

Carnegie Scholar Project: Transforming a General Education Course
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Transformation Theme: Assessment
Qualitative Data

Student Investigator Comments on Attitudes Toward Cultural Diversity

The following comments were gathered prior to these students being selected through a random process as Student Investigators. My goal was to begin gathering data on my students' attitudes toward cultural diversity.

Students had been learning about current population demographics in the United States and had heard that many Americans have become alarmed at these changes and have voiced concerns that the unity of the nation is being threatened; that there are more powerful centripetal forces pulling the country apart than there are centrifugal forces holding it together. They were then asked to answer the following question:

“Many Americans have become alarmed at changes in population demographics and have been concerned that the unity of the nation is being threatened by its diversity. What are your thoughts on these concerns?”

Student 1: I believe that most people are afraid of what they don't know. The people that feel that the US is threatened by its diversity are the people that are insecure about themselves. The more different kinds of people we have here in America getting along and hopefully becoming friends, the better place not only this country, but the entire world is going to be.

Student 2: I disagree totally. I am glad to live in such a diverse country and I am not threatened by it at all, just as long as one whole continent does not decide to pack up and want to take over the U.S. I believe we can all learn a few things from each and every one of the different cultures and by doing that and accepting and understanding all the differences we will grow as a country.

Student 3: I feel everyone has the right to a free and plentiful life with equal opportunities without discrimination to race or sex.

Student 4: I think the problem is solvable if the American Government can find the way to adjust interests of different social and ethnical groups (that is certainly not easy).

Student 5: Several things bug me when it comes to immigration. First, I get very angry with people that come here without following the rules, for several reasons. It seems really dumb go somewhere new, violate the laws and rights of the other citizens and then plan to stay there and not have people hate you and be mean to you and limit what they will allow you to do (which doesn't mean I excuse prejudice behavior). Also, it puts the people in a place where they can easily get taken advantage of by businesses that employ them unlawfully. As an accountant/finance person a large part of what I do is make sure that rules are adhered to, so it's no small wonder that it really annoys me when people don't follow rules. Another thing that bothers me is that it seems like minority groups commit most of the crime in the city I live in, although they don't make up the majority of the population. In my head I know that circumstances play a bigger role in behavior than personal constitution, however when I see my house get tagged on by gang bangers I get really pissed off. I guess I feel that if people want to come here they need to really be screened on a moral level, as well as an economic level, because people at the bottom of the socio/economic scale are far more likely to commit illegal acts. I don't want a bunch of dependent leaches coming here. I really want people that know how to work through channels and follow rules as citizens. I want the same type of people I would count on to be my neighbors or baby-sit my daughter. People with cultural mores that are similar enough to mine that they don't cause me great inconvenience or damage. One immigrant family tried to start a business and in the country they come from time is not so important and culturally people loan each other what they need to get by and don't pay back penny for penny. Anyway, they started their business and it didn't do very well, and they kept complaining that people wouldn't understand that they would pay their bills as soon as they could. Also, in their culture it is more acceptable to blame everything else rather than take responsibility for your failures, and every time a customer would go into their business the woman would talk their ear off about how hard it was, etc. No wonder the place was always empty. I would be just as annoyed with anyone that behaved the way those people done though.

Student 6: I think that the changes in the demographic do not threaten the diversity, rather nourish it. But I think that the biggest cause for tearing the country apart as a result of the influx of immigrants is people being afraid to get to know about other cultures or using it as an excuse to make their own groups exclusive rather than inclusive.

Student 7: I don't really think Americans should be alarmed because of diversity. I think diversity is a centrifugal force and just removes prejudice from American culture. People enjoy having many friends from different backgrounds and it just enriches them.

Student 8: I think that the US always has been a country of great diversity and that what makes it so special. I think that this diversity makes this country. Just because the White people becomes a minority doesn't mean the end of the US, maybe it is frightening to them that the power of the country might slide out of the white people's hands. But that is what a democracy is all about, the majority rules.

Student 9: I must confess that I too have some concerns about our nation's unity but not because of our diversity. I'm concerned that some groups resist acculturation and choose not to learn English. I can understand new arrivals making this choice but when later generations make the same decision I fear that our ability to communicate as a group is diminished. Yes we should all know more than one language, but many of us do not and with so much diversity it is somewhat impractical to expect everyone to know multiple languages. The choice to continue speaking their native tongue is theirs to make but by choosing not to make the most basic attempt to acculturate they are also making a choice not to assimilate. I'd like to give two examples from my past to illustrate my point.

My wife grew up in a very diverse neighborhood in Santa Monica California during the sixties. Her neighbors, and hence her childhood friends, included Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, and Germans. One of her family's closest friends were the Martinez's. Ralph Martinez, the father of this family, insisted that only English be spoken at home and in fact he refused to allow his children to learn Spanish. Today, one of his sons is a big wheel on the state board of education and the other is a sports columnist for the San Jose Mercury News, maybe you've read him his name is Michael Martinez.

The other example occurred in my neighborhood recently. A Mexican family purchased the house across the street from us. The second week after they moved in I noticed that he was having problems with his car. I had once owned a similar model and thought that this would be a good opportunity introduced myself. He responded by saying "no hablo Engles". That was the end of the conversation because like most of my neighbors, this household speaks only Spanish, I speak only English. This didn't upset me but three months later he approached me and inquired about the swimming pool business, which is what I do for a living. He was interested in this line of work for some of the people who live in his house. To my surprise he spoke perfect English, something I don't think is possible to learn that well in such a short time. This experience made me feel like I had been excluded, like I was the outsider in the neighborhood where I have lived in for eleven years.

I can understand peoples concerns that our diversity may be leading to divisions in our society. I personally feel that if an ethnic group wishes to be assimilated into our society

it must make some attempt to acculturate. The first step in this process is to be able to communicate with their neighbors. Acculturation requires risk taking on the part of the immigrant, and assimilation requires risk taking on the part of the mainstream society, much like the risks that Choi and I took which I discussed earlier. Yes there were times when we both felt uncomfortable but these moments were short and soon forgotten. Choi is one of my best friends and I believe that this willingness on both our parts to get to know and understand each others backgrounds and beliefs was instrumental in bring us together.

Student 10: I think in this modern year, science and technology improve so fast. Our view can't strict on region, race nation...anymore. But should expand to whole world, even whole universe. I think no matter what race or ethnicity, once one decides immigrate to U.S., he should and must respect and accept other cultures. I don't think it is a problem, because I believe the most important character of American culture and different from other cultures is that American culture can absorb and melt any kind of culture to its own. And in fact, it did very well.

Student 11: Quoted from book: "One of the greatest challenges the country faces as it approaches the next millennium is finding the means to forge a national identity that embraces multicultural diversity at the same time it strengthen the ties that bind us together as Americans."

Student 12: I think that immigration is a serious issue and can threaten the unity of the nation in America. Accepting many immigrants from various foreign countries creates a huge population growth, which is consisted of non-Americans, as introducing various types of races, religions, and ethnicities. Nowadays, a huge proportion of the U.S. population is built up with these immigrants. As a result, the originality of America itself seems to fade away behind these different cultures, and its characteristics have changed little by little by accepting people who intend to keep their traditions and customs.

Student 13: Change is always a hard thing to accept. Overall I think diversity is usually good. People who are new to our country are different and many times not as economically stable. I think all cultures are good but I am concerned with the growing voluntary segregation that I am seeing as different cultures form large communities instead of assimilating.

Student 14: In my opinion, in order to create a great and stable country, skillful people should be employed or immigrated to this country. These persons can help to reform and

improve the country rapidly. Hence, America can be enriched by the phenomena of diversity.

Student 15: The concerns are that nation is being threatened by it's diversity and that there are more powerful centripetal forces pulling the country apart than there are centrifugal forces holding it together. One of the greatest challenges in s the next millennium which is finding the mans to forge national identity that embraces multicultural diversity.