
The Role of Affectivity in Instructing People of Color: Some Implications for Bibliographic Instruction

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ABSTRACT

IN THE AREA OF PEDAGOGICAL METHODS and their applications in teaching people of diverse cultural backgrounds, many curriculum models have been proposed by the academic community. Instructional models emphasizing a cultural specific orientation have been the most prolific. The underlying logic driving this approach has been the well founded belief that when we instruct people of color, it becomes important that we familiarize ourselves with their cultural experiences, and develop a pedagogy that is sensitive to cultural diversity. This article wishes to place an instructional addendum to the cultural specific model. What is germane in regard to pedagogy and ethnic minorities is not so much how, or even what, we teach. But the more intangible qualities of personal rapport and empathy play a vital role within the pedagogical paradigm. For those busying themselves with the issue of effective bibliographic instruction, the relationships developed inside and outside the classroom, or what is termed "affectivity" (Kleinfeld, 1983, p. 13), are perhaps the best pedagogy. Many of the observations presented in the following paragraphs come from personal experiences as both a secondary and college instructor who has taught such diverse groups as Yupik Eskimos, Cheyenne Indians, Mexican Americans, Javaro Indians of Ecuador, and Black Americans. Several cross-cultural and intercultural studies will also be cited including those of educational anthropologist Judith Kleinfeld.

TEACHING AS A RELATIONSHIP

And the lecture you deliver
 May be very fine and true,
 But I'd rather get my thinking
 By observing what you do.
 For I may misunderstand you
 And the high advice you give,
 But there's no misunderstanding
 How you act and how you live.

Author Unknown
 (Prescott, 1970, pp. 138-39)

Effective teaching is a matter of relationship. Whether relationships are built in intensive classroom communication or in informal advice given after class, we as instructors must be aware of capturing all the teaching moments that are presented each day. In regard to teaching people of color, those interpersonal relationships developed both inside and outside formal class time are imperative in creating an atmosphere where these individuals can best learn. The field of education in general, and bibliographic instruction in particular, have been prolific in proposing and implementing culturally congruent pedagogic models (Cornelius, 1978; Kleinfeld, 1979; Ogilvie, 1985; Nichols, 1986; Cargile & Woods, 1988; Delpit, 1988; Huston, 1989). Although the overall effectiveness of culture-specific methods has been more or less successful, it is this writer's contention that the less intangible element of personal rapport will best serve our goals.

As suggested in the opening abstract, an addendum must be added to the culturally congruent approach. We must not become so bogged down on finding that elusive "right approach." Instead, the focus should be to maximize contact with students. In an age when many academics have largely abandoned their classrooms to teaching assistants because of tenure pressures, overcrowding, and unfortunately, just some plain animosity toward undergraduates (Sykes, 1988), this is much to ask. But if there is truly a commitment to teach people of color, or anyone else for that matter, priorities must be reevaluated.

To interject, for lack of a better term, the term *people of color* will be employed when referring to Native Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Blacks. Although the author is deeply aware of the inadequacies of such labels, nonetheless, it will underscore the main premise of this discussion that interpersonal communication and relationships play a far greater role in effectively teaching these groups than does any contrived culturally congruent lesson plan.

Once again, instruction that takes into account cultural diversity is still vital, but a teacher of people of color must realize the importance of having a personalized relationship with each student. The point is that the teacher must demonstrate, with conviction, that he or she really cares about the students as people (Nichols, 1986, p. 3).

Affectivity in the Classroom—An Elusive Goal

Sixteen years ago, as a new teacher at a predominantly Mexican American high school in Brownsville, Texas, this author was instructing a sophomore class in World Religions. Being new to the teaching profession, I was extremely excited about imparting all that I had learned of various religious belief systems. For many weeks, I diligently spent hours on lesson planning, and in my very best "teacher education don't smile 'til Christmas" pedagogic style, it was attempted to impart to these young people what was for me an exhilarating subject. After a couple of months it was noticed that very little of anything I had taught was being absorbed and in fact I was failing miserably in getting the information across to students.

One day I was tutoring a student in the library, and we were having a great time going over some material, and he inadvertently told me that I should "act this way in class." He had noticed that I had taken an interest in him as a person and wasn't so preoccupied with my material. In short, I had discovered the importance of relationships in the instructional process. As alluded to by M. Ramirez (1982) in his work on the cognitive learning styles of Mexican Americans, "who you are and how you behave is far more important than what you know" (p. 43). In the instructional environment, this translates into an instructor's willingness to go beyond just merely presenting facts. We must package curriculum within an "affective teaching environment."

Use of the term *affectivity* refers to those qualities of rapport, concern, empathy, and dedication coupled with high expectations that are imperative for instructors working within a culturally diverse environment (Kleinfeld, 1983). Although these qualities should be employed in any pedagogic endeavor, they are especially important for people of color, where relationships and person-to-person interplay are focal (Nichols, 1986).

The role of relationship and affectivity in the teaching process was indirectly cited in a lecture by Edwin J. Nichols (1989) given at The Evergreen State College's Tacoma campus. The focus of his talk dealt with the philosophical aspects of cultural differences and how variations manifest themselves in the way Europeans, Asians, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Blacks relate interpersonally. According to Nichols, Europeans' interpersonal relationships are

colored by a "Man-to-Object" paradigm in which the highest value lies in the object or in its acquisition. In the latter groups, Man-to-Man or Man-to-Group paradigms dominate. Interpersonal relationships or the cohesiveness of the group play a vital role. According to Nichols (1986), Europeans and non-Europeans have different axiological reference points, Man-to-Object versus Man-to-Man. The European focus on Man-to-Object dictates that the high value lies in the object or in the acquisition of the object. "Some of the things that could be classified as objects would be land, work, time, and so on. The significance of land as an object can be seen by looking at White farmers. Many of them are losing their land and their loss of object causes them to see themselves as devalued" (p. 2).

On the other hand, non-Europeans, although having a need for object, place their frame of reference in a person or group. The object, whether it be money, land, grades, or factual information gleaned in the formal classroom isn't the bottom line in life. Although Nichols's hypothesis can hardly be thoroughly discussed in this brief essay, and this author does have some misgivings about his identification of what constitutes European values, its pedagogical implications must be taken seriously. Generally, the teaching environment is based on a teacher or a professor transmitting "object *A*," which is the course content, to students via either note taking or seminar. As suggested earlier, the "don't smile 'til Christmas" instructional model, although being a bit facetious, does serve as an indictment against the interpersonal, low-affectivity style of teaching that dominates most university settings. It is this very style that can have disastrous effects on many minority students. To use black students as just one example, the conspicuous failure of black students to achieve academically is well documented (Miller, 1984; Cargile & Woods, 1988; Garibaldi & Bartley, 1988; White, 1988). In response to this failure, educational theoreticians have responded with a myriad of curriculum proposals and programs to address the situation (Gay & Abrahams, 1972; Brookover, 1982; Kochman, 1981). Although these proposals have met with some success, little significant impact will be made in upgrading black academic achievement until teachers develop higher expectations for these students and show that they really are concerned with them as individuals. Affective behavior is the key. If we look at the work of Marva Collins with supposedly low achievers (Shade, 1989), it wasn't any special culturally congruent instruction which motivated these students. Indeed, Collins uses very traditional methods with her students. What she has done is to develop a rapport with her students, while at the same time demanding from them high academic

excellence. Once again, relationship, manifested through affectivity and dedication, is more important than any prescribed pedagogic method. Whether a course integrated bibliographic instructional model is employed or some form of multicultural lesson plan, the success or failure of any curriculum depends more on what occurs in between the lectures or biolabs. It starts when time is taken before, during, and after class to give a little more of our energy to students. If we are serious about improving retention rates among minorities, some credence must be given to the role of affectivity.

CULTURALLY CONGRUENT METHODOLOGIES— SOME AMBIVALENT OBSERVATIONS

In the preceding paragraph, use of the term *multicultural education* in favor of cultural congruency was purposely avoided in discussing pedagogic logistics. Although the latter is very conspicuous in the literature (Cervantes, 1984; Troyna, 1987; Bhola, 1988; Gill, 1988), coherent definitions of multicultural education are extremely tentative and, from an applicational standpoint, cumbersome to implement on the program level (Gibson, 1990). A multiple hurdle exists in the use of multicultural curriculum methods, one which points to an epistemological paradox. Can we develop instructional models that are general enough to be valid and specific enough to be useful? It is this author's contention that this question cannot begin to be answered until affectivity is interwoven into the instructional matrix. Although it might be painful for those who view multiculturalism as the educational panacea, many of its precepts may be counterproductive to its original goals of affirming cultural pluralism via pedagogy that is culturally sensitive (Gibson, 1984). Once again, the purpose here is to underscore the point that method and curriculum models are vital when instructing people of color; however, what is even more germane is affectivity. In Judith Kleinfeld's (1983) work with Native American students, and confirmed through this author's own field experience in teaching Yupik Eskimo high school students:

The critical question for community members is not what methods the teacher is using but the nature of the teacher as a person. The critical question is can we trust this person to care. Once villagers have decided the teacher is trustworthy, then they allow the teacher to make his or her own decisions about how to accomplish the job. (p. 18)

Multicultural teaching methods are indeed important and they represent steps in the right direction, but the shortcomings must be recognized. Margaret Alison Gibson (1984), in an excellent study on multicultural education, highlights some of its weaknesses. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to thoroughly present her arguments, the author recognizes the need to affirm and develop

an awareness of cultural differences and the role they might play in educational discourse, but she suggests that multicultural or congruent instructional models accept, without question, that cultural differences are the cause of minority groups' failures in mainstream schools. Thus, strategies that are generated from such assumptions view the problem as simply one of cultural discordance.

What should be added here is that developing the most eclectic pedagogy might not be the most fruitful way to proceed and in many ways can be quite dangerous when one gets into generating so-called culturally sensitive teaching methods. Too often we either fall into the trap of viewing minority groups in monolithic terms and do not consider the great amount of diversity within that group, or we build instruction around cultural practices that we do not or cannot fully understand. In this author's work with Black Americans, Yupik Eskimos, and Cheyenne Indians, it was found that it is best to be open to learning as well as teaching. It is imperative to have some familiarity with the cultural mores and folkways of these cultures, but our more serendipitous teaching selves should come to the forefront.

Whether teaching a formal class in bibliographic instruction, instructing groups in the use of the library collections, or conducting a reference interview, it is the relationships that are developed and nurtured that are critical. In the following section, the importance of relationships in teaching will be illustrated by outlining situations which gave rise to this author's belief that it is personal interaction and not necessarily method that will best serve our objectives.

RELATIONSHIP AS PEDAGOGY—SOME FIELD EXPERIENCES

In this author's years as both a secondary and college instructor, a wide range of individuals was taught from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the mid-seventies, I was a secondary instructor at a Yupik Eskimo boarding school in Andreafsky, Alaska. Also during the 1970s, I worked with Mexican American students in Brownsville, Texas. In my present position as bibliographic instructor at The Evergreen State College—Tacoma Campus, I teach a four credit research methods course entitled, "Research, Composition and Epistemology" to a largely black student body. In all of these experiences, although having employed many of the instructional ideas gleaned from various cross-cultural teaching courses and workshops, I have come to the conclusion that success was predicated not on specific application of any of these learned and often fadish methods. Success or failure was simply a matter of how well concern for students as people was communicated.

Now this is not to say that continual innovations are unnecessary in working with culturally different groups, or that we should downplay the role that multicultural educational methods play in addressing cognition variations among people of color. Indeed, as Barbara J. Robinson suggested in her book *Culture, Style and the Educative Process*, we live in a culturally diverse nation, where traditional education methods based on a white middle-class notion of cognition, are simply no longer adequate. Yet in my present position, I don't believe successes or failures were based solely on any particular instructional methodology. At Tacoma, a mixture of the four basic methods of bibliographic instruction are employed (Kazlauska, 1987), which are:

1. course-integrated bibliographic instruction,
2. bibliographic instruction seminar and the closely related bibliographic instruction workshop,
3. specialized bibliographic instruction within disciplines,
4. individualized instruction with emphasis on defined research projects.

Within a typical ten week session, a variety of methods may be used. I am also very much aware of allowing sufficient time to consult with each student individually, not just about their research but about anything that might affect their academic performance. Most individuals trained in the education profession may find this difficult since we are socialized to keep a certain professional distance. But it is this very distance that lends itself to low affectivism. In my work at the Tacoma campus, professional distance may be viewed as a sign of rudeness or contempt toward the students on the part of the professor. Despite the instructor's best intentions to the contrary, aloofness expressed through speech, lecture formats, or nonverbal behaviors can be detrimental when working with minority students (Erickson, 1979).

People of color do achieve better in situations where they can connect at some personal level with the instructor. The Tacoma students, as well as other minority students I have observed, have a need for interaction with teachers and their fellow students. Several studies have suggested that among Blacks, Native Americans, and some Hispanic groups, students are accustomed to learning associated with intense interpersonal interaction, as in a family setting (Gitters, et al., 1972; Hale, 1978).

Although the current library research class that I teach could be construed by an outside observer as extremely task-oriented, before, during, and after class throughout the year I put a great deal of energy into just getting to know each student. This often helps to tailor bibliolabs toward topics and examples that plug in to their

life situations. For example, as a part of a research course each quarter, two weeks are spent studying legal and government bibliography. Since the majority of Tacoma students are employed Black adults with families, discussions of such legal resources as the USCA, CFR, and state and municipal codes always involve such issues as child support, race and sex discrimination, landlord and tenant statutes, issues related to harassment by law enforcement officials, and many other topics. These same issues, which serve as the basis of the legal component of the course, are the same issues which are discussed in more informal conversations. They are life issues that are not generated from some contrived culturally congruent method but stem from relationships.

Alluding to my earlier teaching experience fourteen years ago in Brownsville, Texas, my basic mistake wasn't in method or preparation but in a lack of "affective" pedagogy. Similarly, it would have been disastrous to approach the Tacoma unit strictly from a theoretical construct which examines legal bibliography through some abstract discussion involving the evolution of case and statutory law. Taking the time and energy to establish some form of personal rapport with students, and especially minorities, is a far more effective way to promote learning than adherence to the labyrinth of learning and cognition theories dealing with instructing minorities.

As reiterated throughout this synopsis, culturally congruent learning theory is an extremely valid guide to preparing us to work with people of color. Cognitive theories examining such phenomena as field dependent versus field independent learning styles have helped this author immeasurably in being aware of the various ways people of color learn (Saracho & Dayton, 1980). However, within the classroom or in our roles as teachers on the reference desk, success invariably depends on how much we are willing to take the chance of letting affective qualities message the educational process.

During the late seventies, I was an instructor at a Yupik Eskimo high school which has received acclaim in the educational literature as a case study in effective bicultural instruction (Kleinfeld, 1979). One of my classes at this school dealt with world history, and I was teaching a unit on the Peloponnesian Wars. In Yupik culture, as in some other Native American cultures, the use of the story is an effective teaching tool. During this unit and others, I used personal experiences in teaching about intercultural squabbles. Since the Peloponnesian Wars dealt with the conflict between the ancient Greek city-states, sharing something about those conflicts I experienced as a young Black male growing up in the fifties and sixties was appropriate. The majority of the students at St. Mary's School came from the very small villages of Northwest Alaska, and their familiarity

with the western world, much less Ancient Greece, was practically nil. However, my personal biography served as a catalyst, and some of the students began to share their own stories about intertribal conflicts that existed in their own cultural histories.

One major area that these Yupik Eskimos were very emphatic about were stories that dealt with ancient wars they had fought with the Indian population when the Eskimo culture migrated across the Bering Straits thousands of years ago. It was quite fascinating to see these individuals develop an extremely coherent understanding of the wars between the Ancient Greek city-states through the simple sharing of personal stories. Those of us steeped in Western education methodology and semantics would do well to integrate narrative forms of pedagogy into lesson planning. As Kleinfeld (1979) noted in her study of St. Mary's High School:

St. Mary's was a village society with a structure of social relationships similar to the students' own communities. Students and teachers frequently visited each other outside the classroom. While I was interviewing St. Mary's teachers, even in their dormitory rooms, students continually pounded on the door, asking for help with homework or other matters. The kids smother you; they're always in your room, just sitting, touching your things, asking questions. (p. 30)

This intimacy in my personal experience at St. Mary's bred affection and relationship, which was carried over into the classroom, and which made the job as an instructor much easier.

To interject, I often feel that the real tragedy taking place in education in our country, and especially in colleges and universities, is that true teaching and real involvement with students is essentially discouraged (Sykes, 1988). Professors are promoted and rewarded not by how well they teach or inspire students but simply on what they publish or research. Of course this mind set is all predicated on the myth that good research makes good teachers, when in fact teaching develops good teachers. Until the educational community chooses to accept this fact and confront this developing pedagogical desert, which is called our undergraduate curriculum, all of us are at risk. Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, poor whites, and Asians may all feel the effects of low affectivism first, but all students are being cheated horribly by this lack of concerned and dedicated teachers.

Relationship is the key to effective pedagogy. In our work as reference librarians, interaction with people of color in a simple reference interview presents us with daily opportunities to educate and not just to direct. On a personal level, I have seen, far too often, professional librarians being extremely short with individuals who really need help in locating resources. And I can't help but think how many times this scenario is played out in libraries across the nation. As information professionals who are called upon to work

with people who have traditionally been the informationally disenfranchised of our nation—i.e., Native Americans, low income whites, Blacks, Hispanics, etc.—it is urgent that we recognize the role personal relationships can play in the administration of our duties as librarians, as educators, and more importantly, as human beings.

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