THE DIVERSITY WE BECOME: EDUCATION AND AGENCY IN WRITING UNIQUE SELVES WITHIN EVOLVING COMMUNITIES

A DIVERSIDADE QUE VIEMOS A SER: EDUCAÇÃO E AGIR AUTÔNOMO NA INSCRIÇÃO DE EUS AUTÊNTICOS EM COMUNIDADES DINÂMICAS

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Abstract: Work on diversity has highlighted what we bring with us in our family and community histories and in our linguistic and cultural practices and knowledge. This work has helped us recognize the many peoples that make up our nations and the resources they bring; it has been important in disrupting homogenizing, hierarchical and suppressing forces. It has included more people into national participation and allowed people to include more of themselves in our common life. Yet ultimately this is a diversity that looks backward to where we were born and those we were born among. The complexity and fluidity of modern life suggests another way to look at diversity-in the uniqueness we each develop growing from our home communities into the many social configuration the modern world offers. The modern world of professions and workplaces, economic and geographic mobility, virtual and material affiliations, and urban remixes offers possibilities of people leading lives far different from those of their parents, developing new values and interests, adopting new identities and affiliations, and committing themselves to different actions and goals. Within this process of constant social remaking, higher education plays a central role as students come in contact with people of different backgrounds and make new friends, discover new interests and values, reflect on where they have been and where they are going, and learn the skills that will allow them to participate in new communities and take them to new places in the lives after graduation. During higher education people discover new goals, set new directions, and develop towards new lives. As instructors in language and culture, we can help students understand the complex cultural landscape of the modern world, evaluate what is meaningful for them in this world, and gain the tools of participation.

KEY-WORDS: *Autonomous agency. Participation. Higher Education. Diversity*

Resumo: *O trabalho com a diversidade acentuou aquilo que trazemos em nós nas nossas histórias de família e comunitária e em nossas práticas e conhecimentos linguísticos e culturais. Esse trabalho nos ajudou a reconhecer as diferentes pessoas que compõem nossas nações e os recursos que trazem; ele tem sido importante na disrupção de forças homogeneizantes, hierárquicas e supressoras, tendo permitido a participação de mais pessoas nas questões nacionais e a inclusão por estas de mais de si mesmas em nossa vida comum. Contudo, ultimamente essa é uma diversidade que olha retrospectivamente para o lugar em que nascemos e para aqueles entre os quais nascemos. A complexidade e a fluidez da vida moderna sugerem outra maneira de ver a diversidade - na autenticidade que desenvolvemos individualmente ao nos expandirmos de nossas comunidades para as muitas configurações sociais que o mundo moderno oferece. Esse mundo das profissões e dos locais de trabalho, da*

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mobilidade econômica e geográfica, das afiliações virtuais e materiais, e das "remisturas" urbanas oferece a possibilidade de as pessoas levarem vidas bem diferentes das de seus pais, desenvolverem novos valores e interesses, adotar novas identidades e afiliações e comprometer-se com ações e objetivos distintos. Nesse processo de refeitura social constante, a educação superior tem um papel fundamental, pois, nela, os estudantes entram em contato com pessoas vindas de diferentes contextos e fazem novos amigos, descobrem novos valores e interesses, refletem acerca de onde estavam e para onde estão indo e adquirem as aptidões que lhes permitirão participar de novas comunidades e as levam a novos lugares na vida depois da graduação. Ao longo da educação superior, as pessoas descobrem novos objetivos, estabelecem novos rumos e se desenvolvem rumo a novas vidas. Na qualidade de professores de língua e cultura, podemos ajudar os estudantes a compreender o complexo ambiente cultural do mundo moderno, a avaliar o que é significativo para eles nesse mundo e a se apropriar das ferramentas da participação.

***PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: Ação autônoma. Participação. Educação superior. Diversidade*

Diversity is something we celebrate these days, and rightly so. Diversity forms the grounds of equal treatment and opportunity in our societies. Further, it helps us recognize the riches that too be found in our many peoples. In the latter half of this essay I want to introduce a different way of thinking about diversity, a way of thinking that highlights the work of the university and the work of language instruction in enhancing the diversity of the nation. But first I want to explore the history of the term and the influence it has had on higher education so as to help us act responsibly toward the social justice impulses that gave rise to the term's widespread use.

I begin by considering a geographically large country with a diverse population of several hundred millions. This country has a long and complex history of colonization, of eradication and sequestration of indigenous peoples, of importation of slaves from Africa to work plantations, of large and long immigration from all regions in Europe, and of substantial recent immigration from Asia and the Middle East. This history has created a large and continuing residue of social and economic hierarchies, carried out through racism, enduring elites and persistent underclasses, regionalism, ethnic loyalties, religious and cultural divides, linguistic loyalties, and linguistic divisions at both the dialect and language level. Yet at the same time the country has forged a national identity, culture, and economy. Further it has developed educational and communicative systems that emphasize the commonality and equality of all parts of the population and respect the multiple origins of its peoples. As the country has developed national unity

and strength it has moved away from ideologies of hierarchical domination and homogenization toward ideologies of wide democratic participation and inclusion. Along the way, ongoing commitments to individual and group rights have been strengthened by tolerance of difference, rectification of historic discrimination, and transformation of the recognition of difference into a celebration of the rich diversities of society. This last shift is particularly marked by the introduction of the term *diversity* into public dialogue on rights and participation. I am talking about the United States, where the term *diversity* entered public debate on racial discrimination in the 1970's.

One of the key events in bringing political prominence to the term was Jesse Jackson's keynote speech at the 1984 Democratic convention entitled "The Rainbow Coalition."[1] The speech, recognizing the longstanding alliance of African-Americans and Jews, reformulated the civil rights struggle from one predominately about African-American concerns to one that embraced concerns Arab-Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, youth, disabled veterans, small farmers, lesbians and gays. At that time Jackson also formed the Rainbow/Push Coalition as a political movement. The adoption of rainbow iconography turned a racial struggle into a multiracial struggle; it also emphasized the harmony and strength of diversity, suggesting that beauty and strength were to be found in the many colors we bring together. The partners in this alliance demonstrated that social marginalization and dispossession was the key issue, of which racial discrimination was just one component. To understand how this coalition represented a very new political alignment and reframing of the civil rights movement, we should remember Jackson's prominent role in the *Black Power* and *Black is Beautiful* movements in the preceding decades.

The equality work during the early civil rights era was to gain full civil rights for traditional racial and ethnic groups, to remove race-based legal obstacles to participation, such as laws against intermarriage or discriminatory restrictions on voting, and then to make discriminatory acts illegal. By the middle 1960s a new task was added: to affirmatively redress the consequences of longstanding discrimination. Affirmative action was designed to counteract the historical barriers to participation and negative weights put on opportunities so that minority applicants for jobs or education would not be considered equally even when presenting equal credentials. In the phrase of the day,

"the playing field was not even." Affirmative action was designed to provide equal access to opportunity where it did not exist and to affirm the rights for full consideration. It was not to put a finger on the scale but to make sure fingers on the other side were removed or at least compensated for.

The cultural side of this legal and economic struggle was to remove stigma from membership in any group and to ensure full confidence for participation despite long cultural histories that left people being devalued and disempowered. African-Americans took control of defining their identities and asserting their rights on their own terms, not requiring the sponsorship of any other group. This was the spirit of *Black Power* and *Black is Beautiful*. This was the spirit that gave rise to ethnic studies in the academy, beginning with the 1968 Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State University.[2] While there were some early alliances among groups, and some ethnic studies departments brought various groups together (somewhat uneasily), the academic groups tended to have separate identities: African-American Studies, Chicano/Latino Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian-American Studies. Each tended to have separate departments and separate professional organizations, although some umbrella organizations did provide some contact and comparative understanding such as MELUS (The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States.)

The advancement of these cultural identities (even in their fragmented form) led to a backlash in the dominant culture, which exacerbated the backlash against affirmative action. Those who identified with traditional dominant cultures saw values and interests being advanced in competition with their own and undermining what they believed was the strength and equality of the society. Whether this backlash demonstrates a lack of understanding of previous invisible privileges or a justifiable defense of equality, it is certainly important for legitimacy of the state and people's wholehearted participation in the society that all peoples perceive the system as reasonably fair, providing opportunities for their advancement. That problem of perception, however, cuts both ways. Both the formerly privileged and the formerly discriminated against must see the way of life as reasonably fair. That is a hard line for any government to walk.

In 1998 William G. Bowen & Derek Bok, former presidents of Princeton and Harvard, published a study examining the consequences of affirmative action and race-based admissions in higher education, including the quality of education of all students. This book, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*,[3] tied affirmative action to the goals of diversity. In an extensive statistical analysis of almost 50,000 students of different races they studied the effect of diversifying campuses. Not only do they find that students admitted under affirmative actions policies did as well as their peers at the university, in subsequent careers, and in civic participation, they found that students of all backgrounds reported that diversity on campus enriched their educational experiences and added to their abilities to live and work in a multi-cultural, multiracial society and workplace. This study has become iconic in making the direct connection between affirmative action issues of removal of legal and economic discrimination, and cultural issues of recognizing and valuing the identities and resources varied individuals bring to public, corporate, and educational activities.

From the mid-1980's through today the term *diversity* gained increasing importance as a goal of both educational institutions and corporations. The term turned desires for the end of discriminatory practices and for equal access to opportunity into a positive social benefit embodied in the multiple perspectives, knowledges, and social networks that our many peoples bring to deliberation and cooperative action. The rainbow of diversity ideologically highlighted benefits of all groups to work together in an atmosphere of respect, interchange, and cooperation. The concept of diversity was also extended to include groups whose previous exclusion was not based on race or ethnicity, but other characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, religious belief and non-belief, and disabilities--physical, mental, and psychological.

Of course much work remains to be done in ensuring equal inclusion, as revealed by employment, education, and prison statistics examined by variables of race, ethnicity, and economic background. Outbursts of hate-driven violence, political struggles over gay rights, continuing racist discourse, exclusionary practices, and stigmatization of non-believers and believers of non-western faiths continues. While there is some greater inclusion of the disabled, enormous barriers remain to their full participation in society.

Yet the trajectory and social goal is clear. As MLK has said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."[4]

The brilliance of the diversity ideology is in recognizing difference within commonality and relation. All have equal parts, but all do not have to be considered exactly alike. And all must work together and be appreciated to make the whole. The diversity vision as well includes the formerly privileged as an equal partner, and serves to highlight the complexities of identities embedded within the catchall term white, as the particularities of each group's experience gets individual definition. The experience of Italian-Americans are seen as distinct from and equally valuable to the experience of Scandinavian-Americans and Mexican-Americans. The overall effect of the diversity concept has been to move us to a complex view of the American tapestry—as a common metaphor describes the culture.

Recognizing the value of all group experiences does, however, detract attention from the particular sufferings and struggles of some groups, especially the slave experience of African-Americans. Further, the term diversity has turned the issue away from rights, opportunities, and grievances of particular groups and towards the contribution of all groups and the strength of the whole. In doing so, it has softened attention to the legal, economic and political struggle and focused attention more centrally on cultural and social cooperation.

This softening effect of the diversity concept occurred in California education, but this softening also allowed continued attention to inclusion despite backlash against affirmative action. In 1996, voters of California passed by 54-46 percent Proposition 209, an amendment to the state constitution outlawing affirmative action by state agencies, under the view that such programs themselves created inequality of opportunity, access, and evaluation of individual qualifications. The key provision stated:

The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.[5]

While the goals of equality and the desire to make education accessible to those who have been excluded or underrepresented remain strong within the University of

California, once this proposition passed the University could not carry out programs immediately directed toward the betterment of any group. While retreating from an ideology affirmative action and direct redress of previous discrimination, the University of California centered its efforts for social justice around the concept of diversity, making diversity the rationale for action to rectify historical inequities. After several years of deliberation it adopted in 2006 the following statement.

Diversity—a defining feature of California's past, present, and future—refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, worldviews, and circumstances that arise from cultural interpretations of differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, language, heritage, abilities/disabilities, religion/spirituality, and geographic context, among other characteristics.

Diversity is integral to the University's achievement of excellence. Diversity enhances ability of the University to accomplish the academic mission and to serve all of the members of its community equitably. Diversity enriches both the educational experience and the scholarly environment by helping students and faculty learn to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds and by preparing them to participate in an increasingly complex, pluralistic society. Educational excellence that truly incorporates diversity promotes mutual respect and makes possible the full, effective use of the talents and abilities of all to foster innovation and train future leadership. Therefore, the University of California renews its commitment to promoting diversity and equal opportunity in its education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity. The university particularly acknowledges the acute need to remove the barriers to the recruitment, retention and advancement of qualified students, faculty and staff from historically excluded or currently underrepresented populations.[6]

This carefully crafted statement places educational goals within larger social goals of developing all potential talent and fostering cooperation of all peoples in a complex society. From this perspective, diversity strengthens excellence.

While civil rights, affirmative action, and the early history of diversity were formed in relation to simple demographic categories, the diversity discussion has lead to questioning of unitary identities and to recognizing each individual's multiple

experiences. Multi-racialism is a case in point. Race in the U.S. for most of its history was a matter of Black and White. As a result of laws surrounding slavery and post-slavery segregation, any mixture between Black and White was considered Black. Further, within the Afro-American community, passing as White was viewed as a betrayal of the self and of one's people. Even as the civil rights movement grew, mixed race peoples were expected to identify as Black as a matter of loyalty to the struggle. At the same time, the reservation system kept the Native American identifiers out of sight, separating those who maintained loyalty to the tribe from those who passed in the dominant community. Until the later half of the twentieth century, struggles of Asian-Americans and Hispanic Americans were seen as regional, smaller issues not of concern to the general public. But diversity as a cultural theme has highlighted the concerns of all these groups. The complexity of racial diversity has been further highlighted by the demographic shift turning more and more of the country to what is called majority-minority, with more non-whites than whites. Majority-minority, however, really means there is no single dominant majority. Now four states –Hawaii, California (2000), New Mexico and Texas (2005) are minority-majority and the entire country is estimated to become so by around 2040.

Mixed race as a category further complicates the picture. Marriage between races was a strong taboo; "miscegenation" was a crime in some states even until the mid-twentieth century. Now intermarriage is increasingly common and mixed race has emerged as a new identity. Some see this blurring of racial categories as a way to get beyond racial divides. A *Time Magazine* cover in Fall 1993 made the point graphically with a composite computer generated portrait which blends racial feature and is captioned "The New Face of America." A few years later when Tiger Woods became a celebrity he insisted that his racial identity was Cablanasian –Caucasian, Black and Asian American. This complexity of identity and diversity has further eroded stereotypes attributed to groups, as we come to recognize that each person's heritage is complex.

But recognizing the complexity of each person's life does not erase the historical patterns of discrimination based on stereotypes of race, ethnicity, or other classifications that can be readily attributed to individuals. This dilemma is highlighted by U.S. President Barack Obama, celebrated as the first African-American to hold the office. His

parents were a post-graduate student from Africa and a White woman of northern European ancestry (with perhaps a trace of Native American) whose parents had their roots in Kansas. He grew up in the Asian-Pacific multi-culture of Hawaii and in Indonesia. He speaks Bahasa Indonesia. He has close relatives in Africa, Kansas, Hawaii, Indonesia, and Canada, who are of Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian heritages. Though he never grew up in an African-American community, he considers himself African-American, devoted his community organizing career to the African-American community in Chicago, and joined an African-American Christian Church. When asked why, he says he is reminded of his being African American every time he tries to hail a cab. Just because our lives are complex, individual, even post-modern, does not mean we are free of historical patterns of discrimination and stereotypes that we must struggle to rectify in law, economy, and daily life.

To these complexities of identity, we can add aspects of identity that cannot be traced to parentage or home community, such as those of sexual orientation or of disability. The hearing-impaired have developed, for example, a strong community built around language and communication. Such identities are affiliational--how one constructs oneself and who one identifies with. The virtual world, where anyone can adopt any identity with no relation to a personal body or history, has further eroded the idea that identity and how one contributes to communal diversity is predetermined in one's genes, body, or family. These affiliational identities, too, are part of diversity. Further, we are now in the middle of a new shift, a recognition of the diversity one may bring to a situation as a result of an accomplishment, often of one's adult life.

Thus, educational policy discussions have come to require representation of various communities served by school, usually identified by ethnicity, race, or geography (urban/rural). But also such discussions need the views of teachers and parents, as well as curriculum specialists, sociologists, and even economists. Adherents of different credible educational theories also provide richness to the discussion as do the views of. people who have worked with all levels of education from primary through university. Then having people with international experience will add a sense of comparison and alternatives. Now that diversity is understood as the richness of perspectives that are

brought to discussions and endeavors, then many aspects of people's lives may be relevant, including the complex hybridity of experiences that grants people a special perspective. Such thinking also reverberates with the value of interdisciplinarity and the use of multidisciplinary teams to deal with complex issues.

The diversities of our personal development and accomplishments are the result of the activities and the communities, often the knowledge and professional communities, we engage with. We become more unique even as we learn our greater commonality with others, learning from them in carrying out work that improves our common lives. To do that in our modern literate world includes large amounts of reading and writing within specialized communicative worlds, in the genres of those communities, within the activity networks of communal work. Uniqueness and differentiation comes from our learning in facing the challenges of these activities, increasing our repertoire of knowledge, thought, and skills. The more varied our experiences, the more varied and complex repertoires we bring to new tasks and activity groups. Further, writing takes an especially central role in our cognitive and affective and task-competence development as it provides the opportunity to survey what we know, to integrate our complex resources as they bear on our current tasks and activities, to reason and calculate about what we know, and to develop plans on the basis of the complex resources brought together in our writing. Further writing explicitly displays all this knowledge, calculation and planning to open it up for criticism, evaluation, coordination, and use by others with whom we are collaborating.

In the United States higher education there is a long tradition of thinking of creating complex experiences, knowledge, and perspectives within individuals, both in creating excellent specialists in various fields and in producing leaders who understand the relations of multiple human endeavors. Yet this work has traditionally been carried out under an ideology of individualism that typically talks about personal excellence and unique individuals who make particular contributions to society. Yet when we look about how such excellence has been achieved, we see that it has been developed over a long series of challenges carried out in various structured fields of activities, often involving writing as key sites of intellectual work and intellectual development. As instructors we know how much thought goes into how we structure the curriculum for each course and

the challenges embedded in each assignment. We structure writing tasks to be appropriate to the student capabilities but adding an extra level of manageable challenge that will to lead them into more sophisticated thinking. We also know, how as faculties we structure multiple years of courses so as to move students through higher levels of intellectual sophistication and knowledge. While institutional barriers inhibit such thinking across the educational lifespan, we would do well to think about how educational structures inhibit student access and success at higher levels. It is too easy simply to explain away higher levels of success to an ineffable individual talent. The awareness of the evaluation of talent based on prior educational experience itself is an important social justice issue, as different cultural patterns and experiences intersect with school systems so as to limit access and success for some populations traditionally at the educational margins. A recognition of these cultural mismatches has been the object of much research and educational outreach programs to serve the ends of affirmative action and diversity. In the US we have seen the teaching of writing as a particularly critical site of educational success. Further we have seen unequal preparation and cultural mismatches of linguistic patterns as being particular barriers for students from groups that have been at the educational margins. Much of the work of my profession has been dedicated to the social justice issues of providing full and high quality literacy education for all and to provide means of engaging students who have felt themselves excluded by the worlds of literacy and education. I do not have the time to begin to review this large body of work here, but if you scan the pages of any composition journal such as *College Composition and Communication* you will immediately see the great importance we place on this issue. On a personal note, I will point out that position I held for the first twenty years of my university career was funded by a program devoted to provide writing education support for nontraditional students in New York City—African-Americans, Hispanics, and immigrants from around the world.

Apart from different success rates of different groups, advancement up to the higher levels of individual success in higher education is a social matter, and quite often a social matter of support for writing development. As students advance, the barriers for entry to higher levels and completion are often matters of writing, whether vestibular examinations or completing the dissertation and thesis in postgraduate work. One of the

primary reason students fail to complete or delay completing their post-graduate degrees is writing their thesis or dissertation. This failure, although often treated as an individual failure, is a failure of the social educational system that has not prepared the student through successively more difficult and specialized challenges to be ready for the lengthy, difficult, and highly specialized writing of the postgraduate thesis. It as though we have asked students only to sing a few simple folk-melodies and then put them on stage to sing grand opera. The development of an academic or a professional voice requires a long apprenticeship, with much practice, mentoring by more experienced writers, and many sequenced, graded performances along the way. These performances, structured through the genres of the field, socialize the student to a specialized way of life, thinking, and communication and bring them into deeper engagement with other participants in the field.

To bring more individuals from more groups to advanced personal skills, knowledge, thought, and excellence, we need to think of socialization processes rather than just relying on the accidents and luck of each student's biography—whether of ethnicity, race, class, culture, or fortunate mentoring. We need to provide more thoughtful and structured pathways for professional recruitment, induction, development, and participation—aware of the activities and genres students will engage with on their developmental and professional paths. We need to provide opportunities and support for success and reward--not just extrinsic rewards of a good mark but the intrinsic rewards of seeing the impact of their ideas on others, gaining insight from others, solving problems, and making sense of the world through engagement with knowledge communities.

Now let us think of these individuals as participants in society, able to contribute to communal activities and able to communicate effectively with others, but each providing a unique perspective, set of knowledges and skills. Thus individual accomplishments and uniqueness are themselves social resources—but not socially uniform. A traditional view of becoming socialized into a discipline might mislead us to thinking that the process homogenizes people the further their socialization progresses. But in fact the contrary is true. The further one progresses into a professional community the more developed become one's uniqueness, one's ability to make unique

contributions, and one's ability to develop novel solutions to problems. Writing makes this case very clear. Early in writing education we look for students to make unique statements in their assignments. We expect them to start reading different books and contrast different ideas and evidence, coming to their own conclusions. Even as students learn the specialized constraints and forms of writing of their discipline, they also learn to address unique problems, gather fresh evidence, analyze using a variety of theoretical perspectives, and otherwise develop more and more individual voices within the structured discourses of their professions. If students turn in the exact same paper, we accuse them of cheating rather than of getting the correct answer. The further they progress in their career the greater is the expectation of unique contribution. The more one learns the tools, literatures, resources, discursive tricks of one's field, the better able is one to think fresh serious thoughts, draw on more wide ranging and germane evidence and ideas, and hand-craft a unique accomplishment.

How does one develop uniqueness as a contributor to communal projects even while being socialized into a community and working with other members of those fields? As you know through your own postgraduate experiences, the more deeply you engage in your field the more individual your projects become and the more you read a unique collection of the extensive literatures of your field. You collect your own selection of relevant articles (developed through your own criteria of relevancy), synthesize them into literature reviews (which you put together in your own way), and you develop your theoretical framework. You also read and practice many methods of gathering and analyzing data. You make choices and must justify them. In engaging with your research site and the data you develop unique experiences, must deal with particular problems, and must come up with fresh observations and interpretations. Then in conclusions you develop your own thinking about the relevance of your findings for the development of the entire field. What you have been engaged in is centrally a writing activity—an activity that leads you to read and interpret, to go out to the field and collect data, to work with data collections—but it all revolves around writing your seminar papers, theses, and eventually your professional papers and books. Each piece of writing sends you on an adventure of personal learning and development. Together the sequence of such projects creates a unique trajectory of growth that shapes your

disciplinary and professional contribution. The more projects you engage in that pose substantial challenge, the greater the growth. Further if you find that the projects lead you to look at other literature than you were previously familiar with, to expand you criteria of relevancy, to see connection among different theories or phenomena, to seek new kinds of evidence through new research sites and new methods, then your resources and perspectives keep expanding. In none of these instances are you entirely on your own, but rather are drawing on and building from the resources provided by others, even if they are from communities that are new to you and your primary colleagues. By finding more points of warrantable connection that you can justify within the world of your own inquiry, the more unique your voice becomes even as you connect with more and more people. This is a kind of paradox of disciplinary and professional socialization—the more you connect the more different you become and the more different you become the more opportunities you have for new kinds of connections. Thus we become more diverse, even as we socialize.

How can we help develop students to become the strong diverse voices able to speak to professional, disciplinary, economic, and policy communities and to contribute to the solution of the problems that face our societies? To the traditional work in disciplinary writing using disciplinary resources and forms, we need to add experiences that challenge the students to think new thoughts, solve fresh problems, and seek fresh resources. Further, we need to help students see the value of their work for substantive problems of the profession, discipline or society. They must become engaged in substantive problems, working with others concerned with these problems and coordinating with their multiple perspectives and knowledges. And we must keep a strong focus on their writing so as to make consequential statements in these activities.

Let me give as an example a course run by Professor Catherine Gautier, one of my colleagues in the geography department, specializing in global warming science.[7] The course brought together students from environmental studies, geography, sciences, political science, economics, communications, and humanities. After an initial period reviewing the science of global warming, students role-played the negotiation of a new international treaty. Some students formed teams representing countries and regions in the developed and developing world—US, China, Brazil, the European Union, Equatorial

Africa, Pacific islands, and so on. Other students represented non-governmental organizations and others corporate groups. Plus there were a group of journalists. The instructor and her assistant took the role of the conference organizers, like a UN Secretariat. The groups every day needed to produce background and position papers, proposals, and responses to proposals. There was also oral debate. The journalists interviewed all the parties and every day produced a newspaper summarizing events and positions, presenting background stories about participants, and analyzing events in editorials. The course was taught for a few intensive weeks during the summer when students had no other obligations—and of course all students who enrolled in this course were already interested in climate change issues. This became their life for three weeks and they came out with changed perspectives, large increases of skills, and improved abilities to listen and respond to other perspectives in ways that would constructively carry forward the communal work.

Such projects help students articulate their unique voices to contribute to diversity. A series of such experiences connecting students with the post-education roles will help make them flexible, multi-disciplinary learners capable of participating in a range of significant activity systems. They will also become sensitive to the range of perspectives necessary carrying out important social cooperations.

Insofar as such students are from backgrounds from communities traditionally excluded from power and reward, they can bring those perspectives to bear. They will bring minority concerns and perspectives to the table, but they will be more than just representatives of a set of political interests—they will bring professional knowledge and skill in cooperative activities, developed through broad reading and thought. They will also understand the dominant perspectives they must engage with. Those whose origins are in dominant groups will not only become open to more diverse viewpoints, but will see others as competent professional contributors bringing important resources and thoughts to complex problems. Such dialogues may also allow a more equitable and precise discussion about rectifying the continuing difficulties arising from historical discrimination and exclusion.

As a final case in point I return to the example of the new US President. As we have discussed his complex historical, racial, and even religious background has been

filtered through the patterns of discrimination that have haunted American life, so that on election day a single identity was celebrated, that of the first African-American President. Certainly, from his childhood and formative years he brings an understanding of and sensitivity to African American issues to the job; he also brings an understanding of all minority and multicultural issues; he also brings an understanding of white attitudes toward race. He also brings an understanding of multi-racial identities and of Islamic and Asian cultures. Yet these days what is most important is what he brings from his adult experiences as a deeply engaged university student, as a community organizer, as a constitutional lawyer, as an eloquent speaker and adroit politician, as a smart and informed policy maker able to learn from many advisors from many perspectives bringing different wisdoms to the table. Moreover, the presidency is a collective enterprise of the many people making up his administration, so his diversity also includes the diverse perspectives and skills he has gathered and leads among his advisors. What is important now is the diverse dialogues he is able to orchestrate to solve problems in the country and internationally. His contribution to diversity is far beyond being the representative of a formerly excluded group—as important as that is. His contribution is to understand and support the many diversities that make up our complex world and that must to work together if we are to prosper in this interdependent, difficult world.

Despite the similarities between Brazil and the U.S. I alluded to at the beginning of my talk, Brazil has its own unique history and social dynamics, which you understand better than I do. For one thing you had a church which reinforced from the beginning of colonization that all people had souls worthy of saving; further in many regions of the country Europeans were never in the majority. Both these conditions meant that racial complexity was confronted and accepted much earlier. The Brazilian history of revolutions and independence is again different, avoiding deeply divisive struggles such as the US Civil War. The discriminations and divisions of our pasts are different as are the continuing residue of inequities that need to be addressed. Further the current structure of politics and the public sphere differ in our two countries. Yet the complexes of issues we must face in the future—maintaining a sustainable economy in a sustainable environment, improving the health and education of our citizens, forming

constructive relations with our global neighbors bear great similarity. And we share the intellectual resources of modern disciplines, professions and the information environment. Our worlds are infusing each other. In our global world the diversities of many nations also enter into the diversity within each of our nations.

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