



Race, Class, Culture

Who we are and how we see the world are substantially shaped by perceptions of our racial, class, and ethnic identities... One of the cardinal rules for discussion across class and ethnic boundaries is to begin by acknowledging the fact of diversity. Honoring differences is a way of recognizing that racial, class, and ethnic identifications have greatly enriched many people's lives.

Brookfield and Preskill

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Day Three

The third day is always pivotal. It's halfway through the week, so there's some kind of natural turning point in the group energy. We talk about weighty topics such as racism, sexism, classism, identity, culture, and privilege; these topics tend to stir people up. And we bring in strategies that ask participants to reveal their identities in ways that are very different from how academics typically represent themselves to each other and to students. These techniques can be genuinely controversial within the group.

We started from two basic premises: 1) that most difficult dialogues are related to questions of identity; and 2) that many of us in the dominant culture may know little about our heritage, may consider its role in shaping identity to be minimal, and may be unaware of the range and ubiquity of white privilege. We wanted to demonstrate how hard it is to recognize and transcend what seems to be a natural world order when, indeed, it is not. We also wanted to raise awareness of the Alaska Native cultures in our midst. Both our universities sit on traditional Native lands, and both have special missions to serve our Native populations. We wanted to ask ourselves: How are we doing? Are Native voices being heard? Are Native ways of knowing and learning being given equal status?

Several of Wednesday's activities were designed by Alaska Native Studies Professor Nancy Furlow and Anthropology Professor Phyllis Fast, both of whom are Alaska Native women. We invited them to bring in strategies from their own heritages that were not part of our text or common academic experience. But both of them felt that the demands of translation would be too intense, that the gap between what works in Native communities and what you could do in a higher education classroom is too big to make sense.

They focused instead on strategies for creating democratic and inclusive classrooms, choosing techniques such as the Circle of Objects and the Five Minute Rule that are consciously inclusive and that can be used to build trust, cultivate respect, and create community. The idea of including all voices is an essential element in many Alaska Native ways of communicating. Most Native cultures have something like these practices, where people take turns, speak from the heart, and relate to each other on a personal level.

Sample Agenda

- Exercise: Identity Groups
- Exercise: Circle of Objects
- Reflection and Discussion
- Presentation and Discussion:
White Privilege
- Exercise: Haful of Quotes
- Exercise: The Five-Minute Rule

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

Human communication is often messy, and nowhere more so than in the language we use to talk about racial and ethnic groups. Words do more than simply label things; they are often imbued with history and power as well. Over time, in response to different historical, social, or cultural circumstances, groups of people change the way they refer to themselves and the ways they wish to be referred to by others. These changes reflect new understandings and re-defined relationships of equity and power. Groups may claim for themselves terms that were previously used in a derogatory manner, turning them into proud positives instead. Some may prefer terms, words, or phrases from their original languages (for example, Inupiat) over words from a foreign source (such as Eskimo). Some may wish to be identified with a highly specific cultural or ethnic group (such as Hmong) while others prefer a more general moniker (Asian). Sometimes the terms evolve rapidly, with the preferred term (Negro, colored, Black, African American, people of African descent) changing several times in several decades.

Sometimes people avoid the difficult conversations about race because they don't know which words to use. Many people are afraid of using the wrong word and either hurting others or being publicly embarrassed by their word choice. They realize that even the best intentions may not prevent the appearance of their being insensitive rather than conscientious, and they fear that they will have no credibility in a discussion. And so they disqualify themselves, and remain silent.

We must be willing to acknowledge and correct our mistakes, and to examine any ignorance, assumptions, or over-generalizations that may lurk behind them.

We believe respectful dialogue to be the foundation of democracy. Since language and culture are always dynamic, it is inevitable that somewhere in the process we will all make mistakes. We must not let that keep us from talking, however. We must be willing to

acknowledge and correct our mistakes, and to examine any ignorance, assumptions, or overgeneralizations that may lurk behind them. This is a critical first step toward engaging in meaningful dialogues, which is a critical step toward preserving and reinvigorating democracy. It may be comforting to realize you are not the first person to make the mistake, and you won't be the last. The important thing is to keep talking and not let the fear of making mistakes keep us from re-engaging. That would be the most profound mistake of all.

With that said, here at this particular historic moment, from this region of the world, we put forth some provisional definitions of terms we tried to use consistently throughout this handbook. We think of these as terms of convenience, and we acknowledge their limitations. Most of us routinely enclose these words in quotation marks when we use them, to signal our understanding of the worlds of difference the shorthand obscures. We apologize in advance if our choices don't match the terms you prefer. We're following our own advice here, and pushing through our fear of making mistakes so that we can start talking about race, class, and culture, and how these affect our classrooms and our teaching.

Terms of Convenience

Alaska Native: We tried to avoid this term as a noun and use it only as an adjective: Alaska Native people, Alaska Native professors, Alaska Native students. The designation is a generic term for the many distinct cultural and ethnic groups or nations that are indigenous to Alaska, including Inupiat, Yup'ik, Athabascan, Aleut, Tlingit, Haida, and dozens of others.

Minority: Although we recognize that this term implies a kind of marginalization that we did not wish to perpetuate, we used it anyway to refer to cultural or ethnic groups that are (at least for the time being) outnumbered in our two universities and the U.S. at large.

White: Despite widespread discomfort with it, we used this designator to refer generically to light-skinned European Americans and even more generically to the mainstream values and institutions of the dominant American culture.

IDENTITY

Introducing ourselves

In many cultures of the West—including the mainstream of American academia—we introduce ourselves with a name and some indication of what we do. I'm Kay, your editor. You're you (state your name and faculty rank). We send our resumés and vitae on ahead, and we trail our publications and portfolios and faculty files along behind. We use our individual activities and accomplishments as a basis for many of our professional and social relationships. We think this is normal.

But if middle class white people and others raised in mainstream Western cultures tend to define themselves by their individual activities and accomplishments, many other groups do not. Students and faculty of color may define themselves in terms of their cultural or historical roots, values, or affiliations. Those from minority religions or working-class backgrounds or those with disabilities or gay/lesbian orientations may identify themselves by some of these features. Many are struggling to keep their sense of identity while attending or working in the university, and they may be unable to fully participate unless their identity is acknowledged and respected.

The entire question of names, naming, and the language used by groups to refer to themselves and each other is therefore of great importance in our learning environments. It matters how we introduce ourselves, whom we identify with, what we call ourselves and each other. To tackle controversial (or indeed any) issues with civility, we must first learn to listen to each other, address each other with respect, and honor each other's right to be seen as individuals.

Identity Groups

Our facilitator, Libby Roderick, adapted this exercise from a model developed by the National Coalition Building Institute many years ago. We found it an effective way to get everyone thinking together about personal and group identities.

Before the exercise, prepare a list of potential identity groups that may or may not be represented by your participants. Try to be as complete as possible, including major religious and ethnic groups, class affiliations, gender, ability/disability, parental status, age, and—if the setting is safe enough—sexual orientation. Start with a few identities that are relatively innocuous (artists, students), and build up to those that are more highly charged.

Tell people what's going to happen, and then, one by one, start calling out the identity groups from your list. As you call out each group, invite those who identify with that group or consider themselves members of that group to stand if they choose. Pause a moment, asking all participants just to notice who is in this group and who is not. Thank them, and then call out the next group, repeating the process, noticing who's there and who's not there, and moving on.

After the list is complete, ask all participants to pick at least one of the groups they identified with, pair off, and talk with a partner about the following questions:

- What's great about being a member of this identity group?
- What's tough about it?
- What do you wish people knew about this group?
- What do you want people to never do, say, or think again about your group?

After several minutes, bring the whole group back together and call out the identity groups again. This time, invite group members to briefly share their responses to the questions. Make sure everyone knows that those sharing are speaking from their own experience as individuals; their answers do not represent the entire group and may conflict with one another. Invite them to clarify how they would like to be identified if their preferred terms do not match those used in the exercise. For example, if you called out a group such as “all or part Native American,” you may also ask if



Identity Groups

A simple exercise to get everyone thinking together about their cultural, class, ethnic, religious, gender, and other identities.

Before class: prepare a list of potential identity groups. Include large, broad groups as well as small, distinctive groups.

Call out the groups. Invite members to stand, and invite everyone to notice who is in the group and who is not.

Think about the groups. Have participants pair off and discuss what's great and what's hard about being in their particular groups, and what they want others never to do, say, or think about their group again.

Open discussion. Bring the group back together, and invite people to share.

This exercise was adapted from a model called Up/Downs developed by the National Coalition Building Institute.

there are those who wish to be identified as Iroquois, Haida, or Hopi. Close with an opportunity for people to briefly reflect on what they got out of the exercise.

Our experience

We found this exercise to be especially useful for pointing out groups that weren't represented in our faculty intensive. When Libby called out Jews and Muslims (at separate times), not a single person stood up. She asked participants to notice the absence of these key groups, and talked a bit about their small numbers and general invisibility on Alaska campuses. When she invited gay, lesbian, or bisexual faculty to stand, and again no one responded, she suggested that the lack of people standing did not necessarily mean that members of these groups were not present. These groups still suffer from legalized discrimination, and individuals might, therefore, not wish to publicly identify themselves as members.

The meta-discussions were quite lively. One participant objected to the idea that personal disclosure results in a reduction of biases and stereotypes on the part of the listening audience, a major goal of the exercise (see her essay on page 100). Others argued against the need to identify ourselves by labels at all. A few expressed concern with the personal nature of this and similar exercises, saying, "I am not comfortable with 'touchy/feely' exercises, especially when I am the instructor. I am afraid I will not be able to deal with the emotions that come up..." Some wanted to extend the identity groups to include interests (such as musical tastes, hobbies, etc.) rather than identities. The most widespread concern involved students having to ally themselves with an outwardly imposed category (such as Asian-American) when they would not have picked that name for themselves (identifying, instead, as Samoan-American or "from Malaysia"). Libby suggested inviting all participants to clarify their identities within the groups.

On the good side, most participants indicated that the experience gave them greater insight into the wide range of identities and backgrounds operating in a given group:

- *"I had no idea that people identified as working class here!"*
- *"I was surprised by how many self-identified atheists are in the group."*
- *"Some of the people here I know quite well (or so I thought), but I learned something new about them."*

Most indicated that, in the future, they would be more aware of the multiplicity of learners in their classrooms. Several also said they felt more part of a learning community after completing the exercise with their colleagues.

PRIVILEGE

Most white people don't consciously intend to behave in ways that can be experienced by their students or colleagues of color as racist; they simply go along with a system that is already biased in their favor, never noticing the privileges built into their daily lives and institutional structures. This essay introduces the concept of white privilege, using the seminal work of feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh as a basis for exercises designed to help white faculty members quickly grasp the existence and mechanics of institutionalized racism, and their unaware participation within that system.

White Privilege

Libby Roderick

*Associate Director, Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence
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...it has frequently been the case that White students enrolled in my class on racial and cultural issues in counseling expect to be taught all about the cultures of people of color, and they are almost always surprised to hear that we will be discussing the White group's experience. Some students remark that they are not White; they are female, or working-class, or Catholic, or Jewish, but not White. When challenged, they reluctantly admit that they are White, but report that this is the first time they have had to think about what it means for them.

Rita Hardiman

Nobody really likes to talk about racism, oppression, and privilege. These are scary topics that bring up strong feelings of fear, defensiveness, guilt, anger, and grief. Most of us are unprepared to handle strong emotion, in the classroom or outside, and would prefer to avoid these topics if possible. Because of this discomfort, reluctance, and fear—and as many of the *Difficult Dialogues* projects nationwide have recognized—racism and white privilege are among the most pervasive, charged, and under-addressed difficult dialogues on campuses, in the country, and in the world.

Many of us who are white know that our group exercises unfair power and privilege over other groups. We read about it. We hear about it. In short, we know in theory that we are privileged. However, we don't bump up against the effects of white privilege as experienced by people of color, so the reality of discrimination is lacking; for us, it's largely an abstraction, an idea. We feel that our efforts to be fair, caring, just people make things a little better for those who are not privileged, but in fact, they do little to change their everyday experiences of institutionalized racism.

I wanted to at least make people aware of these unacknowledged privileges so that in the classroom we can make a more informed effort to ensure that we are not excluding or silencing others. I approached the topic and exercise with caution and care, deciding to place it smack in the middle of the intensive, when participants had already built some sense of safety and shared community with each other and after they'd had a chance to consider the rich tradition of Western approaches to controversy, including rhetoric and debate.

Background

It has been twenty years since Peggy McIntosh published her working paper called *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies*. This article, along with a shorter version called *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, introduced the concept of privilege into academic discussions of equity, discussions that had previously focused exclusively on the deficits experienced by marginalized groups. Nearly two decades later, these two pieces remain among the most easily accessible learning tools to help European Americans quickly begin to grasp the realities of institutional racism and white privilege and their own roles within those systems.

The paper contains a list of forty-six ways in which McIntosh, a white professor, benefits from unearned white privilege, enjoying daily, institutional advantages denied her colleagues of color. McIntosh draws parallels between her experience of white privilege and the ways her male colleagues benefit from institutional sexism, and discusses the ways in which white people are systematically trained to ignore the system of privilege from which they benefit. She writes:

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see the corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage...Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism does not affect them because they are not people of color: they do not see "whiteness" as racial identity...In my class and place, I did not recognize myself as a racist because I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Exercise

I used the McIntosh article as the basis for an exercise in our faculty intensive. I made a list of twenty-three of the privileges McIntosh could take for granted that her colleagues of color could not. Participants sat in a circle and took turns reading the statements aloud. After each statement was read, we paused to allow reflection by the group. The list was then passed to the next participant to read the next statement.

Examples include:

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can be reasonably sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- I did not have to educate our children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

I paired the list-reading exercise with an exercise called The Encircled Circle, adapted from Brookfield and Preskill. In the textbook exercise, a small circle of chairs faces inwards, surrounded by a larger circle of chairs. Volunteers fill the inner circle and begin their discussion with the question "What's at stake here?" The rest of the participants occupy the outer circle and serve as witnesses to the focused discussion of the inner circle. At the suggestion of one of our participants, however, we added an empty chair to serve as a revolving door to the inner circle; anyone who

wished could occupy it briefly, add a short comment, and return to the outer circle. This modification encouraged participation in the inner circle and created fluidity between the two groups.

The discussions were animated. Some people spoke openly of the pain of experiencing institutional and other forms of racism and of watching their children or loved ones suffer from its impacts. Others expressed surprise and dismay at the ways in which they had themselves colluded with racism without thinking about it. A white woman was horrified at the drain on energy, talent, health, and potential that results from racism. An Alaska Native professor observed that the list was missing the most significant challenge he experienced in dealing with racism on a daily basis: handling frequent physical threats and violence. He told stories of Alaska Natives on the receiving end of rough treatment by store security guards, random attacks by complete strangers, and name-calling (often being mistaken for individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, such as people of Arab or Asian descent).

This exercise allowed participants to reflect both emotionally and intellectually on the effects of white privilege and racism on our mutual lives and to begin to consider how such effects might also impact our teaching styles and our students. Stories such as these opened the eyes of others to realities of racism of which they were previously unaware.

There are painfully few opportunities in academia for faculty to wrestle with these critical issues on more than superficial or purely intellectual levels. However, in my experience, even a small bit of awareness on the part of majority professors about the kinds of pressures and systemic barriers facing many of their minority students can make them into far more trustworthy mentors and teachers, which translates into far greater academic, personal, and professional success for the students. Although it seemed to some participants that we were spending too much time on issues irrelevant to their disciplines, I am convinced it was time well spent. If we could change our practices enough so that students no longer experience us as reproducing, reinforcing, or representing an often oppressive society in the classroom, the effort would pay off hugely and in immeasurable ways. One of those ways would be fewer, but more productive, difficult dialogues.

The Encircled Circle

This technique can be used as a follow-up to discussions of culture, heritage, and diversity. It deliberately poses a vaguely worded question and allows observers in an outer circle to witness a focused discussion among volunteers in an inner circle.

Small groups. Have participants break into small groups of three or four and discuss the question “What is at stake?” Ask them to speak from personal experience and values.

Inner circle: Coming back together, invite one or two people from each group to form a small circle, with the remaining participants arrayed behind them. Each member of the inner circle is invited to sum up the issues and themes they discussed in their small group.

Everyone: Returning to the full circle configuration, everyone is invited to deal with the question “is there something more?”

This exercise was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, who adapted it from the Fetzer Institute.

CULTURE

Books of the Year

We chose culture and identity as inaugural themes for our Books of the Year program. After lengthy committee review and several heated discussions, we selected two books for 2006-07: Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* for the fall and T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* for the spring. Each details a certain kind of cultural collision, complete with misunderstandings and misperceptions that lead to tragedy.

Many of us found these books useful as springboards to discussion. We held faculty roundtables to share our ideas with each other. Some of us led open discussions in the bookstore, residence halls, and student lounges. Several classes held modified debates in which students argued for a position or issue from the perspective of one of the book's characters or groups. One class held a role-playing exercise in which students acted out the parts of the Lee family and their doctors, nurses, and social workers, trying to imagine an alternate and happier ending to that real-life tragedy.

We were hoping to create a kind of shared experience, linking faculty and students all across our universities in a communal culture, all engaged in dialogue about the same topics. With these first two books, we were off to a good start.

FALL SEMESTER

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down — Anne Fadiman

This powerful non-fiction book tells the story of Lia Lee, the infant daughter of Hmong immigrants, born with a severe seizure disorder known in the West as epilepsy and to Lia's parents as *gaug dab peg* ("the spirit catches you and you fall down"). From the moment Lia arrives in a California emergency room, cultural differences and linguistic miscommunication begin to drive a rift between her loving parents and well-intentioned doctors. The tragedy that unfolds opens the door to conversations about cultural difference, the modern immigrant experience, and the limits of Western medicine.

SPRING SEMESTER

The Tortilla Curtain — T.C. Boyle

When wealthy nature writer Delaney Mossbacher hits illegal immigrant Cándido Rincon with his car on a Los Angeles highway, the stage is set for a conflict between the rich and the poor who occupy the same California canyon but find themselves on opposite sides of the "tortilla curtain." The novel explores themes relating to immigration, discrimination, social responsibility, environmental degradation, poverty, materialism, and the darker side of the American Dream. Often compared to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Voltaire's *Candide*, it is a story with both humor and heartbreak that speaks volumes about the human condition.

I structured an entire English as a Second Language course around *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, approaching most of the class sessions as a book group. The students met first in small groups to respond to questions or discussion prompts, then came together in a circle to share the results.

At first, students were reluctant to speak in the big circle. Then, during our discussion of Chapter 1 (which deals extensively with childbirth), a male student complained, "This book is for girls, not men." The class laughed, and it relieved a lot of tension. I thanked him for presenting a controversial interpretation and assured him that later chapters would deal with more stereotypically "men stuff" like war.

I think several students were feeling frustrated with the book, but they didn't feel it was appropriate to criticize it, coming as they did from cultures in which it is not acceptable to contradict an instructor openly. Despite the indelicacy of his comment, I was grateful to this student for showing the others that here at least it was acceptable, even encouraged, to express their opinions.

Tara Smith
English as a Second Language

Using a Book to Explore Cultural Difference

Suggested techniques to help students consider issues represented in a book.

Modified debate

Have students pick a perspective from the book and debate a question from the point of view of that character or perspective.

Role Playing

Cast students as characters in the book and have them play out a key scenario. Repeat the scene, changing roles and practicing alternate endings.

Small Group Discussion

Introduce the concept of privilege. Break students into groups and ask them to identify instances of privilege depicted in the book. Reconvene the class and list the events on the board as they correspond to social locations of race, class, gender, and nationality.

Online Discussion Board

Post your own discussion questions or assign students to post them on different weeks. Require some kind of response.

The Tortilla Curtain tells parallel stories about illegal immigrants Cándido and América Rincón, who live on the bare edge of survival in a Southern California canyon, and the affluent Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher who live in a soon-to-be gated community at the top of the hill. The book opens with a collision that literally and figuratively sets the stage for injuries that will eventually nearly consume them all.

Using *The Tortilla Curtain* to Teach about Privilege

Dr. Nelta Edwards

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My brother was working as a maintenance supervisor for a low-income housing provider when he found a copy of *The Tortilla Curtain* in a garbage dumpster. Bryant is an avid reader, political activist, news junkie, and “salvage artist” (not to be confused with “dumpster diver”). He passed the book on to me, and I was so taken with it that I began assigning it in my upper-division sociology class on social stratification. Over the years, students have enjoyed the book and have been able to make links between the story and the class material. Until we adopted it as the Book of the Semester, however, I had never thought of using it to teach lower-division students.

I assigned *The Tortilla Curtain* to my Sociology 101 class as a supplement to chapters on social class and stratification, global stratification, and race and ethnicity. As students were reading the novel, they were also learning important sociological concepts such as social location, life chances, social mobility, stereotypes, salience principle, prejudice, discrimination, and racism. I also wanted to introduce the concept of privilege, and I used the book *Privilege, Power and Difference* by Allan G. Johnson as a resource.

For the first discussion period I asked students to get into small groups of two or three and talk about how the story begins, describing each of the main characters in terms of their social locations: that is, their race, class, gender, and nationality. When I brought the class back together, I asked a member from each group to describe a main character and then some minor characters. Students identified Delaney, Cándido, Kyra, and América as the main characters. They also identified the son Jordan, neighbors Jack and Jack Jr., the “bad” Mexican guy and his friend, and even the Mossbacher dogs as minor characters.

Using PowerPoint slides, I introduced the concept of privilege, which is defined as a benefit that members of some groups have that nongroup members do not have. Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups that they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do. As Peggy McIntosh put it in describing white privilege, it is like “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.”

I then listed some of the characteristics of privilege:

- It is hidden. Those who have it do not necessarily notice that they have it.
- It comes from societies and groups, rather than from individuals (although, of course, it shapes the personalities of individuals).
- It is the category that does not have to be explained: Gender—Race—Class—Sexuality—Ability.

Because I think that privilege is a difficult concept to grasp, I spent some time going over some examples, using Johnson as my source. As he points out, many aspects of privilege repeat from one category to another, although not all do.

White privilege (pages 25-27)

- Whites can choose whether to be conscious of their racial identity or to ignore it and regard themselves as simply human beings without a race.
- Whites can assume that when they go shopping, they'll be treated as serious customers, not as potential shoplifters or people without the money to make a purchase. When they want to cash a check or use a credit card, they can assume that they won't be hassled for additional identification and will be given the benefit of the doubt.
- White representation in government and the ruling circles of corporations, universities, and other organizations is disproportionately high.

Male privilege (pages 27-29)

- Men are more likely than women to control conversations and be allowed to get away with it and to have their ideas and contributions taken seriously, even those that were previously suggested by a woman and then dismissed or ignored.
- Men can usually assume that national heroes, success models, and other figures held up for general admiration will be men.
- In most professions and upper-level occupations, men are held to a lower standard than women. It is easier for a "good but not great" male lawyer to make partner than it is for a comparable woman.

Heterosexual privilege (pages 29-30)

- Heterosexuals are free to reveal and live their intimate relationships openly (referring to their partners by name, recounting experiences, going out in public together, displaying pictures on their desks at work) without being accused of "flaunting" their sexuality.
- Heterosexuals can move about in public without fear of being harassed or physically attacked because of their sexual orientation.
- Heterosexuals don't run the risk of being reduced to a single aspect of their lives, as if being heterosexual summed up the kind of person they are. Instead, they are viewed as complex human beings who happen to be heterosexual.

Disability status privilege (pages 30-32)

- Nondisabled people can assume that they will fit in at work and in other settings without having to worry about being evaluated and judged according to preconceived notions and stereotypes about people with disabilities.
- Nondisabled people can ask for help without having to worry that people will assume they need help with everything.
- Nondisabled people can succeed without people being surprised because of low expectations of their ability to contribute to society.

After the short lecture, I asked students to get back into their groups and come up with instances of privilege in the book. After about ten minutes I wrote "race," "class" "gender" and "nationality" on the board and asked the groups to report, listing the instances of privilege as the students reported them.

They noticed several instances of national and class privilege. The Mossbachers make sure their son has a nutritious breakfast; the Rincóns may not get anything to eat at all. When Delaney and Cándido collide in Chapter One, one worries about damages to his car, the other about damages to his body. Because Cándido is an undocumented Mexican, Delaney doesn't even take him to the hospital; he gives the battered man twenty dollars instead.

They also noticed the way privileges overlap and contradict each other. Because of her social class, Kyra is not as afraid of the bad Mexican and his friend as América is, and doesn't have to put up with the same kind of sexual harassment at her place of employment. Kyra's social class privilege trumps her gender disadvantage so much that it's hard to even imagine her putting up with the conditions of América's life.

Another day I devoted an entire class period to the showing of a documentary film called *Crossing Arizona* that looks at illegal immigration from several different local perspectives. On one side are farmers who depend on migrant labor, activists who oppose anti-immigration legislation, and humanitarians who provide water for immigrants crossing the desert. On the other side are the ranchers who mend fences and pick up garbage left by those passing through and a citizen militia who police the border with guns. Even though the economic and political realities have changed somewhat since the time in which *The Tortilla Curtain* is set, students were able to see on film real people like the fictional Cándido and América and witness the hardships they were willing to endure for the chance of a "better life."

The Tortilla Curtain was useful in teaching concepts that we, as a culture, prefer to ignore. We do not like to talk about social inequalities, particularly those based on race, gender, and class. We'd rather concentrate on all the ways in which hard work rewards people. This allows us to justify inequalities in society on the basis of merit (individual and group) instead of acknowledging the unearned privileges and disadvantages that accrue to individuals and groups based, usually, on the luck of birth.

Because college students are themselves likely to be from privileged groups in terms of their race and class, they may not always welcome analysis that points out the ways in which their privileges are unearned. Even students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to adhere to the notion that our society is based on merit. Applying the concept to characters in a novel, however, helped students learn about privilege without feeling personally threatened. They were able to engage in conversations about social inequality and justice—of utmost importance to the health of any democracy—with thoughtfulness and civility.

Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups that they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do.

Post script

I met T. C. Boyle when he came to Anchorage for a public reading in conjunction with our project. I told him the story about how I had become familiar with his book and asked him to sign a copy for my brother. He signed it "dumpster treasure." I thought, "Indeed."

In the fall, I gave students in my graduate-level Epidemiology of Aging course the option of choosing either their textbook or the Book of the Semester for their required online discussion board topics. Our students are primarily mid-career professionals, average age 35 years old, working full time, and often married with families to care for. They are busy professionals, and it is difficult to get them involved in any activity that is not course-related. Most of them chose their textbook.

I tried again the next semester with my Environmental and Occupational Health course. This time I created a separate discussion board page and posted primary threads myself. Again, participation was limited. Nevertheless, those who did participate enjoyed the opportunity to discuss difficult questions and generated some interesting discussion.

Betty Buchan
Public Health

SAMPLE ONLINE DISCUSSION

The Tortilla Curtain

Betty Buchan, Public Health

Prompt: a passage from the book:

“Cándido knew what those gates were for and who they were meant to keep out, but that didn’t bother him. He wasn’t resentful. He wasn’t envious. He didn’t need a million dollars—he wasn’t born for that, and if he was he would have won the lottery. No, all he needed was work, steady work, and this was a beginning. He mixed concrete, dug holes, hustled as best he could with the hollow metal posts and the plastic strips, all the while amazed at the houses that had sprouted up here, proud and substantial, big gringo houses, where before, there’d been nothing.”¹

Professor’s primary thread:

Cándido doesn’t seem to suffer from a sense of entitlement, but many Americans do. Are we so spoiled that we consider it beneath us to do manual labor? Americans hire illegal immigrants because they will do menial jobs for almost no pay. Who is at fault here: us, for keeping the minimum wage too low for many Americans to earn a decent living, or them, for being willing to do the work that we won’t (or can’t) do? During the Great

¹ Boyle, p.166-167.

Depression of the 1930s, weren't most Americans grateful to have any work at all? Do we need something like that to happen periodically in history to bring what we have back into perspective?

Response: Student 1

I thought Cándido's attitude toward work, difficult and dirty work, was admirable. He was willing to do any amount of manual labor to provide for his wife and get ahead. His wife, América, was also willing to work incredibly hard. There was one scene where a pregnant América is working with harsh chemicals with no protective gloves provided, and she gets chemical burns on her hands. A decent immigration policy might prevent many of the abuses suffered by immigrants.

I do think many Americans feel a sense of entitlement and are loath to perform the types of manual labor that many immigrants gratefully perform. This always makes me think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As people get their base needs met, they become less willing to do certain activities or jobs in order to meet their higher-level needs. If the economy were to drastically worsen, I think many Americans who were formerly unwilling to do manual labor would become less picky if they needed to do it to pay for food and shelter.

Response: Student 2

I agree that there is a trend of Americans not wanting to do hard jobs. I have a couple friends in the construction business who have had a hard time finding and keeping employees, even when they are willing to pay more than other companies.

I like your thoughts on Maslow's hierarchy, but I wonder if the American approach is really helping us gain self-actualization. It seems we have the food and shelter part down, but when it comes to love and belonging, I'm not sure we have accomplished this as a society. The divorce rate continues to climb, the pace of life is always quickening, and more and more articles and books on dealing with stress, depression, anger, road rage, etc. are appearing.

I am proposing that manual labor (especially when done for other motives than money) helps us to reach our higher needs. Working in a garden connects us with beauty, reduces stress, and can provide food for meals. Repairing our homes leads to a satisfaction of self reliance. Walking to work gives us a chance to unwind and have exercise.

Some of the most self-actualized people I know live in a cabin with no running water or electricity. They work hard to provide the basic needs of water, heat, and some food. They also are well educated. This is a deliberate choice they have made. Instead of both spouses working, they have shaved off their expenses so that only one works while the other teaches the kids school, takes them to the symphony, music lessons, and rock climbing school. The kids also spend a year abroad during high school. I really admire them for living so deliberately, and they are able to do so many more self-actualized activities than the average American! Most Americans really are still stuck on shelter and food with bigger and bigger houses and a growing obesity/diabetes epidemic. Perhaps Cándido was more self-actualized than Delaney in the sense that his biggest love was his wife.

CIRCLE OF OBJECTS

One way to invite cultural awareness into a room is to openly and respectfully acknowledge each other's heritage. The Circle of Objects technique does this and more. It also engages the emotions, invites expressive reflection, honors the whole learner, and provides a kinesthetic experience that many learners will appreciate. For these reasons and more we introduced it in our faculty intensives. Many of us tried it out in our classrooms as well.

The exercise works somewhat like a show-and-tell. People are asked to bring in an object that has meaning to them with respect to their culture, heritage, or ethnic or class background. Often they choose things that mattered to their ancestors, such as a grandfather's watch, a grandmother's soup bowl, a piece of jewelry, something that has been passed down in the family, or something that symbolizes ancestors they never met or traditions they may or may not continue to observe. One by one, people volunteer to speak, setting their object in front of them or on a table in the middle of the room, and speaking uninterruptedly for two or three minutes about the object and its significance to them.

This exercise gets very emotional for both students and faculty members, partly because it's so personal and partly because it's so rare. Our academic culture does not typically make space for personal or emotional sharing, and especially not for vulnerable sharing (sharing something about your background that you wouldn't put on your resumé). Nor does it make much space for honoring nondominant ethnicities or class backgrounds. Those of us in the majority may not realize the significance of this, because we are so used to the dominant culture and its values. But others of us are painfully aware of it, every moment of the day.



Circle of Objects

An exercise that respectfully acknowledges the varieties of cultural heritage and introduces visual and kinesthetic elements into a discussion.

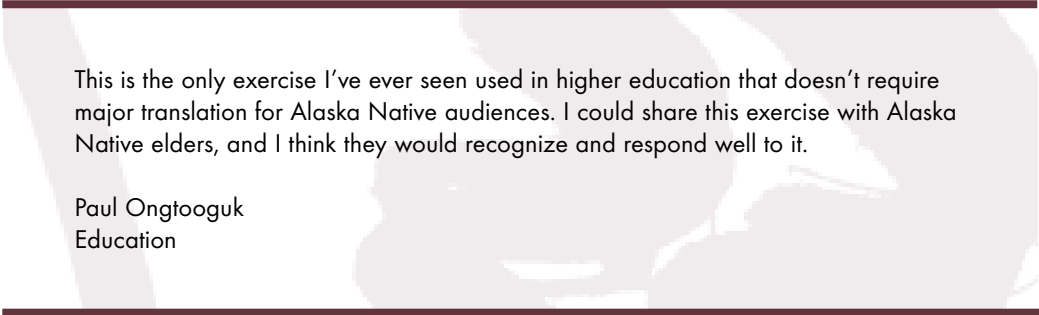
Preparation: Ask each person to bring in an object that reflects something about their ancestry, cultural heritage, class background, or other feature you wish to illuminate. Explain the purpose of the exercise and how it will work. Give them several days to choose their object and consider their response.

Sharing: Arrange the chairs in a circle, with a low table in the center. Invite each person, one at a time, to place their object on the table and to talk about its links to their culture, family history, class background, or other topic under discussion. After everyone has spoken, invite the group to share further comments or questions with each other.

Tips: Consider speaking first yourself, to model the act of self-disclosure and a time guideline of two or three minutes. After that, let the students rise and speak in whatever order they wish. Honor the silence between speakers.

This exercise was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, who themselves adapted it from the Fetzer Institute in San Francisco.

In this exchange, it almost always happens that there will be people from the dominant ethnicity who suddenly realize they don't have much connection at all to their ancestors or their heritage. This lack of connection seems normal to them, but it's not at all normal to many who come to higher education from other regions, countries, or cultures. They do have a connection, and it's often very deep and sometimes very much in conflict with the dominant culture. You can start to see around the room how many different viewpoints the dominant culture misses by taking itself for granted.



This is the only exercise I've ever seen used in higher education that doesn't require major translation for Alaska Native audiences. I could share this exercise with Alaska Native elders, and I think they would recognize and respond well to it.

Paul Ongtooguk
Education

College can be a natural context for exploring one's identity; students often find themselves in a new setting, surrounded by new people and ideas. This essay describes how one of our colleagues used *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* in her freshman seminar course as a springboard to discussions of culture and conflicting world views. She followed those conversations with a unit on cultural and socioeconomic sensitivity that featured the Circle of Objects technique.

Encouraging Cultural and Socioeconomic Sensitivity

Dr. Maureen E. Austin

*Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Outdoor Studies
Alaska Pacific University*

At the beginning of their freshmen year, first-year students at Alaska Pacific University (APU) take a seminar course called Introduction to Active Learning. Here they are introduced to the basic framework of our undergraduate degree program, our portfolio process of guiding and documenting one's learning, and the active learning mission of the university. We teach this course during the Fall Block: a four-week intensive format at the start of the semester. The students take only one course during the block, meeting daily for several hours. The classes are usually small, with a dozen or perhaps fifteen students at a time.

I enjoy teaching the freshman seminar. I get to focus on a single class, and the students get to build a cohort, learn about the university, and work together on a shared project. Our first-year students are often new to either Anchorage or Alaska, and they are wide-eyed in their enthusiasm and open to learning about this university and state. At the same time, they can be a challenge. University life is all new to them. They're in a learning environment that doesn't force them to attend class, and they struggle to balance their new type of independence with the consequences of acting upon that freedom. Many are far from home for the first time, and while some feel invigorated by the experience, others feel isolated. Still in their teen years, many struggle with issues of identity and self-expression.

APU's emphasis on teaching and active learning encourages our faculty to try new ideas and test innovative approaches in the classroom. As a *Difficult Dialogues* participant, I was also eager to try some of the techniques I had learned in the faculty intensive. Anticipating that the majority of my first-year students would be environmental science majors, I decided to use our Book of the Semester, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, to engage them in a conversation about world views and the conflicts among them. The book is a vivid portrayal of a Hmong family and the California medical professionals who try to heal their very sick daughter. The Hmong approach life from an Eastern and mystical philosophy; the California doctors and social workers from a rational and very Western view of the world. I felt that conversations about this book would translate into

Many first-year students are far from home for the first time, and, while some feel invigorated by the experience, others feel isolated. Still in their teen years, many struggle with issues of identity and self-expression.

consideration of their own choice to become environmental scientists and to therefore follow a rational, scientific approach to the world. I wasn't expecting really deep discourse here; rather, I hoped to gently challenge their worldviews, encourage them to think about the scientific paradigm they would be learning, and notice how radically different it is from other cultural perspectives and indigenous worldviews.

I followed our book discussions with a unit of activities to encourage cultural and socioeconomic sensitivity. The unit included a class Code of Conduct, several journaling/writing exercises, and a Circle of Objects. In announcing the latter exercise, I instructed students to bring to class an

object that, to them, represented something about their background, cultural heritage, or socioeconomic position.

Almost immediately, I sensed a heightened engagement from the class. Some students had questions, stopping me after class to ask me more about the assignment and what an "appropriate" object might be. I told them it could be anything, as long as they felt it represented something about their cultural heritage or socioeconomic background. Other students seemed to know right away what they would bring to class.

I allowed approximately one week for students to prepare for this activity, giving them time to reflect before choosing an object. Although it was apparent on the day of sharing that a few had just

grabbed something at the last minute, most of them put quite a bit of thought into what their object would be and what it represented. Some wrote or called home and asked for objects to be mailed; others called family members and asked for ideas. For these students, the assignment went beyond their individual selves and out into their families as well.

On the day the students shared their objects with one another, the overall tone was one of respect. We moved tables and chairs out of the way and sat on the floor, forming a large circle. Every student took a turn sharing his or her object.

Each spoke eloquently about the object and what it represented, then placed the object in the center of the circle. After all students had a chance to present and display their objects, I asked them to write in their journals, using the following prompts:

- What did you learn about yourself from this activity?
- What did you learn about your classmates from this activity?
- Did this activity help you increase your cultural awareness and sensitivity?

I gained a tremendous amount of respect for the students as a result of this exercise. I have to assume that it was more difficult for some than for others, but they all participated, taking time to explain why they had selected the object and what it represented. Some talked about grandparents and their heritage. Others talked about special family members who meant a lot to them. A few brought in objects that represented their socioeconomic class, a class they considered to be low income. The courage with which they shared their experiences and the passion with which they spoke about being the first in their family to attend college was received with a mixture of respect and admiration. APU is a private, liberal arts university, and while many of our students receive some type of financial aid, I think most believe their classmates are from families that are fairly well-off financially.

Another outcome of this exercise was the level of respect and inspiration that students gained from each other. After it was over, we shared a few last thoughts. Several students voiced their appreciation for classmates who had spoken about growing up poor. They seemed to feel a real empathy for how that made their classmates feel and a real respect for how that background could be a source of both pride and strength. Several students commented that they had thought about sharing an object in this way, but decided against it because they were afraid others would make fun of them for being poor. It was particularly powerful to see the inspiration that these students derived from their classmates who were proud of their backgrounds.

I will use the Circle of Objects technique again, but sparingly and with an increased sense of respect. I learned how much effort it takes to facilitate the exercise, waiting through silences for students to volunteer to speak, and responding to their personal stories instead of the more usual assigned readings. The experience was powerful, but also tiring. It is not something to engage in lightly.

The courage with which they shared their experiences and the passion with which they spoke about being the first in their family to attend college was received by the class with a mixture of respect and admiration.

The Circle of Objects technique can be adapted to support a variety of course goals. This essayist uses it to personalize an important period of Alaska history and to help students connect their own sense of place with concepts of land and place that are central to Alaska Native cultures. The author suggests additional adaptations for archaeology, anthropology, sociology, economics, and other subject areas as well.

Using the Circle of Objects To Teach About Place

Paul Ongtooguk

*Assistant Professor of Secondary Education
University of Alaska Anchorage*

I was intrigued by the Circle of Objects technique and decided to try it out in my upper-division Issues in Alaska Native Education course. This course introduces future teachers to certain aspects of Alaska history that are relevant to how educators understand Alaska Native societies today. No one can really understand the contemporary life of Alaska's Native communities without some understanding of the cultural history as well.

One of the challenges in helping university students understand Alaska Native societies is to make the issues real. Students' preconceptions are often limited to historical and museum snapshots; the result is that Alaska Native people are viewed as two-dimensional social anomalies. Students

We discussed what we might mean by sense of place: it could be a ground for personal development and image, a foundation from which sprang family roots and values, or a platform to which a person could return and understand and be understood.

most often assume that assimilation into white society is desirable and that successful Alaska Natives want to and have been assimilated. It is important that they learn to challenge these assumptions, however. In many of the Native communities and neighborhoods where they will be working, a cultural revival is occurring. Assimilation is being rejected or accepted only on Native terms.

The Circle of Objects exercise seemed like a good way to help students relate to certain land issues that have been, and continue to be, central to Alaska Native cultures. I asked students to bring in an object (or a representation of an object) that was important to their sense of place. We discussed what we might mean by sense of place: it could be a ground for personal

development and image, a foundation from which sprang family roots and values, or a platform to which a person could return and understand and be understood. The object had to have value to the student, and it had to be something that they could share and discuss.

In general, the exercise went very well. The variety of objects was interesting and included a hunting knife that had been used on the family land; a jar of sand from a beach property; pieces of driftwood; dried flowers; a hand-knitted object. The students assumed this was a community-building activity, and they were attentive to each other and engaged. They seemed to appreciate the opportunity to get to know each other in something other than the standard “Where are you from and how long have you been in Alaska?” format.

I was surprised, however, by the amount of time it took. Students truly wanted to share the stories behind the objects, and since the sharing was so personal it was difficult to interrupt. Next time I might use an hourglass to focus students on the length of their presentations.

Connecting Politics and History to a Sense of Place

The most important piece of land use legislation in Alaska’s recent history is the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), passed in 1971 to resolve Alaska Native rights to lands based on traditional use. In other states, treaty settlements created reservations and transferred Native lands to tribal governments. In Alaska, Congress went in a different direction and actually revoked several reservations before creating a special class of state-chartered Native regional and village corporations to hold the forty-plus million acres of lands kept by Alaska Native peoples. In payment for taking the rest of Alaska, \$962.5 million also went to the new Native corporations.

This departure from the treaty/tribal government model is an ongoing social experiment involving the lives and futures of the Alaska Native peoples. Native corporations are now some of the largest corporations in the state. Alaska Natives who were alive at the time of the legislation are original shareholders; shares may not be sold without a special vote of the shareholders. With Native corporations controlling the largest private lands in Alaska, ANCSA is important to all Alaskans and, indeed, all Americans as well. At the end of it all, though, for most Alaska Natives, ANCSA was about trying to protect and pass on some of our lands for future generations.

ANCSA is easily understood as a piece of legislation with specific terms, but less easily understood for the role it plays in shaping contemporary Alaska Native cultures and the lives of real people. For that, students need an understanding of the importance of land to Native life and culture.

Hence, prior to the discussion of ANCSA, I returned to the Circle of Objects exercise and asked the students to think about some questions with their own place in mind: How would you feel if someone took the land that your place was on? How would you feel if you were denied access to your place? How would you feel if someone were going to destroy your place and build a parking garage?

It became clear that the work undertaken was years in the making. It also became clear that it could only have been accomplished by a people who valued their land and who were willing to fight for it through a court system that did not understand or value their history and culture. The students were resoundingly impressed.

Students discussed these questions and the alienation, resentment, and feelings of helplessness that would result if these places, so central to their sense of self, were lost.

One of the underappreciated aspects of ANCSA is the fact that Alaska Native people successfully engaged in a mammoth effort to prove their land claims. Since Alaska Natives had no system of written property titles and deeds, they had to be methodical and assiduous in collecting documentation that would be understood and validated in a system of Western government. I asked the students an additional question: If you lacked a system of property deeds and titles, how would you prove that the place belonged to you? Students brainstormed ideas that would demonstrate ownership and how records might be accumulated that would be accepted by the court system. The problems of accumulating such records became apparent very quickly.

I then showed them some of the books that Alaska Natives compiled in response to the need to show “traditional use and occupancy.” One such example is *Haa Aaani Our Land: Tlingit and Haida Land Rights and Use* by Walter R. Goldschmidt and Theodore H. Haas, which contains personal

The power of this technique seems to lie in the manner in which students are drawn into a consideration of concepts from their own unique vantage points. The objects are tangible and their value and importance to the person is articulated and public.

accounts, oral histories, detailed maps, and records of anthropological evidence. We examined this book in some detail, and students were very impressed with the quantity of records and stories. We examined the records to see if questions critical to the court had been demonstrated: where, when and how the land was used. I also stressed the fact that this had been done without the benefit of modern technology and without the level of resources and support that are used to generate most government reports today. It became clear to the students that the work undertaken was years in the making. It also became clear that it could only have been accomplished by a people who valued their land and who were willing to fight for it through a court system that did not understand or value their history and culture. The students were resoundingly impressed.

Again, it took a considerable amount of

time for students to make these connections. The first time I tried this technique I did not allow enough opportunity for discussion, and only one student really made the connections for which I had hoped. I had assumed that the Circle of Objects activity would provide the framework for understanding ANCSA without additional time and discussion, but that assumption was wrong. I had to generate those additional questions to explicitly help students transfer their experience with place to the Alaska Native experience with place. Covering essential content is always an issue in university classes, but since the concept of land and place is so fundamental to understanding Alaska Native cultures today, I will continue to support the Circle of Objects activity as a way of facilitating this understanding.

How other disciplines might use the technique

A Circle of Objects exercise focused on land and a sense of place has relevance to teaching history across the world. Issues of land ownership have generated countless wars, created and destroyed multiple empires, and led to the displacement of millions, if not billions, of people. American and Canadian history cannot be understood without considering the displacement of American Indian, Alaska Native, and First Nations peoples. Likewise, current events in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, are grounded in issues of land ownership, displacement of peoples, and conveyance of property. The exercise can help university students consider how people, including themselves, value the land from which they came and in which they have their roots. When the concept is personalized for them in this way, they can better understand why land rights have been, and will continue to be, such contentious issues both locally and globally.

The technique lends itself to other applications as well. Focused on the family, it could be valuable in anthropology and archaeology classes, where objects can otherwise seem isolated and disconnected from families, communities, and cycles of use. Too often, students view the debris but don't make the connections to the lives of real people. Likewise, sociology classes might use it as an entrée into more theoretical discussions and models of the family and extended family. Economists might expand their students' concept of the value of goods and services by having students share and discuss things that are of great value to them. American government might become more relevant to some students if the personal property laws and protections were related to their own lives through the Circle of Objects.

The power of this technique seems to lie in the manner in which students are drawn into a consideration of concepts from their own unique vantage points. The objects are tangible, and their value and importance to the person is articulated and public. Once this background knowledge has been stimulated, the creative instructor can help the students jump across cultures and time and invigorate theoretical and abstract concepts with personal connections that vastly increase understanding.

Not everyone was completely enamored with the Circle of Objects. In addition to a general reluctance to spend too much time off topic, there were objections based on theoretical and political grounds. This essay discusses the politics of self-disclosure and describes a creative way one of our colleagues resolved her objections by using the exercise to help students see and articulate the links between personal experience and professional decision-making.

Coming to Terms with the Circle of Objects: Resistance and Transformation

Dr. Tracey Kathleen Burke

*Assistant Professor of Social Work
University of Alaska Anchorage*

As I understand it, the point of the Circle of Objects exercise is to come to an appreciation of how much our various individualities are shaped by social position and family. As a community-building exercise, it is fine, even powerful. However, because we engaged in it on the day of our faculty intensive that focused on race, class, ethnicity, and culture, I presume the larger point our program

organizers intended was to help us help our students transcend stereotypes. I have serious reservations about the Circle of Objects toward this end.

When the Circle was described to us and we were instructed to bring our objects, I sighed internally. This was going to be like most diversity classes and workshops I have attended, relying heavily on self-disclosure among classmates. It was going to consist of exactly what I intentionally do not do in my own undergraduate diversity class.

When the Circle was described to us and we were instructed to bring our objects, I sighed internally. This was going to be like most diversity classes and workshops I have attended, relying heavily on self-disclosure among classmates. It was going to consist of exactly what I intentionally do not do in my own undergraduate diversity class. I find the logic of self-disclosure to be antithetical both to combating stereotypes and to promoting ideals of diversity.

As near as I can tell, the logic of self-disclosure activities in this context is this: oppression is basically an individual or relationship-specific phenomenon. Students (and faculty and others) fear/hate/dismiss a group because the group is an abstraction

rather than real people; therefore, knowing a member of the group will make the group as a whole more benign, and students will then feel more positively toward all members. For example, getting to know an African American student as “Mike” rather than “the black guy” will make him more human; therefore, all black men become more human. Learning about hardships he has faced (and

by virtue of his being in the classroom has presumably overcome) makes Mike seem stronger/more disciplined/more responsible than the stereotypical black man; therefore, the stereotype must be wrong.

The problem here is twofold. First, the logic relies on the kind of generalization from case study to population that researchers go to great pains to avoid, for very good reason. And second, the power of institutional and discursive forces in oppression is wholly ignored and therefore uncontested.

To illustrate. Let's say our hypothetical student Mike is indeed a wonderful person. For the classmate who has not personally known any black men but who has the media-driven impression that they are all scary drug dealers, knowing that Mike is not a scary drug dealer is important. But Mike is no more representative of the group "black men" than an imagined—or real—drug dealer. For some classmates, Mike ends up in the untenable position of having to be more than himself; he becomes the new black man. For other classmates, Mike is recognized as a good guy, but there is in fact no generalization, and the scary drug dealer remains the prototypical black man.

While Mike as case study might open doors to a deeper discussion of the larger societal forces that contribute to his experience, with

Mike as our classmate we are not likely to go there. Said differently, person-based discussions tend to be weighted toward the personal rather than the political. A discussion about racism and white privilege is quite likely to be personal to Mike already, but it should also be personal to his classmates of all backgrounds. Focusing on Mike at the outset makes it seem like it's Mike's problem alone.

There are many good questions we might raise here. What circumstances surround instances of racism and white privilege? What assumptions undergird differential treatment? When do the rest of us replicate those circumstances and act as if we believe those assumptions even if we do not? What can we do to change the circumstances, however blatantly or subtly, to reduce the odds of the differential treatment being repeated?

I would argue that exploring these larger questions is more important than looking at individual instances of differential treatment. Few people would actually argue that members of racial minorities, cultural minorities, and other historically oppressed groups are intrinsically "bad" or "less than" simply as a function of that group membership. Mike's classmates would not claim that all black men are scary drug dealers. However, if that is their image of the black man, Mike alone will be hard-pressed to challenge it, and if the image remains intact, very little else in their thinking or behavior will change either. Likewise, people who do not believe gays and lesbians are less-than and who support full civil rights for sexual minorities can still be surprised if children play house with two mommies; their world is still constructed as heterosexual such that an unspoken rule/expectation for the game "playing house" is that there should be a mommy and a daddy. These expectations are much more insidious than outright negative characterizations, and these are what I hope my students learn to examine.

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If we want to raise awareness—and change behaviors—regarding discrimination and oppression, we need to directly confront the assumptions, circumstances, and histories that contribute to them. This is no easy matter, especially when multiple forms of difference collide. In my field (social work), we confront this most often around socially conservative religious beliefs and sexual minorities. How does one honor both groups: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, etc., and people who genuinely believe them to be doing wrong, perhaps at risk of damnation? I have not found easy solutions or reliable ways to handle this in class, but I do find it wholly distracting to use self-disclosure as an entry point for thinking about it.

Adaptation

Because of all this, I was very skeptical, that day at the intensive, that the Circle of Objects exercise would yield any new insights. I chose my object with resignation and expected to mentally drift off. To my surprise, however, I remained engaged throughout the exercise, listening to my colleagues. We got to know each other better that morning, and I think our level of group cohesiveness increased. I did not leave the activity having learned much about historically oppressed groups, nor do I believe that what Alaska Native faculty members shared changed my thinking about Natives in general. But I came to appreciate the Circle of Objects as a mechanism for community-building, where the focus is in fact personal relationships but not broader political phenomena.

I was still not about to adopt the exercise for my diversity class, but after this experience I was no longer opposed to using it at all. A conversation with my colleague Tracy Stewart gave me an idea that I thought might work in my practice methods courses. Last spring, I experimented, trying it out in two sections of a graduate class.

I came to appreciate the Circle of Objects as a mechanism for community-building, where the focus is in fact personal relationships but not broader political phenomena.

I used the exercise to help students think about the ways that personal experience and self-knowledge inform professional social work practice decisions. This was part of a unit on the sources and legitimacy of professional knowledge that included discussions of evidence-based practice (empirically validated interventions), professional practice wisdom (insights gained through clinical experience), and whether and how to include client knowledges in decision-making. Including personal experience in this mix of knowledges is perilous because it's so very prone to bias; but since it

happens, I choose to address it straight on and promote mindfulness and care.

I had the students bring in two objects: one that represented them personally, as in the original Circle, and one that represented them professionally. I spoke first, modeling the kind of commentary I hoped they'd provide. We went around the circle once talking about the meanings or histories of the personal objects. Then we came around a second time, backwards so the last person started, explaining the professional objects. Finally, we commented on the connections, on how the self-knowledge or experience or learning described in relation to the first object shapes us as professionals and informs our work.

The discussion dynamics were different in each of the two sections, related to the very different quality of pre-existing relationships among the students (in other words, related to the level of community in the classroom). In the small class, consisting of part-time students who had been together as a cohort for some years, there was virtually no risk involved in sharing personal information, which they all acknowledged. Indeed, because of their history together, the lesbian student was able to point out in a way that raised no tensions that it was a function of heterosexual privilege that two people could use pictures of their families as their personal objects. There was also some discussion of whether the label “gay” as a derogatory term used by pre-teens was really homophobic or just(?) about identity issues. The group did not reach a consensus, but people agreed the conversation was valuable, and I do not think anyone was shut down.

The level of intimacy was less in the second section, which was larger and in which the students were much newer to each other. A few participated in an off-the-cuff fashion; most, however, took the activity very seriously. There were some creative objects and heartfelt explanations. One woman choked up when it was her turn to draw connections. Perhaps the most humorous moment was the transition between two women sitting beside each other, one of whom used her wedding ring as her personal object, the other of whom used her divorce papers. At a smooth moment when I judged the woman would not feel personally attacked, I pointed out how a wedding ring might seem like a token of heterosexual privilege, even though same-sex couples also use rings to signify commitment.

I was very impressed with the students and the modified exercise, both times. However, the second object is crucial. Had we stopped after discussing the personal objects, people would have had a bit more information about each other, but it would have been hanging out there, unconnected to the class itself. The second objects and the discussion of connections did segue fruitfully back to the course material; it gave the self-disclosure a context and purpose.

Students’ reactions support mine. Several said they found the activity useful despite initial skepticism. “I didn’t really get the point until we had to talk about the linkages,” one woman said. Others nodded their agreement.

I used the exercise to help students think about the ways that personal experience and self-knowledge inform professional social work practice decisions.

VOICING MINORITY VIEWS

We tried out Brookfield and Preskill's Hatful of Quotes technique in our faculty intensive and found it to be successful at allowing participants (particularly those of color) to express concerns about our own interactions—concerns they might not have voiced without the safety of the structured exercise.

Libby pulled a selection of quotes from the text that critiqued the whole idea of what we were attempting to do by engaging in difficult dialogues. The quotations were controversial statements in their own right, voicing minority points of view from an academic source outside of our group. They introduced concepts such as repressive tolerance (practices that give the illusion of honoring diversity while actually supporting the status quo) and pointed out the “implicit legitimacy of the center.” One of them critiqued the entire educational enterprise as “an ideological state apparatus...that works to ensure the perpetuation of dominant ideology.” See page 106 for a sample.

She placed multiple copies of each quote in a basket, circulated the basket among participants, and asked them each to draw out a quote. She then invited people to comment on the statement they had selected, in no particular order. Others with the same quotation sometimes chimed in immediately and sometimes waited until a later point in the discussion to respond.

During the discussion, many majority participants reflected on ways in which their role as authority in the classroom might unintentionally reinforce status quo values. Several minority participants told stories from their own personal or professional lives in which they had directly witnessed or experienced marginalizing dynamics similar to those in the quotations; they indicated that they felt more free to speak because of the academic credibility of the theories articulated in the text.



Hatful of Quotes

A technique for introducing provocative ideas from an outside source.

Before class:

- Select five or six passages from a text.
- Transfer them to small slips of paper, with each quote appearing on at least two slips of paper.

In class:

- Put the quotes in a hat (or other suitable container).
- Ask students to draw a slip from the hat.
- Give them several minutes to think about the quote they drew.
- Then ask everyone to read his or her quote aloud and comment on it to the group.

Adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, Discussion as a Way of Teaching

One of the primary intents of this exercise, when used in a classroom setting, is to encourage all students to voice an opinion of some kind, while avoiding putting any of them on the spot. Those who are least confident can wait until they have heard several other students express their thoughts on a particular quote and then simply agree or disagree with previous speakers when their turn comes. This allows teachers to balance the competing concerns of wanting to develop confidence in all of their students about speaking their minds while not forcing any student to speak in a way which may be experienced as intimidating or oppressive. This was a minor concern, however, within an all-faculty group.

The exercise gave us a place to start having a respectful difficult dialogue of our own. Afterwards, participants were able to reference the critiques from this exercise and say to their colleagues, “Remember that quote about how sometimes it might look like we’re teaching something by entertaining another point of view, but in fact we’re just reinforcing our own? Could that be what’s happening right here, right now?” The earlier discussion, and the quotes, gave minority speakers both the language and the legitimacy to surface and challenge problematic dynamics in the room and a basis for conducting (or averting the need for) difficult dialogues within our own learning community.



Strategies like this one went a long way toward creating an inclusive atmosphere in our third intensive, paving the way for the group to take on a difficult dialogue of their own choosing. See page 242.

Quotes From Our Hat

Consider, as we did in our faculty intensives, the following quotations from Brookfield and Preskill's *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*.

"Marcuse (1965) argues that an emphasis on including a diversity of views and intellectual or racial traditions in discussion is often repressive, not liberating. When they experience repressive tolerance (which is the term Marcuse uses to describe this situation) people mistakenly believe they are participating in discussions characterized by freedom of speech and an inclusive emphasis on diverse ideas, when in fact those same discussions actually reinforce dominant ideology. Repressive tolerance is a tolerance for just enough challenge to an unjust system to convince people that they live in a truly open society in which dissenting voices are expressed and heard. As long as people believe this, they will lose the energy to try to change the system, even though in reality nothing has altered." (p.255)

"...when an alternative idea is included alongside a mainstream one, people's prior familiarity with the mainstream ensures that the alternative, oppositional perspective is inevitably seen as an exotic option rather than a plausible viewpoint around which a new worldview can be constructed...Certain centrist ideas are always given greater credence. They are subtly favored, presented by both participants and leaders as more 'reasonable' or 'balanced.' So while alternative interpretations and opinions are pursued, the fact that they are framed as alternatives only serves to support the implicit legitimacy of the center." (p.255-6)

"Structural analysis views education as an ideological state apparatus...that works to ensure the perpetuation of dominant ideology. It does this partly by teaching values that support that ideology, and partly by immersing students in practices that are ideologically determined. Prime among such practices is the conduct of discussion...In the ways they respond to different comments, teachers ensure that certain perspectives are marginalized and discredited while others are portrayed as 'common sense,' the clear choice of those with intelligence and discernment...To help us understand how this happens, the concept of cultural capital proposed by the French thinker, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), is useful. Cultural capital refers to the style and patterns of speaking, dress and posture, the command of language, and the knowledge of cultural matters that one brings to an educational situation. Differences in the amount of cultural capital people possess explain why students from middle- and upper-class homes consistently do better in school than working class students." (p.249)

There are many ways to use quotations to stimulate classroom discussion. Brookfield and Preskill describe several, and many of us have adapted techniques we discovered from other sources or made up on our own. This essay describes an exercise in which the instructor used quotes by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to affirm or challenge key statements from the civil rights movement and to help her students connect more personally with civil rights issues.

Using Quotes to Affirm and Challenge: Effective Teaching Strategy and Discussion Builder

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A slightly modified version of a technique involving quotations worked well in my classroom, both as a means of provoking discussion and as a means of reinforcing substantive course content. I got the idea from Brookfield and Preskill's discussion-starter advice: Use Quotes to Affirm or Challenge.

Method

In honor of Alaska Civil Rights Day (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day), the university encouraged faculty to address in their classes some aspect of civil rights. Because the civil rights movement is part of my substantive course content, I was able to devote approximately an hour and 15 minutes of class time to this activity. The activity also required approximately two hours of preparation prior to class.

Using the course text and various web sites, I created and printed a list of 23 quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. I cut these apart into individual slips, each with a single quotation. I asked students to divide themselves into groups of three or four, and passed out two different quotes at random to each group. I then asked the groups to discuss the quotes among themselves and decide whether to affirm or challenge them in light of current social and political conditions. I told them that if they could not reach an agreement, students could speak individually rather than as a group.

I gave them about fifteen minutes to review their quotes and discuss their positions. Then I asked each group to choose a spokesperson, and we went around the class with each spokesperson reading the quote and explaining the group's position. Students from the class at large then responded to the quote and to the group's position.

Assessment

I was surprised at the high level of engagement, in part because Alaska Civil Rights Day coincided with the beginning of our spring semester, and I held the exercise on the first day of class. Therefore, students were unfamiliar with me and with each other. I did precede this exercise with one in building a course Code of Conduct, which I think was important in breaking the ice for this new group. I also think allowing students to choose their own group was helpful. Presumably, most of them had selected a familiar face with whom to sit when they walked in, so that most of the students knew at least one of their small-group members.

There was no resistance to the desk shuffling and group formation process, and no resistance to my distributing quotes at random. The students remained on task for most of the allotted small-group time, and approached the exercise seriously. I detected no flippancy in their responses and received no challenges to the value of the exercise. This was a culturally diverse group, and students appeared to be sensitive to that in phrasing their comments. As far as I could tell from circling the room and listening in, all of the students expressed themselves during the small-group discussion. Many of the small groups adopted the technique of going around the group in order to hear each student's position.

Students also responded positively to the whole-group discussion. They appeared to be genuinely interested in hearing the quotes other groups had addressed and willing to discuss the decisions to challenge or affirm. I did not observe any student who appeared to be completely disengaged from the exercise, and I estimate that more than half of the 36 students present spoke out spontaneously at least once during the large group discussion.

In addition to generating highly successful dialogue, this exercise had a positive effect on student engagement with civil rights issues throughout the semester.

In addition to generating highly successful dialogue, this exercise had a positive effect on student engagement with civil rights issues throughout the semester. When these issues arose, students invariably seemed to perk up, expressing spontaneous comments and questions. Their understanding of the text and lecture material was particularly sophisticated in this area. I think this may have been, in part, because they

focused intently on the problem and articulated their own feelings at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, through their careful consideration of Dr. King's own words, standing alone as individual statements, I believe the students related to the tragedies and the challenges of the civil rights movement on a very personal level. There can be no better path to understanding.

I found the Hatful of Quotes technique to be effective with a group of educators in a professional development course last summer. I clipped out pieces of paper with individual quotes borrowed from a required reading on leadership, then folded the papers and tossed them in a hat. I had more quotes than there were people in the group. The first thing I noticed was how eager participants were to select a quote, with some choosing more than one. After taking a few minutes for quiet reflection, I invited people to share their quote and their own views on it. The class participants who did not often initiate discussion did so more frequently with this exercise, and all participants shared their views freely, which led to a dynamic, stimulating discussion. As a cross-cultural educator, I plan to use this technique again to create more democratic, equitable, and inclusive group discussions.

Alice Hisamoto
Education

THE FIVE MINUTE RULE

To a large extent, we focused on Alaska Native cultures as our entry point to questions of race, ethnicity, and culture. It was an obvious choice, due both to geography and to the ongoing efforts at both universities to recruit, retain, and graduate more Alaska Native students. In addition, Alaska Native issues seem largely invisible within the curriculum and the academy at large. There is a pervasive, often unconscious stereotype that classifies indigenous cultures as exotic historical or anthropological case studies rather than contemporary and equally valid ways of living and knowing the world. Few non-Natives are aware of the ongoing effects of colonialism on our Native students and citizens or the critical insights on global issues that indigenous cultures have to share.

A pivotal moment in each of the faculty intensives came from Phyllis Fast's application of the Five Minute Rule. The technique offers a simple way of taking an invisible or marginalized perspective and entertaining it respectfully for a short period of time. The only people who get to speak are those who can say something positive about it. The idea is that those who find it dangerous to entertain an idea that is against their value or belief system may find it safer in this context. After all, it's only five minutes, and you don't have to speak. When the five minutes are over, everyone can return to his or her own personal perspectives and carry on, perhaps changed, perhaps not.

The perspective Phyllis presented was that of Ernie Norton, an Inupiat from northwestern Alaska. All his academic life, from elementary school through his anthropology baccalaureate, Ernie's science teachers have expected him to learn and adopt the Western (Linnean) system of plant and animal classification based on species, genus, family, phyla, and order. But the Western system doesn't make sense to Ernie; it violates what he knows to be true from his own experience.

Phyllis based her presentation on a 1995 paper by Norton and UAA anthropology Professor

The Five Minute Rule

A way of taking an invisible or marginalized perspective and entertaining it respectfully for a short period of time.

Rule

Anyone who feels that a particular point of view is not being taken seriously has a right to point this out and call for this exercise to be used.

Discussion

The group then agrees to take five minutes to consider the merits of this perspective, refrain from criticizing it, and make every effort to believe it. Only those who can speak in support of it are allowed to speak, using the questions below as prompts. All critics must remain silent.

Questions and prompts

- What's interesting or helpful about this view?
- What are some intriguing features that others might not have noticed?
- What would be different if you believed this view, if you accepted it as true?
- In what sense and under what conditions might this idea be true?

This technique was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, who based it on Peter Elbow's "the believing game."

Kerry Feldman called “Nijsaq and napaaqtuq: Issues in Inupiaq Eskimo life-form classification and ethno-science.” The taxonomy this paper articulates differs markedly from the Western version; it is based on function as well as morphology and acknowledges a human relationship to the animals and their role within the greater Inupiaq society. Phyllis explained the Inupiaq perspective briefly and then, applying the Five Minute Rule, asked her colleagues to consider how the world would look different if this was “how things are.”

It has been a powerful exercise for our groups. The effort of trying to think like an Inupiat, even for just five minutes, has challenged several participants to their very epistemological foundations. Others realized that they’d never seriously entertained the perspective of many people in their state, including some of their students. A few began to see the Inupiaq viewpoint as complementary to, and equally legitimate with, the scientific and academic reality in which they were steeped. For some, the act of respectfully considering a marginalized perspective led to serious soul-searching about their own constructions of reality.

EXERCISE: BELIEVE THIS

So here’s how this works. For the next five minutes, set aside your own point of view and entertain the one below. Don’t listen to the critical thoughts that pop into your head. Instead, ask yourself: What’s interesting about this view? How would things be different if this was how you understood the world, or if this perspective were true, or if it were the dominant view? After five minutes, feel free to return to your original perspective.

Nijsaq and Napaaqtuq: Another Way of Thinking about Animals and Plants

While still in grade school, Ernie Norton was told by a Western teacher that the creature he knew as *aaglu* (killer whale) was related to the one he knew as *agviq* (bowhead whale). This didn’t make sense to him. He knew these animals; he’d seen them, hunted them, watched them hunt. He did not, however, perceive them to be related. From his perspective, they were not in the same category or family at all. Trying to think of them that way, he said, made his brain hurt.

Ernie’s language, Inupiaq, has words for some of the major life-form categories that certain ethnographers recognize as universals. Fish are *iqaluk*, birds are *tigmiat*. Each

species has its own name as well: salmon are *iqalugruaq*, ravens *tulugaq*. But there is no classification for mammal, at least not as most English-speakers would define it.

What Ernie has instead is *niqsaq*. The word refers to several species of large animals as well as the method with which they are hunted. Bowhead whale, beluga whale, bearded seal, spotted seal, polar bear, walrus...all these are, or can be, *niqsaq*. These creatures have many things in common. They are big, they breathe air (they are not fish), and they can swim. They live all or some of their lives in the sea or on sea ice. Humans hunt them for food. They taste good.

Niqsaq also refers to a type of *angu* or hunting that takes place on the sea or sea ice. It is not the same as *saavit*, or hunting that takes place on land. It must be traditional (that now includes the option of a rifle), and it requires skill and bravery, about which one could dance in recounting the story of the hunt. *Niqsaq* indicates that there was blood shed, that a hunter risked his life to kill the animal. A beluga swimming in the water is not *niqsaq*, it is *sisuaq*. If it's taken by a net, still *sisuaq*. If it's found washed up on the beach, dead by some natural process, *sisuaq*. Only if it has been taken by traditional methods does it become a *niqsaq* animal.

Two kinds of what English speakers call whales—bowheads and belugas—are, or can be, *niqsaq*. Both are hunted traditionally on the sea or near the sea ice, and both make good muktuk. Two others are not. The grey whale is a phony, like a blank bullet. Its blubber doesn't taste good. Killer whales cannot be *niqsaq* either; they are hunters, like humans. They are vengeful; if harmed, they will return to take their revenge. They are not shot at even in sport, and although you could eat one if you found it washed up on the beach, it would not be *niqsaq*.

In the plant world, Ernie has no generic word for "tree." Instead he has *napaaqtuq*, which refers to what English-speakers call spruce trees. There are no other kinds of trees in Ernie's language, only *napaaqtuq*. The word means "this thing is standing up firmly. Nothing can knock it down easily." It has a strength and firmness that makes it ideal for building a home with. People who live along the Noatak River once called themselves *Naupaktomiut*: "people of the trees" or "people of the spruce." As the only living thing that stays green all year round, it has a spiritual power that cannot be taken away by winter.

All other plants are either *uqpik* (bushes) or *ivik* (grass). *Uqpik* come in two sizes: *uqpikpak* (big bushes, willow, all trees other than spruce) and *uqpikuraq* (small bushes like blueberries and the like). *Uqpikpak* (big bushes) are good for burning, but not for building. They are deciduous, greening up in the summer, and dying back in the winter. One has only to look outside on a winter day to see the difference between the full dark green spruce (*napaaqtuq*) and bare brown birch (*uqpikpak*) as they are silhouetted against the sky. The birch are obviously bushes; the spruce obviously a tree.

The mention of his brain hurting reveals the depths to which people become attached to and formed by the classification systems present in their native cultural systems...Although Ernie Norton is well educated now in Western thought, he still does not believe that *aaglu* really is a whale. I do not think many Western people, even some anthropologists, grasp this. Education in the western system does not necessarily cancel out Native categories of reality and feelings about these things. Our current education system in Alaska, and perhaps elsewhere in the far North, can suffer from such unconscious ethnocentrism.

Kerry Feldman
Anthropology

The believing game

What happens when you try to believe this view? Can you do it easily, or does it make your brain hurt? If you find it difficult or even impossible to “believe” in *niqsaq* and *napaaqtuq*, then you are beginning to understand what it was like for Ernie when he was expected to master the distinctions so common in the English-speaking world.

What do you notice or find interesting about this view? A common observation is that it’s place-based, specific to a particular place where a particular people live and hunt along the sea ice. Another thing that stands out is that it’s relational. The understanding and classification system is not independent of us and our human experience, the way Western science tries to be. Instead it is openly dependent on the relationship between humans and nature. As one researcher has put it, these categories are not only “good to think” but also “good to act upon” in prescribed ways because of their wide cultural usefulness.

How would things be different if this was your perspective...the way you saw the world? It’s a good question, isn’t it?

Speaking the language

Inupiat - refers to the people

Inupiaq - refers to the language and culture of the people

Niqsaq: large animals hunted on or near the sea ice using traditional methods; also those methods themselves; also the skill and bravery involved; also the way you could tell the whole story in a dance.

Agviq: bowhead whale

Sisuaq: beluga whale

Ugruk: bearded seal

Qasigiaq: (small) spotted seal

Nanuq: polar bear

Aiviq: walrus

Background on *Niqsaq* and *Napaaqtuq*

I got interested in this topic while teaching an anthropology research methods course. As we discussed the research methods of ethno-science (or how cultural groups know, understand and classify the world around them), one of the students, Ernie Norton, was having difficulty understanding what I meant by classification systems. I suggested interviewing him about his own culture's classifications of life forms, hoping that as a respondent in such research he would come to understand what it was about. Eventually we agreed to write a paper together about our mutual discoveries.

In the paper, I examined theories of the anthropological linguist Cecil Brown regarding folk taxonomies for plants and animals. While all cultural groups engage in classification of the things around them (some X is viewed as a kind of some Y), each culture identifies different attributes as a basis for seeing things as alike or unlike or for not grouping them with anything else at all. Brown's examination of 144 languages led him to argue that 1) there are five potentially universal folk life form classifications for plants and animals; 2) one could predict the order in which they would occur if the cultural/linguistic group did not name all five; and 3) life form classifications are based solely on morphology (appearance). Most of these arguments and predictions seemed to be correct for Inupiaq, but there were a few interesting exceptions.

I learned that the main reason Ernie had trouble understanding the research method was that Inupiaq has so few classifications for plants or animals: each species usually had its own particular name. He insisted that originally, prior to contact with Western peoples, the Inupiat viewed only the spruce as trees. He also introduced the term *niqsaq* which was a major classifier of animals to him. The term is now in the most prominent Inupiaq-English dictionary, largely because one of the dictionary authors heard our joint paper at a meeting of the Alaska Anthropological Association. Its meaning, however, is listed as "sea mammal," which is not correct as explained by Ernie in the essay.

Another purpose of the paper was for readers to reflect on the arbitrariness of whatever classification system of anything they adhere to. Much inter-cultural conflict and misunderstanding is due to different emphasis given to attributes of phenomena that result in different classification systems. It is through a culture's system of classification (cognition) that a person in the culture experiences (perceives) the world. Think, for example, of these important classification terms from our own culture: democracy, human rights, religion, cult, nature, myth. These classifications are all to some degree based on arbitrary and culturally perceived attributes. Yet most English speakers treat them as absolutely correct kinds of classifications.

Kerry Feldman
Anthropology

Five minutes can be a very long time to contemplate something that conflicts deeply with how you understand the world. This essay describes what it was like for one of us to play the believing game with the Inupiaq way of classifying plants and animals. The lesson she learned is how deeply embedded her own world view is and how much is at stake when students confront worldviews not their own.

The Five Minute Rule

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The most profound moment for me during the entire intensive was Phyllis Fast's presentation of the Five Minute Rule, a technique that asks participants to consider an idea or argument for five minutes and to play a believing game with it. We were supposed to embrace the notion as if it were true, avoid criticizing it, put aside the analytical, and instead give into acceptance.

Phyllis presented us with an Inupiaq heuristic for animal and plant life. A beluga whale swimming in the ocean belongs to the category *sisuaq* while a beluga that has been taken by traditional methods becomes *niqsaq*. The latter category illustrates the role of functionality and subjectivity in Inupiaq culture. The hunting technique used to harvest it is integral to the animal's classification. The Feldman/Norton article emphasizes the deeply cultural role of linguistics in the classification process, contrasting it with Western biological classifications.

We were then asked to play the believing game for five minutes with this classification system. For me, five minutes was a long time to believe this approach to classification, if by believe we mean to truly embrace the idea and weave it into our world view. I am a rhetorician, with a deep background in the analytical philosophical tradition that is at the foundation of modern scientific thinking. I teach writing, specifically of arguments, a tradition steeped in Aristotle, the great classifier. Aristotle spent a significant part of his intellectual career building structures that could classify his world. He offered heuristics for knowledge, for plants and animals, for types of persuasion. For me as a rhetorician, the Aristotelian attitude toward classification is crucial.

Perhaps not surprisingly, I found the Five Minute Rule threatening. As I looked across the silent room, I didn't see the same struggle in the other members of my cohort and when it came time for discussion, my colleagues readily and cheerfully offered their insights about embracing this life-form classification. I, however, struggled with it, and, ultimately refused to accept it, even for five minutes. In answer to what was interesting or helpful, I had plenty to say. The notion of classifying an animal with reference to its role in human enterprises, specifically with regard to the hunter's allegiance to an honorable hunting method, is fascinating, even if subjective. It seemed clear to me that numerous features of this system were waiting to be noticed.

However, when it came to the question about what would be different if I believed the view, I found the five minutes overwhelming. This method of classification would and does completely undermine the principles that inform Western classification methods. The analytical tradition rejects the subjective. We might even say that the ability to separate the subjective is the West's most significant contribution to the intellectual tradition. Thus, this classification system would undermine my tradition and destroy my ability to teach argument.

For me, an academic who has always valued the intellectual and rational above all, the Five Minute Rule felt threatening. Perhaps this response reveals my lack of imagination or incompetence with regard to acceptance. Certainly it revealed the resistance I offer to the world. But later, when I reflected on it, I found a great deal to think about as well.

First, I'd been complaining all year about our graduate students in the English department. They seemed resistant to, perhaps even incapable of, reading an article or essay and working to understand it before starting to refute and deny it. They would lead with denial, even against the clear background of their own ignorance. I had struggled to convince them that they must first understand before they can rebut, judge, and assess. And yet I found it very difficult to do the same thing myself.

Second, I started to understand why students in my writing classes might be struggling with the concepts of critical thinking and argument. Many of them are not from the white, Western, analytic tradition. The intellectual processes I expect them to employ are based on values they may not understand, values that may threaten or undermine their more spiritual and subjective world views. The choice of coming to college has exposed some of them to an onslaught of threats to their cultural traditions. My traditions may be part of their difficulties.

I suppose I became conscious that there's more at stake in my teaching than I realized. I also developed a greater sense of empathy toward my students' struggles with (or against) new ideas. The Five Minute Rule gives me another option beyond mastery and acceptance to offer to students. I can invite them to temporarily put aside their own beliefs, to believe for a moment in a world different from their own. The technique demonstrates that when teacher and students meet in a classroom, we come from a variety of worlds. In order to learn, we must be willing to be open—if only for a few minutes—to that which challenges us. The Five Minute Rule doesn't ask us to abandon our own views, to transform our lives. It asks only that we set aside time to step outside of the familiar and into the larger world beyond. The exercise is good for us. And that includes me.



The Five Minute Rule can be combined with a common reading to explore new perspectives. See pages 130-132 for one example.

Whenever we present the Five Minute Rule, someone always asks “What happens if someone brings up a truly offensive perspective, and I don’t want to treat it as worthy of respect?” For example, what if someone wants to argue that the Ku Klux Klan was just performing necessary work, or that the Holocaust never happened? In my opinion, this is where the authority of the faculty member comes into play. He or she has the authority and the responsibility for setting boundaries in the classroom for the benefit of the whole.

Faculty members can say, “No. In my class we are not going to entertain the viewpoint that the Holocaust never happened, not even for five minutes. There is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and we have a moral obligation to the people whose lives have been forever impacted by this event not to play games with that evidence. Certain things are non-negotiable in my classroom, and this is one of them.”

Or they can say, “I am unprepared to take on this discussion. I don’t have the skills or experience to ensure that it will result in productive learning, so I decide not to entertain this for now. I will instead seek out additional help so I am more prepared next time this arises.”

Others might say, “Why not? Let’s have the discussion. A primary role of academia is to entertain ideas, let them see the light of day, and model how critical thinking and the requirement of evidence can move people toward more responsible positions.” From this point of view, the ideas that we refuse to entertain are more dangerous than the ones that we do talk about. We might seize this opportunity to launch into a truly meaningful discussion of the role of evidence in academic and civic life, helping students to differentiate between opinion and historical or scientific fact. We might delve deeply into the phenomena of denial or of racism or anti-Semitism, helping our students grapple with some of the hardest questions faced by human society. We might examine the many, many times throughout history when real human experiences or facts have been “disappeared” by political leaders or governments.

These are questions we all have to wrestle with on our own. What harm comes if we take on these conflicts unprepared? Potentially quite a lot, if, for example, you have students whose parents or grandparents were actual victims of the Holocaust or who have their own experiences of the Klan. What harm comes if we fail to take these issues on at all? Perhaps even more, as we continue to turn out generations of students who don’t know how to grapple with the most important issues of our times.

If we’re going to go there, we’d better be prepared. Unfortunately, many of us aren’t. This project took us a few steps closer, but we’ve got a long way to go before we are really able to take on these potentially explosive kinds of dynamics in truly productive ways. I hope we keep moving in that direction. A lot depends upon it.

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Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally responsive teaching asks us to recognize that many of our default teaching methods are ineffective for large numbers of learners, to adapt our strategies to reach the greatest number, and to confront the power differentials that privilege some voices while discouraging or silencing others. This essay acknowledges both the complexity and importance of culturally responsive teaching while offering several tips for making our classrooms more inclusive of different types of learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

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As many researchers and educators have noted, most educators in the U.S., without consciously intending to, have inherited and tend to reflexively reproduce models of learning based upon educational systems historically designed for only a few groups of learners: middle class or wealthy, able-bodied, young, heterosexual, European or European-American Christian men. The buildings, curricula, teaching styles, books, technology, and definitions of knowledge and learning that most of us were raised and are most comfortable with derive from these systems. “Many of us who now teach grew up in what appeared to be mono-cultural schools and communities. It is likely that we were socialized in our formative years with an unexamined set of traditions and beliefs about ourselves and a limited knowledge about others.”¹

Most of us have internalized the prevailing values of the dominant culture and consider them to be reflections of reality rather than a particular cultural perspective. As one example, sociologist Robin Williams, Jr. compiled a list of fifteen values that the dominant culture holds, including efficiency, practicality, activity, work, material comfort, progress, individual freedom, science, and secular rationality.²

Yet many of us are also uncomfortable perpetuating systems that fail to recognize and make welcome the vast range of learners, learning styles, ways of knowing, socioeconomic, and cultural perspectives that now fill our classrooms. We recognize that even as our society becomes increasingly diverse, it also continues to perpetuate unequal power relations between and among various groups. We do not wish to recreate these unequal relationships within our own classrooms. We believe that education plays a critical role—if not the critical role—in how we envision ourselves as citizens and members of the human community and whether we make

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¹ Bowser and Hunt, 1981.

² Williams, Jr., 1970, pp. 454-500

significant movement toward our democratic ideals. We agree with educator, activist and theorist Paulo Freire, who asserts that education is never politically neutral; no matter how and what we choose to teach, we are always either reproducing the inequities embedded in the larger society or challenging them in some way.

The effort to help more faculty members become more responsive to the various learners in their classrooms is, therefore, hugely important in our efforts to better tackle difficult dialogues on our campuses: dialogues that are often difficult precisely because they are attempting to address issues of power and inequity. I consider every communication a cross-cultural communication, and

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For more on Paulo Freire and the politics of language and education, see pages 188-193

every classroom a microcosm of the greater society. Even when a classroom appears to be homogenous, there are often many hidden differences. We come from different backgrounds, with different values, histories, perspectives, symbols, learning styles, and priorities. We may have similar skin colors, but radically different religious ideologies. I may be affected by a learning disorder you can't see, while you may have a disabled child at home who requires most of your attention. I may be female, while you are male, straight while you are gay, poor while you are middle class, Catholic while you are Jewish. Or I may simply learn more effectively through visual presentations while you absorb information most quickly when you are allowed to tackle something hands-on. All of these differences inform and complicate our efforts to communicate with one another.

Some of these differences may be relatively innocuous when it comes to how we teach, but others are profound. Culturally responsive teaching asks us to do at least two things. First, to adapt our teaching styles to best reach the greatest number of learners and “allow the integrity of every learner to be sustained while each person attains relevant educational success and mobility.”³ And second, to recognize and do our best to correct for power differentials in the classroom that may promote some voices while silencing or suppressing others.

Trying to learn the specifics of every thread of American society is a daunting and seemingly overwhelming task, given the already challenging workloads faculty members handle. Fortunately, there are some things we can do that make the classroom more inclusive for all types of students and learners. Here are just a few:

● **Vary our teaching techniques.** In addition to lectures and tests, consider using strategies that facilitate inclusive learning, such as small-group work, dyad and triad sharing, problem-solving approaches, short reflective papers, role playing, using creative or performing arts as discussion starters, journals, research in the community, debates, or any number of the techniques discussed in the Brookfield and Preskill text (some of which are described in this handbook).

- **Permit multiple ways for learners to show that they have mastered the material.** In addition to papers and tests, offer students the option of demonstrating that learning has occurred through such efforts as writing and performing skits, creating Web sites or videos, conducting interviews, writing grant proposals, creating pieces of artwork or music, or giving oral reports.
- **Help students make links between the material and their own lives.** Invite students to make these connections in problem-solving exercises, classroom discussions, dyads and triads, writing assignments, or any of the other means described above. Doing so will allow them to bring in elements of their own socio-cultural backgrounds that the instructor might not be aware of. Ask questions to elicit these connections: What do we want to know about this subject? How is it important in our daily lives?
- **Use fair and clear criteria of evaluation.** Because learners are diverse, it is important to give them a chance to ask questions to ensure that they truly understand how assessment will take place and how to measure their progress. “Make available examples of concrete learning outcomes that have already been evaluated (e.g. past tests, papers, projects and media).” ⁴
- **Use inclusive language and examples.** Invite students to break into dyads (groups of two) and identify words that generate feelings of anger or self-consciousness. Ask them to consider why these words affect them and to suggest alternative words or phrases that would be more amenable. Share these in the large group and list out the best ideas for class language. Frequently invite students to offer examples from their own lives to illustrate points made in classroom discussion; this practice can correct for any cultural biases in the instructor’s choice of examples and enrich discussion.
- **Invite students to point out behaviors, practices, and policies that discriminate.** This can best be done in anonymous short writing opportunities or an area of Blackboard (or other electronic classroom space) designated for requests, where a sample posting might read “Please don’t use the phrase ‘those people’ when referring to another group. Thanks!”

⁴ Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 127-8

DIFFICULT DIALOGUE FITTING EVERYTHING IN

Process vs. Content

Whenever we introduce cultural awareness exercises in our faculty intensives, there are those who feel that we are wasting their time. They will never be teaching this content, and they don't have time for this process in their classrooms (or even in the intensive). The Circle of Objects in particular takes a lot of class time; even those who loved it were surprised and a little chagrined by how much time it can take and how much emotion often surfaces.

Academic culture, of course, values content delivery very highly; this is what students come to us for and what we get paid to do. For a few people this concern was paramount: how to stay productive, cover their content, fit in all the required information in sixteen short weeks. And they are right; there is a high cost for practicing strategies like the ones suggested in this chapter. Student and department evaluations may reflect discontent with covering less information or with introducing uncomfortable subjects or exercises. Our faculty rewards systems may not support it.

But there's also a high cost—for society as well as for academia—to not spending the time to create inclusive learning environments or examine how we learn as well as what we learn. Considerable research on effective teaching and learning shows that traditional content delivery strategies that focus exclusively on the transfer of information, view students as passive recipients of knowledge, and require them to work in isolation and in competition with one another are not the best way for most of our students to learn, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. People also learn from each other, and from their relationships with each other.

More important, perhaps, is the recognition that we teach as much by what we do and value and prioritize in the learning environments we create as by the information we impart. Our students may come away with a head full of facts about chemistry or economics, often quickly lost after the test, but they may also have learned a more enduring lesson: that no one cares about them as individuals. Or that correct data and a good grade matter more than any relevance their learning may have to their own lives and the real struggles and problems faced by the human community. Or that efficiency and a fast pace are more important than taking the time to dig deeply into key issues or build trusting relationships. Or that what matters most is the ability to out-argue others, rather than to really listen in an effort to try and understand one another. Or that no one seems equipped to deal with tough topics, and so they never get dealt with. These less visible lessons can then translate into greater challenges in our civic society: the kinds of challenges the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative was designed to address.

The idea of introducing new kinds of inclusive processes (like those explored in our intensives) and taking the time to tackle difficult dialogues in our classrooms inevitably brings up the question of how to fit them into a curriculum and a semester already overloaded with necessary content. Most faculty feel compelled, by choice or by departmental requirements, to cover a certain well-defined body of information and knowledge in the number of weeks allotted for their class. They will probably be evaluated on how well they have accomplished this goal.

Several of our participants expressed the concern that they wouldn't be able to cover all the necessary information if they made these changes, even if these practices would strengthen their classroom learning environment. This is one of those difficult areas where the best learning theory clashes with institutional requirements. Over and over, learning research demonstrates that if we want to develop students and citizens with a capacity to learn we need to help them develop connections between the course material, each other, and the real issues in their personal and civic lives. We also need to help them learn how to interact, think critically, express themselves, relate with others, address controversial topics, engage in civic discourse, conduct research, find credible sources of information, and many other things.

In short, we need to teach them, by modeling it, the process of learning. This endeavor requires us to be both selective and realistic about which specific pieces of information they actually need to know. If we are successful at teaching them the process, they are likely to become lifelong learners: people who remain enthusiastic about learning, who will be motivated to search for and competent in finding relevant information whenever they need it, and who are able to apply that learning to real-life challenges.

Viewed in this light, taking the time to do the work encompassed in our *Difficult Dialogues* project does not hinder student learning and our academic objectives; rather, it strengthens both.

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

What do I know about my students' gender, racial, cultural, or class identities, and where have I learned these things?

How does my own gender, racial, cultural, or class identity affect how I teach?

How does my students' gender, racial, cultural, and/or class identity affect how they learn?

Can I—or should I—protect my students from offensive ideas or comments?