“Designing More Culturally Inclusive Presentations”
© Janice Lovelace, Ph.D.
jclovelace@conceptsnet.com

Our lecture audiences are becoming more and more culturally diverse. This presentation will explore educational concepts of curriculum transformation by looking at a five phase approach to multicultural curriculum and explore strategies to make presentations more culturally inclusive and welcoming of diverse perspectives.

An initial question that often arises is why make changes to a class/presentation to make it more inclusive of diverse perspectives? One quick answer is that our audiences are increasingly diverse and hope/expect to hear their diversity represented in the presentation. One question to ask ourselves as we design a class is “who is represented AND who is missing?”

Demographics tell us that the United States is quickly moving toward a significant multi-ethnic population. Latest census population estimates (2015, U.S. Census Bureau) are 61% white only, 17% Latino/Hispanic, 13% African American, 6% Asian American, 1% American Indian and 2% two or more races.

Five states are already “majority-minority” while another seven states are in the 50-60% white-only range.

Inclusivity, of course, is more than race and ethnicity. It also reflects diverse perspectives of gender, religion, sexuality and cultural heritage.

How does one go about designing a more inclusive presentation? There are several models from the academic world, first proposed in 1990s, that address curriculum transformation from an inclusive perspective. Theorists James Banks (multicultural) and Peggy McIntosh (women’s studies) developed models that are still used.

Banks had four stages:

- Contributions – the “Heroes/Heroines and Holidays” approach where one adds in a few well known representatives of different backgrounds. The course is basically unchanged.
- Additive – the course adds substance but is not restructured. Add a chapter/section that discusses a ‘different’ group. The focus is still on the dominant culture and how others relate to that dominance. The material is still viewed from the mainstream or “norm” rather than looking at interconnections of cultures and perspectives. Although the course shifts, the perspective of ideas and concepts are presented from the dominant culture’s view.
• Transformative – course is transformed so students see concepts from several perspectives equally represented. This approach requires a major change in how material is presented and how the instructor consciously thinks about the material.

• Social action – this stage adds the component of taking action related to the concepts presented. It looks at more complex issues like oppression, and challenges the listener to understand the dynamics of oppression and effects on all groups (including the dominant group).

McIntosh had five stages to her approach:

• “Womanless” curriculum – this is the primarily male, Eurocentric perspective which largely ignores any other groups. Often Eurocentric is considered the “norm” and teachers do not realize anything is missing!

• Famous Women – this stage suggests women are included when famous or exceptional. It highlights the achievements of a few extraordinary individuals but fails to address most “ordinary” women.

• Women as Problem or Anomaly – although this stage adds more women but views women’s inclusion in the curriculum as a “problem”. It approaches diverse perspectives as stand-alone like an add-on section or a separate course. It still leaves out women as part of the ‘norm’.

• Women as History – this stage includes significant information about women’s lives into a course and begins the shift of the ‘center’.

• Curriculum Revision – This stage reconstructs the curriculum to include women as a part of a total history.

What can you do to shift to a more inclusive lecture/presentation? Some thoughts to start:

Start with your title - does it reflect the actual content in terms of inclusivity? Are you really talking about all or primarily those of European ancestry? Does your description reflect diverse perspectives? Do you include diverse examples? Is the general thesis of your presentation inclusive of multiple populations?
