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Teaching Global Citizenship in Tense Times: Promoting Inclusion and Equity Through the Liberal Arts

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Teaching Global Citizenship in Tense Times: Promoting Inclusion and Equity Through the Liberal Arts

Introduction and Rationale

A liberal education is not the opposite of a conservative education but rather “a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and that cultivates social responsibility and a strong sense of ethics and values” (Humphreys, 2006, p. 3). The liberal arts teach students how to think critically, communicate clearly, solve complex problems, appreciate others, and understand the world. A liberal arts education is more important now than ever in this complex twenty-first century world where our future can seem uncertain. The global coronavirus pandemic has not only changed how we work, live, and socially interact, but it has also revealed inequities related to age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and place of residence on a national and global scale. Furthermore, the death of George Floyd prompted us to reckon with and reexamine the history of racism in our country. The United States witnessed further division during the 2020 presidential election. These significant events have illustrated the critical need to understand, respect, and bridge cultural differences, which can ultimately lead to greater inclusion and equity.

The mission of South Dakota State University (SDSU), located in Brookings, is to offer a “rich academic experience in an environment of inclusion and access through inspired, student-centered education, creative activities and research, innovation and engagement that improve the quality of life in South Dakota, the region, the nation and the world” (South Dakota State University “About us”). SDSU is a land-grant university and the state’s largest comprehensive institution of higher education. In fall 2020, SDSU’s enrollment was 11,405 students from 49 states and 70 countries. The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) enrolls the most students of any College and offers 27 majors, 44 minors, and 10 certificates. In order to teach students how to engage with diversity, promote inclusion, and develop their intercultural competence, four faculty from the College of AHSS, including the author, designed a 100-level course called Introduction to Global Citizenship and Diversity in 2017. This interdisciplinary course, required for all students pursuing a major within the College, was redesigned by a team of faculty in summer 2020 to reflect new course delivery methods and the recent aforementioned events.

The course’s introductory unit sets the stage for the rest of the semester and encourages students to critically evaluate the authors’ claims, consider their own identities, and reflect on how they might engage with others who are different from them. Students are assigned several short articles by leading scholars of race and gender: Beverly Daniel Tatum, Gwyn Kirk, Margo Okazawa-

Rey, and Iris Marion Young. These texts, from *Readings for diversity and social justice*, focus on the complex and fluid nature of identity. Another assigned reading in the first unit is Blanda's (2016) "The 'other side' is not dumb," which highlights the importance of actively and respectfully listening to others. He argues that we tend to dismiss people with different opinions without listening to them, especially those who "actually believe in an opposing viewpoint of a complicated issue, and do so for genuine, considered reasons. Or [*sic*] at least, for reasons just as good as yours" (para. 7). Throughout the semester, students are challenged to think critically about what responsibility they have to act as global citizens within their own situated contexts. "A global citizen is concerned about the welfare of *all* human beings, not just his or her own ethnic, linguistic, or national group... global citizens recognize the dignity of every human being and proactively seek the common good for society and the environment" (Jackson, 2014, p. 301). We discuss how students can be active and engaged members of their own communities, starting on campus.

This emphasis on community and engagement, where students become active learners and partners in the co-creation of knowledge, is a critical component of feminist pedagogy. Shrewsbury (1987) posits:

Feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning—engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classicism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change.

(p. 6)

In Introduction to Global Citizenship and Diversity, students and instructors learn from and with one another in a setting Shrewsbury describes as a liberatory classroom where "members learn to respect each other's differences rather than fear them" (p. 6). As an instructor of this course, I attempt to encourage excitement, as opposed to "a rote, assembly-line approach to learning," following hooks' (1994) description of engaged pedagogy in *Teaching to Transgress* (p. 13). According to hooks, "Seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community" (p. 8). Through analysis and discussion of scholarly readings, fictional and nonfictional texts, films, newspaper articles, guest lectures, podcasts, video clips, and TED talks, the classroom becomes a dynamic place of shared learning.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will identify theoretical frameworks and approaches for interpreting, defining, analyzing, and evaluating the diversity of human experience on a local and global level.
2. Students will examine diversity from multiple perspectives such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, nation, and socioeconomic status in order to create an inclusive community.
3. Students will reflect critically on their own cultural background in relation to systemic inequalities.
4. Students will explore and increase their understanding of how their own culture affects their values, behavior, communication, perceptions, and implicit biases.
5. Students will explore ways to engage in competent and constructive communication in a diverse society.
6. Students will attend campus activities such as lectures, discussions, film screenings, and events in the surrounding communities in order to explore diversity and global citizenship and engage in critical reflection about their experiences.

Explanation

After establishing the course framework and discussing identity, we move to our content units, which are each two weeks long. With a focus on structural change, several common themes arise repeatedly throughout the course: How can we promote inclusion and equity? How can we learn about historical facts and acknowledge this history? How can we break stereotypes? How can we educate ourselves so that we can become active global citizens who work for positive, structural change in our communities? These are critical components of feminist pedagogy where “the classroom becomes an important place to connect to our roots, our past, and to envision the future” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 6).

Representation in texts and films, as well as guest lectures, is a key component to this course. Current required texts include “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” by Zitkála-Šá, *There There* by Tommy Orange, *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?* by Moustafa Bayoumi, *Know my Name: A Memoir* by Chanel Miller, *Hillbilly Elegy* by J. D. Vance, and “Why the Revolution Will not be Tweeted” by Malcolm Gladwell.¹ Students are also tasked with viewing various films and documentaries such as *Inequality for All*, *13th*, *Unspoken: America’s Native American Boarding Schools*, *The Laramie Project*, and *Walkout*.

¹ Students read excerpts from each of the texts by Orange, Bayoumi, Miller, and Vance.

Guest lectures are delivered by experts in their respective fields and people who have lived experience or are members of the various cultural groups we examine throughout the semester. These have included SDSU's Chief Diversity Officer and coordinator of American Indian and Indigenous Studies, directors of local nonprofit organizations including South Dakota Voices for Peace and The Transformation Project, and an attorney from the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota.² As Chandler (2021) writes:

Representation matters. It empowers us to imagine what is possible and shapes our expectations. It enables us to eliminate biases and raise awareness of the privileges in our relationships with friends, neighbors and co-workers. We are better when we recognize and engage the full range of experiences, talents, and abilities among us. Without representation, success and perseverance are hard fought and isolating (para. 1).

Assessment

Throughout Introduction to Global Citizenship and Diversity, students are encouraged to engage with and learn from different perspectives and opinions through active learning and continual reflection. An important part of the course is open and respectful discussion, both large and small-group. Due to COVID-19, in 2020-2021, my sections were taught synchronously online, so we used the chat and breakout rooms of four to five students in our daily sessions on Zoom. This allowed students the chance to talk to each other and discuss their differing opinions without feeling as intimidated as speaking in front of an entire class of 50 students. The discussion board on Desire2Learn is also a critical tool to promote reflection through graded assessments, with 150-word postings due about every two weeks. The objective of these online assignments is to have a robust, thoughtful discussion—which means replying multiple times to classmates, reading comments, and moving the conversation forward. Differing opinions are encouraged, but students must remain respectful of one another and respond to classmates with careful reflection, moving beyond simply indicating agreement or disagreement. This regular opportunity to engage in reflection entails examining one's own assumptions as well as those of others, which is a key tenet of feminist pedagogy.

In order to help students recognize, investigate, and reflect on the course themes, they are required to attend two cultural activities (either in person or virtual) from an approved list and submit a reflection for each. Instructors promote events from partners throughout campus, including those sponsored by

² As of fall 2021, the position of Chief Diversity Officer no longer exists at South Dakota State University.

the Multicultural Center, American Indian Student Center, Office of International Affairs, Common Read program, among others. Students often select events that highlight topics about which they want to learn more or that are hosted by a student or campus organization with which they would like to become more familiar. They are asked to reflect on how questions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and global citizenship are addressed in our campus and local communities and to provide specific examples from our course materials to relate them to the cultural activity or event. Research has shown that this type of intercultural learning does not just happen in a void but relies on intentional facilitation and guidance, which instructors model during course lectures and discussions.

Debriefing

On their final essay exam in fall 2020 and spring 2021, students were asked to reflect on their most significant takeaways from the course. Responses were assessed as pass/fail and scores were based upon whether students responded with the required minimum of seven sentences. All students who took the exam in my sections during the 2020-2021 academic year completed the question ($N=82$ responses). Several commonalities emerged regarding what students learned in this course, including the following two most prevalent themes: 1) developing new knowledge and deeper understanding of past history and current issues; and 2) learning how to actively listen and respect difference.

In terms of the first theme, comments centered on the “eye-opening knowledge” gained from the various units and how some topics were “completely new” and “opened [their] eyes” due to a lack of exposure to diversity in their small, Midwestern towns. One student commented that they had never learned about Indigenous people while another mentioned that before college, they “hadn’t even had a conversation with a person that wasn’t white.” Several students mentioned that they had not previously learned about redlining or how it impacted Black Americans: “Before I watched the film *13th* [sic] I was ignorant about what systemic racism was...I learned so much from watching that documentary.” Regarding gender and sexuality, one student said that they “always struggled to know the correct terminology and [did not want] to offend anyone” while another indicated that “sexual assault is usually ignored due to the uncomfortable nature of the topic...we need to change this,” so this unit was particularly impactful for them. Gaining knowledge about important historical events, facts, and terms is a way for students to become more informed global citizens and aware of the world around them.

Some students referred to the broader knowledge or skills they gained rather than a particular unit, text, or film. One mentioned that they appreciated the chance “to think critically of [their] own beliefs while also learning about others”

and another valued the opportunity not only to learn about history and current events but to develop “the skills to think about these difficult issues critically; taking the time to think about them...and form [their] own thoughts while also valuing the inputs and ideas of others who may think differently.” Finally, one student mentioned that the most important takeaway is “to make a change, to be better and do better, and to learn from our past mistakes.” Although students sometimes disagreed with the claims presented by authors and filmmakers, they acquired important critical thinking skills that will benefit them personally and professionally. In this type of feminist classroom, where dialogue and participation are the focus, “students integrate the skills of critical thinking with respect for and ability to work with others. Feminist pedagogy strives to help students and teacher learn to think in new ways, especially that enhance the integrity and wholeness of the person and the person’s connection with others” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 7). Critical thinking does not necessarily occur organically, but this reflective process must be practiced and facilitated.

Regarding the second theme of listening to and respecting different opinions, students appreciated the chance to discuss difficult topics in small groups, share their opinions, and hear their classmates’ perspectives. All group members were encouraged to contribute to discussions in order to promote an inclusive community and sense of empowerment. hooks (1994) states, “Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy” (p. 39). Excitement for learning can be stimulated by a collective effort where everyone’s presence is valued. This emphasis on community “creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us” (p. 40).

Students gradually became more comfortable in small groups comprised of four or five students that changed each class period, where they appreciated the chance to hear “multiple perspectives,” consider “different points of view,” and “respectfully listen.” One student commented, “this class taught me that discussion is a good and healthy thing” while another stated, “it was really cool to see how we could all have such different reactions to the same article, movie, or podcast.” Students were encouraged to discuss their differences in a respectful manner and to be open to learning about these varying opinions and perspectives. They were empowered “to find their own voices, to discover the power of authenticity” and, simultaneously, “find communion with others and to discover ways to act on their understanding” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 7).

Finally, several students mentioned the impact of this class for job prospects and in cultivating global citizenship: “The materials covered in this class will help me better work with different types of people in my future career as an Air Force officer” and “I feel like I can walk into the world equipped not

only with knowledge, but also with the confidence to start conversations, and the heart to lead projects that I am passionate about. College is a place where we cultivate a wide array of knowledge, meet a vast variety of people, and discover who we are.” Students came to realize that they live in a globalized community and that in order to interact with culturally diverse people both in the workplace and in society, the ability to listen to and respect others is critical.

Conclusion

As evidenced from the 2020 census data, South Dakota’s population has grown by 8.9% and is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (2020 Decennial Census). The course Introduction to Global Citizenship and Diversity equips students with the knowledge and skills to function in a pluralistic society where they will be exposed to diverse people and perspectives, both in their jobs and communities. President of South Dakota State University, Barry H. Dunn, states, “If history has taught us anything about higher education, it is that we will not always agree with each other. However, that does not mean that we can’t respect one another and address our differences through conversation and education” (South Dakota State University “Freedom of Expression”). Students in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences are gaining important skills and knowledge that will not only help them become more marketable but also build more equitable workplaces and communities.

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