears to be applicable to all social situations.

Similar to Boman's (2000) work, but in the context of business education, Cavaliere et al (2002), discuss the incorporation of workplace diversity education with attention to accreditation. These authors make the point that "the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) . . . has strongly endorsed incorporating the topic of diversity into the business school curriculum." They specifically advocate the inclusion of creative approaches to diversity education within business statistics courses. Their suggestions for "creative approaches" in statistics courses include: supplementing the course text with outside readings which are presented orally; using [U.S.] federal government sources and secondary sources such as InfoTrac and other online databases; requiring class presentations which use statistics about diversity; applying a multi-cultural perspective to case studies; using the census with respect to a local population of interest to students; referring to the Bureau of Labour statistics and the [U.S.] equal opportunity commission; and performing regression analysis to predict cultural diversity patterns in the future (Cavaliere et al 2002, p.7). While such suggestions may not be new to many teachers within disciplines such as sociology and psychology, the recommendation to include these topics in statistics courses may pique the interest of a wider audience of post secondary teachers.

Additional practical and creative comments and suggestions about the process of workplace diversity education in business schools can be found in Von Bergen, Soper and Foster (2002). In this article, the authors comment on what goes wrong in diversity education and training programs. For instance: trainers' values and agendas are narrowly defined; training is too shallow; only one group such as minorities or "people with problems" are expected to change; and resource material is outdated (Von Bergen

et al 2002). Of course, such problems are present within many courses in addition to those which deal with diversity.

This brief overview of a few selected articles about diversity education, in sum, indicates that diversity education is aimed at increasing social cohesion in the presence of change; is included in a variety of curricula; often uses interactive learning methods which involve reflection on personal experience; should be taught by diverse faculty members with attention to the local context; and frequently employs large databanks in order to help students move from their own personal experience to an understanding of life in multi-cultural societies. Such education can help students adapt to rapid social change.

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