

Voicing Differences: Encouraging Multicultural Learning

Carney Strange Lorraine Alston

A unique strategy known as the "Voice Project" engaged 70 student affairs graduate students in an exploration of human differences, concentrating on issues of age, race and ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Outcomes of journal entries revealed steps students took in learning to see through the eyes of individuals different from themselves.

In the second half of the 20th century American higher education has evolved from a private, meritocratic privilege, dominated by the select few, to a public, accessible opportunity enriched by increasingly diverse students seeking learning opportunities across the lifespan. Pressures brought to bear on the academy, as a consequence of this shift, have called for significant revision of both the curriculum and methods of teaching. Beyond the classroom, as well, challenges of building community in residence halls and student organizations have emerged as students from a greater variety of backgrounds come to terms with boundaries of gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. The challenge for postsecondary educators today lies in preparing students to take full advantage of this increased diversity as members of a multicultural society.

Numerous authors have commented recently on the nature of this multicultural challenge facing postsecondary education in general and the student affairs profession in particular. For example, Manning and Coleman-Boatwright (1991, p. 368) noted that a fundamental question is often absent in discussions of campus culture: "Whose past, traditions, actions, and experience are embraced within our institutional structures, described in the study of history, transmitted through the curricula of schools, and represented in the art and architecture of campus environ-

ments?" They called for "more advanced stages of intercultural communication, group awareness, and systemic change" (p. 373).

Fried (1995) cautioned that the ability to achieve a multicultural society is dependent upon each individual's capacity to see beyond the intrapersonal borders of his or her current limited perspectives, models, and sets of interpretive constructs. To cross these confining borders each one "must begin to understand the role of culture in shaping individuals—their perceptions beliefs and behavior" (p. 35). Drawing from the work of Grossberg (1994) and others, she proposed the practice of "border pedagogy" (Fried, 1995) the purpose of which is to

help people learn where borders have been established, explore the forces that established them, how each person is defined by a range of borders which may be invisible to him or her, and whether or not people feel comfortable and competent with the borders that define them. (p. 80)

McEwen and Roper (1994, p. 46), in their discussion of graduate curriculum resources, suggested that "educating and preparing graduate students in student affairs to work effectively with a multicultural student body is an ethical and professional responsibility." Citing the work of Talbot (1992, p. 200), they acknowledged the importance of a transformed approach to incorporating multiculturalism into professional preparation, as distinct from an additive approach involving only the "addition of a book, a unit, or even a course to the curriculum without changing anything else substantially." A transformed approach allows individuals "to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several different ethnic [or] cultural perspectives.

Carney Strange is Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs at Bowling Green State University. Lorraine Alston is a Doctoral Fellow in Higher Education and Student Affairs at Bowling Green State University.

The multiple nature of reality is seen” (Talbot, 1992, p. 201). Tierney (1993) concluded that “if we want to create the conditions for building a community of difference, then we must place at a premium an emphasis on creating cultural learners” (p. 146), that is, those who have developed and can engage in “dialogues of support and understanding across differences” (p. 144).

This paper is an examination of the implementation and outcomes of a transformed teaching strategy designed to instill an understanding and appreciation for human differences in the context of a student affairs graduate preparation curriculum. Known as the Voice Project, this border-crossing pedagogical approach combined the steps of “cultural learning” (Tierney, 1993), the strategies of qualitative inquiry (interviewing and observation) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and the technologies of computer mediated communication. Our goal for the Voice Project was to begin to develop a “habitual instinct toward empathy” (Strange, 1995) among graduate students in preparation for their entry, as educational leaders, into a multicultural society.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this Voice Project were 70 first or second year master’s students in a student affairs graduate preparation program of a large midwestern state university. These students were enrolled in one of three different courses offered over a period from the summer of 1995 through the fall term of 1996.

Procedure

At the core of the Voice Project was the challenge for participants to actively seek out alternative “voices”, those meanings, perspectives, experiences, and values different from their own and to assure that these voices were heard and understood as part of the students’ discussion of course content and interaction with their colleagues. Participants were each asked to select a “voice” other than their own and assume responsibility as advocates for their voices for

the entire 16-week semester. Next, they had to develop expertise in their chosen voice by, for example: (a) examining literature and reading materials relevant to that voice (e.g., Evans & Wall, 1991); (b) accessing resources and personal contacts through various Web sites (e.g., EASI, at <http://www.rit.edu/~easi/rsrccpubs.html>, which provides access to information for people with disabilities) discussion lists and bulletin boards; (c) observing the behavior and interacting in the context of individuals who were thought to live that voice (e.g., attending a Black Student Union meeting on campus); or (d) interviewing people presumed to speak in that voice (e.g., an Asian American student, faculty, or staff member). The participants maintained a voice journal wherein they entered, on a regular basis, their intellectual, personal, and experiential discoveries about their selected voices and any implications for materials discussed in class or policies, practices, and programs considered in their internships. They also let their selected voices be heard regularly as part of class discussions during the term.

RESULTS

Following are themes and select excerpts which emerged from the 70 voice journals completed in the course of this project, illustrating the steps and strategies the students pursued in acquiring their voices as well as the self-reported outcomes of their cultural learning.

Students selected voices representing a variety of cultural, ethnic, gender, religious, and sexual orientation distinctions, e.g., a traditional college-age Latino male, an African American gay male, a Japanese American female, a visually impaired male, a Muslim female, a male with HIV, a single-parent adult [older than 25] female, a traditional college-age Caucasian male. We observed a pattern of steps most students took as they selected, gathered information about, and acquired a facility for presenting their voice. A typical sequence included an initial period when students explored and weighed motives and reasons for selecting a particular voice, followed by a period of exploring to gain a simple understanding of the characteristics and influences of the selected voice. Next came a

period of deeper understanding when personal engagement through a variety of learning strategies produced a growing affinity for the gifts, challenges, and barriers of the selected voice. Finally, in a period of advocacy, participants acquired a distinct sense of empathy and responsibility to affirm their voice and to seek out and remove sources of bias and discrimination. These steps are examined more thoroughly through the lens of students' voice journal reflections below.

Selecting Voice

These students identified a variety of reasons for selecting their voices, with motivations ranging from intellectual curiosity to a personal investment in the outcome of the project. For some, the intrigue and "otherness" of a particular group was piqued by childhood images and messages. One student recalled how her earliest impressions of Native Americans were formed:

I think of the Indian on the old *Grizzly Adams* TV show. I think of the Indian doll I got on some camping trip as a kid probably at Yellowstone or the Badlands. I think of teepees [sic] and peace pipes and bows and arrows. Tonto. Storytellers. Everything I had learned about Indians was related to those things.

Now, as an adult, she realized that her former impressions were incomplete at best and perhaps totally inaccurate.

Another student's fond memories of her Mexican American playmates and friends from high school prompted her to choose a traditional-age Latino male college student as her voice. Although she had been exposed superficially to the Latino culture from an early age, she realized that she had learned very little about their world. "I know nothing about Mexican American culture, even though I grew up with friends from that population all around me," she wrote in her journal. Recognition of the hegemonic nature of the relationships that existed between Whites and Mexican Americans caused her to question and challenge the imposition of the dominant culture upon her former friends.

For the children in [my hometown] there wasn't much notice taken of what race anyone was. While it was great that we grew up without those lines there, we also grew up appreciating White culture and not Latino. We didn't blend together like a melting pot; the Latinos just had to take on the White world, giving the Whites the impression that everything blended very easily. Looking back, how easy was it for Joel and Jesse to sit back and accept it when the foreign language teacher said the Spanish they spoke at home wasn't good enough? How easy was it for John to be called "John" all his life because "Juan" was just "too hard" for us to get accustomed to? I didn't learn until after his father died how much he hated "John." He was named after his dad, Juan, and his grandpa, Juan. And after his dad's death, he got the courage to insist on *Juan* since he was the only one left of the long line of them.

In addition to those recouping experiences of diversity from their past, others saw the project as a way to revisit former acquaintances, as was the case with one female who chose an African American female voice after the funeral of a close friend reunited her with a former colleague and caused her to reflect upon some of the differences between the African American culture and her own. Some students chose their voice because of current or recently discovered situations that were challenging family members and friends. Thus, one female student's voice, "Danny," a gay male with Attention Deficit Disorder, represented an attempt to incorporate the experiences of her brother, who suffers from the disorder, and a friend who had recently disclosed his sexual orientation to her.

For some students, taking on a voice also seemed to provide for the first time an opportunity to acknowledge long-standing and deeply enculturated values and beliefs. One student reflected cautiously on this in her journal, recognizing and taking inventory of the social restraints in her own upbringing:

I have decided to represent the voice of a lesbian freshman student. I chose this voice for several reasons. First and most personal is that I am Catholic and I was raised to believe that homosexuality is wrong. It's hard to get past those things that follow you from childhood, but I would like to open myself up to some self-examination. Second, as a CSP [college student personnel] professional, I would like to become an ally for *all* students. This begins with understanding them. The GLB [gay lesbian bisexual] population is one that I have not taken the time to learn about. Third, I have seen the damage that "closed minds" can do to a group of lesbian students who needed support. My voice will also be Catholic. Her name is Rachel.

Similarly, but from another perspective, a self-identified lesbian student chose to face the "oppressor" in her selection of a "White, middle-class, male, heterosexual, conservative, traditional aged American college student" voice. Recounting her strong feminist undergraduate experience in a very liberal college environment, she acknowledged the challenge of her limited exposure to this voice:

I assume this voice is one of many men who is competitive, individual (in a sense of his main concern is for himself alone), closed minded, opinionated, argumentative, intelligent, self-confident, heterosexist, homophobic, athletic, and socially successful. I don't know yet how to deal with these assumptions appropriately, or how to get beyond them and respect this voice, or even address this voice as the course context calls for. I just hope that by the end of this project I reach a greater understanding of some sort.

Memories of an initially hostile reaction to adult learners in her undergraduate experience also led another student to create "Emma," as an opportunity to explore feelings of resentment and annoyance she once harbored for these

students. Finally, a mixture of shame, a sense of personal responsibility, and genuine interest motivated another student, a self-described Christian, to create the voice of "Sarah," a Jewish student. Both the struggle and the excitement in the prospect of this voice assignment was apparent in her initial journal entries, as she anticipated what lay ahead:

I realized that my new voice is not going to just be a research topic for me. It is deeper than that. For me to claim responsibility for another is a serious and thoughtful commitment, for I want to represent my voice in the truest way that I can. I am willing to bet some frustration will be experienced during this whole process because of such subjectivity. But I wouldn't have it any other way. I want this responsibility to become a personal one. Sure, I want to know in my head, but also [I want to] understand in my heart.

Not surprisingly, these students experienced a wide range of emotions as they approached this project, from mild hesitation to acute discomfort and fear of the outcomes, from cautious optimism to eager excitement. Because many, like the student above, accepted the project as a personal commitment rather than simply a classroom exercise, these students expressed concern for responsibility they felt to represent their selected voices with accuracy and sincerity. Some students were apprehensive about their ability to articulate the experiences of an entire group based upon their limited exposure through this project. Fear of offending others was another recurring concern for some students in the early stages of this project. One student noted in an initial journal entry:

I am feeling a little nervous about my voice. This stems from the fact that I know [that] at least two people in our class are gay and I don't want to say the wrong thing or insult them. I think that this will take some time for me to get beyond my insecurities.

Perhaps one of the greatest fears expressed

was simply that of being associated with the selected voice, as one student acknowledged.

I was simply embarrassed about going to the library and taking out books on the topic. The first time I went was on a cold Saturday night, right before closing. Although I didn't time it that way purposely, I did feel thankful that the place was almost empty. I kept wondering if the woman who was checking out the books was thinking that I was gay.

Informing, Engaging, and Appropriating Voice

Once the initial stage of voice selection and naming was resolved, participants in this project proceeded with a variety of strategies for informing their voices. Reading books and articles was an obvious technique for some as they began their journey. Often, too, students elected to interview and become acquainted with a person on campus who was presumed to speak their voice. Still others were able to access personal contacts through the World Wide Web and various email lists where they engaged in active discussions about their selected voice. However, the difference between simply informing their voice and engaging and appropriating their voice became apparent as many of these students chose a more phenomenological strategy. In these "voice experiments," as we called them, students sought to "be their voice," to experience firsthand, if only for a moment, the essence of living their voice. This was true of the student who searched for the meaning of atonement and sacrifice during the High Holy Days for her Jewish female voice. She wrote of that experience in her journal, with the twinge of an impostor in her recollection.

I decided to experience a bit of what Yom Kippur would be like for me if I were Jewish, so I fasted from sundown to sundown. I succeeded [in] having no food, but I did drink two glasses of orange juice. The difficult part for me was continuing my work during the day, not that I was tired, but my enthusiasm

for fasting turned to guilt for trying to experience something I wasn't. I felt that my efforts were only half-hearted, and I wondered if I were a Jew, would I take offense at this Christian toying with my tradition. I almost felt blasphemous.

Just as meaningful was the case of another student who chose the voice of a male fraternity member with HIV, "Jonathan." Her "experiment," as she described it, involved going to the campus health center to seek information about her condition. Reflecting afterwards she recalled with guilt how disappointed in herself she was because of her fear of being associated with her voice, even to the point of distancing herself by explaining that the material was for a class assignment and not for herself. Somewhat less dramatic, but nonetheless insightful, was the "experiment" of another student whose voice reflected the characteristics of a southeast Asian heritage. After communicating over the Internet with several Asian American students at a California university, he discovered that their "desire to listen to the instructor, to be lectured to, and to memorize and recite" was very different from his own style. In his journal he reflected on the surprising results of his attempt to take on this voice in one of his classes:

I decided to keep my big mouth shut for a month. . . . I wanted to try and see what I could gain from a different learning perspective. I found that by actually restraining myself, I found much more time to create perceptions in class, rather than in reflection on the discussion later. [Doing this] actually assisted me, a heavy class talker, to relearn the value of listening and observing.

For another student, her voice experiment became a temporary lifestyle seeking to more fully understand the customs, beliefs, values, and skills of her selected voice. She immersed herself for a semester in the culture of Native Americans, as she described later in her journal, and she "fleshed, stretched, hand-scraped, sinew-stitched, brain-tanned, and smoke-cured a deer hide with authentic bone tools." Sometimes these voice

experiments took the form of an acquaintance or friendship initiated with a person who lived the chosen voice. In this example, one student recounted the hands-on learning she experienced while spending a day with a visually impaired male acquaintance, Jeremy, and his guide dog, Hamlet.

He challenged me to close my eyes and hold onto his shoulder. It was the blind leading the blind! But Hamlet took good care of us. We went very fast and it was real easy . . . definite trust with the dog . . . and we were safe on our walk around campus.

A variation of the voice experiment was found in the observations of another student who imagined her wheelchair-bound voice “Rita” in a situation she encountered on campus:

I . . . happened to look into a classroom where a class was being held. What I really noticed was that a student in a wheelchair was pretty much sticking out of the door. I don’t know if the chair just didn’t fit, or if she was put there because it would be easier for her to maneuver, but if I were in that position, I wonder how I would feel about being a little bit “out” of the class. She was sitting on the outer rim, instead of in the circle. Like I said, I can’t know what her preference was, but if it were me I would feel a bit excluded. On the other hand, [I imagined] I saw “Rita” sitting in that wheelchair. With her shattered self-esteem and feelings of self-consciousness, she would have been thankful to sit on that outside edge.

In addition to these voice experiments, the engagement and appropriation of voice was encouraged by the act of “speaking in voice” where students contributed entries to their voice journals or offered comments in class in the form of first-person reflections. Often these entries were set off by quotation marks or a unique color of ink and represented attempts to reflect accumulated understandings and experiences of the voice documented in previous entries. At

times they were simply hypothetical explorations of a research finding or a theoretical model, as was the case, for example, with one student whose gay male voice expressed the frustration, conflict, and implication of being in the Identity Pride stage of Cass’ (1979) model. Like the voice experiments, speaking in voice reminded students of the difficulty of seeing the world through another person’s eyes. This concern became a topic for a journal entry of another student who later on in the project became more conscious of her growing discomfort.

I haven’t spoken for “Sarah” in quite awhile. In fact I have come to find that I feel uncomfortable speaking for her. It is impossible for me to truly speak for her voice, because quite honestly, I only met her when I started this project. I almost feel that I undermine her existence with my surface view of her identity. I cannot *be* her voice—it is impossible.

A third strategy invoking a sense of engagement and appropriation of voice involved the development of direct encounters with others who lived the selected voice. One student recounted an ongoing dialog he nurtured, first through the Internet, then by phone, and ultimately in person, with an individual who spoke his Black, gay male voice.

Today I [E]-mailed him. He is a [B]lack, gay man. I got his name and [E]-mail address from [another student]. It was so weird to ask questions about his sexuality without knowing him.

I think I really felt like I needed to talk about myself first. I’m scared to ask the probing questions. I don’t know what is “right” for me to ask and what isn’t. That’s why I think I am glad I just asked about history and background information.

I am excited to finally be able to get an idea of what it is like being Black and gay—I feel I have been making assumptions. Hopefully Jim will [E]-mail me back. I am trying to think what Jim is thinking. Does he think I am weird for doing this voice journal?

Later, anticipating a personal meeting, this student wrote:

I am really glad I have been able to interact with Jim. I have to admit, I was nervous about going to meet Jim. It just seems weird meeting someone like this. I don't think his being gay and Black has anything to do with my hesitations in meeting Jim. But to deny my reluctance would not be fair to myself and this journal.

A fourth strategy came in the form of assignments, examinations, and discussions that explicitly challenged students to integrate the characteristics of their emerging voices into course content. This strategy was designed to encourage an important step in Stage and Manning's (1992) model for becoming a "cultural broker"—learning to think contextually. The intent was to build "a realization that administrative actions and educational practices are not objective but rather reflect cultural backgrounds and assumptions" (Stage & Manning (1992, p. 17). Toward that end, for example, students were challenged to bring their new perspectives to bear on an in-class examination, following a review of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) and Levinson and Levinson's (1996) models of human development, that asked them to respond to the following exemplary question:

From the perspective of your emerging voice, discuss two developmental aspects or dimensions that are most likely to be affected because of the characteristics of your voice. In your role as a student development educator what would be your advice to such a student for facilitating his or her resolution of those aspects or dimensions affected?

One student considered the implications of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) third vector of development, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, for her Chinese international student voice:

In the Chinese culture great emphasis is placed on the group versus the individual.

The group is of primary importance and the well-being of the group is valued over the well-being of the individual. Taking responsibility for pursuing self chosen goals, learning to function with relative self-sufficiency and increased appreciation for one's uniqueness are not as highly valued in Chinese culture as in American culture. The degree of interdependence may be stronger for this student [and commitment to the welfare of the larger community] initially, thus the progression through this vector must be significantly altered for an individual from this different cultural background and emphasis.

For "Susan," a visually impaired voice, the psychosocial challenges implicated in such a question blended with cognitive style (Myers, 1980) in her creator's analysis to form some of the developmental fabric of the freshman year. Here she constructs what it might be like as "Susan" encounters her first romantic relationship:

Intimacy—this is one of the first times that Susan has felt romantic feelings for someone who may have reciprocated the feelings. This is where the issue of her *blindness* is a very prominent one. Will people consider her as a potential "significant other"? Will this [her disability] inhibit this type of relationship from occurring? Susan is not able to initiate all events that a sighted person might—when asking someone out, she must rely on them to take responsibility for transportation if they are to go somewhere. Because relationships such as this are new to Susan, she is very insecure with its implications relating to her blindness and feels unattractive and that her disability stands in the way of males noticing her as a potential partner.

Susan is naturally a *perceiver* [in Myers-Briggs terminology], but her blindness forces her to function as a *judger*. Once other issues come to the

forefront, Susan's natural tendencies override the others, and she forgets to order her materials in advance and therefore fails a quiz.

The power of these strategies (voice experiments, speaking in voice, personal encounters, and integrating voice) seemed to lie in their capacity for moving these students beyond a point of information to a stage where personal consequences and effects of their voices were experienced, perhaps for the first time. Invariably this step involved an emotive as well as an intellectual response. For some it became a highly personalized encounter, in effect, wherein a deeper level of understanding was evoked in the form of a constructed persona and seeking to see the world of human experience through the eyes of another. For many this personalization process proved to be a significant turning point in their sensitivity to multicultural differences in general. As one student acknowledged in reflecting on this process toward the end of the term, the persona of his voice, "Raymond," became so real to him that he had difficulty saying good-bye: "It is difficult to stop now. I am finding closure in this project difficult. It is like I have created a person within me that I want to keep challenging and growing. This person has become a part of me."

Outcomes of Voice

Students described myriad outcomes and meanings of the Voice Project for their understandings of human differences. The impact of new insights and awareness was powerfully acknowledged in the first and last entries to the journal of "Sarah," a Jewish voice, quoting first from Shakespeare, then marking the tragic demise of Yitzak Rabin:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh?

If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. (Shylock, *Merchant of Venice*, Act III, scene i)

Later, the student wrote:

I would like to close these entries of my first exploration of the Jewish voice with the words of Yitzak Rabin: "We love the same children. We weep the same tears." When I heard these words he spoke as part of the speech he presented moments before his assassination (11/4/95), I was struck by its similarities to Shylock's words with which I opened my journal. Shylock and Yitzak Rabin both speak of the equality between peoples, but their vision makes them differ. Whereas Shylock sought revenge, Rabin spoke for peace.

Isn't that our goal also? Isn't the pursuit of peace the overarching vision that guides our work in student affairs? We are working for the development of a whole people that furthers the process of creating, supporting, and maintaining peace. So, perhaps we should add to our list of titles not only advisor, professor, supervisor, and administrator, but also peacemaker.

Most obvious for many of these students was the heightened sensitivity and awareness of human differences they attributed to this project. Even among those who initially described themselves as open-minded and knowledgeable of diversity issues, their level of awareness deepened sharply as what was unconscious and implicit became conscious and explicit. An excerpt from one student's journal acknowledged such an outcome.

Another important piece to interacting with our voices is the need for us to locate ourselves in terms of our biases and privileges. For me, I feel it is important that I acknowledge those factors which play into my interpretation

and outlook on those [individuals] of the voice I have chosen. I like to think that I am open-minded and have worked through much of my racism but I have become acutely aware of the unconscious and automatic assumptions I make and stereotypes I hold.

Another student reflected on the responsibility he now embraced as an aspiring student affairs professional in creating a campus where different voices can be heard:

I find myself walking across campus looking at the faces I pass and wondering what their voice sounds like. Every face has a story. I think that more of these stories need to be told. I think students want to tell their stories but they don't have someone to tell it to. Perhaps through my work as a student affairs professional, I can help create an environment in which students will feel comfortable telling me and my colleagues their story and to help us understand their voice.

The sensitivity to voice also seemed to leave some students feeling frustrated by their tendency to confuse individuals with groups, and to use knowledge of groups to make assumptions about individuals. Thus, one student underscored the importance of taking the time to understand each student's unique story.

I feel very strongly that each student needs to be treated as an individual—we need to find out each student's story and the individual struggles, challenges, and celebrations that each student faces. All the literature in the world and the generalizations that we can make cannot give us a definitive answer about a student. Yes, identity is an issue for my voice. Yes, my voice is subject to "positive" stereotypes. Yes, my voice may have adjustment issues in college. Yes, my voice may be treated a certain way on the basis of skin coloring and the shape of the eyes. Yes, my voice may have a strong work ethic. Yes, my voice

may value family. Yes, my voice may be bright and have high academic achievement. Yes, my voice may value teamwork and cooperation. Then again, for my first hand voices [those people actually interviewed], were all of these true? No. Could they have been? Yes. Sure, under some circumstances.

Similarly, another student illustrated in her journal how such assumptions must be adjusted in the practice of working with individual students.

The difference is in the REAL skill that I want to learn—how to work with Latino students in a way that will help them without being assuming. At this point I believe one secret is to listen. Instead of saying, "I bet you miss your family don't you?" it would be better to ask, "Have you talked to your family lately? How are they? Do they miss you?" [Such questions are not] as assuming as the first one, [yet they] still [recognize that Latino students] may indeed be struggling with these issues more than other students.

In the final entry of the same student's journal she reflected on the journey ahead, realizing that she has much more to learn. For her the greatest impact seemed to be a newfound sensitivity to seek the presence of all voices in what she does.

What am I left with? Most of all that I am not done. Learning about people from different voices is an ongoing task. Even though I only focused on one culture, I've learned to question what I hear for as many voices as I can think of. When my residents plan events I find myself asking, "[I]s there anyone that this isn't going to include?" Sometimes it's racial, sometimes it's based on religious differences (especially during this time of year), sometimes it's simply the voice of "people who don't like to drink." At any rate, I've learned something very valuable to my being an effective practitioner.

Becoming aware of and sensitive to differences is only half the picture painted by participants in this project. For some, espoused understandings led to their concern for enactment, as is evident in one student's commitment after exploring the implications of her lesbian voice.

I guess the point I want to make is that "intrigued" isn't enough for me anymore. After keeping this voice journal, I have decided that I want to work with and for this particular group of people. In personalizing this voice, I have become an advocate rather than an observer. Keeping the journal really helped me to grow not only intellectually but also in empathy and integrity.

Another version of enactment came in the form of a friendship renewal with the source of one student's voice. She noted this outcome in her journal, with a distinct sense of relief of having come full circle in crossing the borders of time and distance to more fully appreciate what was once foreclosed: "To me that has been one of the greatest benefits, to get to know her on a higher level and to learn to ask more pointed questions and not to be afraid of asking questions." And such effects were not restricted to each student's own selected voice. One student's journal revealed an understanding that what may define one group may also define another: "I think I am developing empathy for my voice and it is transferable to other groups. I have learned from this to try to put myself in other's shoes—more than just one pair at a time." Perhaps the Voice Project exerted its greatest impact on students in positioning them, through heightened awareness, sensitivity, and personalization to ask deeper questions about the complexities of a multicultural world, where differences between individual and group experiences must continually be examined and challenged.

DISCUSSION

As we reflected on the methods and approaches these students used in the course of the Voice Project, we realized that this was a very powerful

process for most of them. In that context we offer some tentative claims, based upon the experiences observed and upon feedback gained from participating students, about the characteristics of their successful diversity encounters. We present these in the form of working hypotheses for purposes of further discussion. First, we believe that successful diversity encounters involve whole learning. The principal mechanism for completing the Voice Project entailed the writing of a voice journal. Clearly, the act of journal keeping became an important tool for encouraging students to go out and seek information, contacts, and experiences for purposes of acquiring and presenting their voice. Dated journal entries also allowed students to monitor the chronology of their voice as attempts were made to integrate it into course content and to develop progressively greater levels of sophistication and insight into their voice. Whole learning involves all of these steps. Through the lens of Kolb's (1983) model of experiential learning, the maintenance of the voice journal became a motive for students to seek concrete experiences, to observe reflectively, and to understand in principle as new frameworks for accommodating differences emerged. This process then led to further exploration and experimentation of new ideas, approaches, and attitudes. Such whole learning is transformative in the sense that doing, reflecting, abstracting, and experimenting, the four key points in Kolb's cycle of learning, come together to influence the core of one's beliefs, values, and understandings. In the end, this multifaceted approach, like Evans' (1997) Multicultural Immersion Project, results in a more complete form of learning that probably changes the way people act.

Second, successful encounters are self-directed and begin where individuals understand them. The Voice Project did not impose any particular parameters on the nature or degree of diversity explored by these students. Participants were encouraged to select whatever context of diversity they were comfortably ready to pursue. Their journal entries revealed that the degree of challenge and discomfort with this process varied widely among them. However, regardless of the level at which students began their exploration,

the experience ultimately left them better prepared to seek greater challenges. Through addressing one form of diversity, at their own level of comfort, the prospect of other forms of diversity (which many experienced vicariously through other students' voices) seemed to them all the more manageable. Placing the control and direction of this project in students' hands let them take the experience as far as they were prepared to go and seemed to minimize the degree of resistance some exhibited initially when faced with this task.

Third, successful diversity encounters must involve an element of risk. Risk taking is essential to any learning experience as new concepts and understandings challenge current assumptions and frames of reference. The risks these students often expressed in their journals related to fears of sounding stereotypic, appearing uninformed, or failing to accurately represent their voices, especially in the presence of some of their class colleagues who actually lived the voices they had selected. However, this element of risk seemed to create a degree of vulnerability among these students such that they experienced a heightened sense of responsibility to "get it right." The public nature of their selected voices placed a special burden on them to teach their peers with the best and richest sources of information available to them as they carefully thought about and integrated their learnings in their own minds before vocalizing them in class.

Fourth, these encounters are as much a process of thinking and experiencing as acquiring information. Through the process of learning about different voices these students also learned a way of thinking about differences. Tensions between idiographic (focusing on the unique) and nomothetic (focusing on the similar) understandings, between theoretical and concrete prescriptions, and between present and past norms, in the end, all seemed to fuel a form of contingent thinking and sensitivity that encouraged students to be much more skeptical than they were before about various claims. Having to account for their voices necessitated a persistent questioning and contextualizing on their part to understand the implications of their voice characteristics. Thus, in addition to an

increase in specific information about their voices they also gained an understanding of a process applicable to learning about other voices representing other differences.

Fifth, successful encounters involve a sequence of steps. Learning to understand differences seemed to follow a fairly predictable sequence for most of these students in this project. Initially most students felt a need to come to terms with or declare what they had already known or understood about their voices. For some this was an act of purging the ideas and beliefs they had carried with them in their lives up until that point in time, for whatever reason, but were embarrassed about or even regretted as they began the project. For others it was simply a chance to declare their own ignorance with respect to their voices. Nevertheless, purging seemed to be an important first step that invariably oriented them to the second step—information seeking. Some resorted immediately to standard methods of inquiry, such as library research and reading while others began with more personal sources through interviews, observations, contacts with friends and acquaintances. This became a very active period in their journal writing as they summarized and critiqued conceptual and experiential materials in their entries. The third step was characterized by a distinct engagement with their selected voice characteristics. By this time most students had actually named their voices and had created minimal personas for purposes of exploring implications within the context of the course syllabus. By this time, too, some had conducted voice experiments while others had attempted to speak in voice, either in their journals or in class discussions. The critical difference in this step seemed to be the transformation of their voices from distant, abstract phenomena to personalized, whole, and concrete individuals for whom they were beginning to experience a concerted sense of responsibility. This form of immersion in their voices was a natural prelude to the final step, advocacy, when students began to anticipate and argue for various concerns and adjustments in light of their voices and those of other students. Their new understanding of these differences became a

compelling framework for asking critical questions about various policies, practices, and theoretical models. However, not all students seemed to have reached a point of advocacy. For some, the semester's journey ended at the point of information seeking, or perhaps at the very early stages of engagement. Nevertheless, some students apparently completed the entire sequence within the 16-week term.

Sixth, successful encounters require repeated exposures across time. A unique feature and important dynamic of the Voice Project was its extension across time. Unlike other approaches to diversity which may focus on "special students" during a 2- or 3-week period within a particular course, the Voice Project sustained issues of diversity across the full term, regardless of the topic featured each week. Students were faced with the challenge of being accountable for their voices week after week as the course syllabus emerged. They were able to see one another's progress in acquiring their respective voices, as what was expressed in simpler terms initially evolved into increasingly subtle forms of understanding and insight. Having to "live with" their voices day after day in the context of a course encouraged them to develop more complex levels of expression that they recognized as more improved and effective across time. Furthermore, the extended time focus of this project gave the students the opportunity to correct and shape earlier understandings into a more satisfactory framework as they became comfortable with the information gained and knowledgeable of the kinds of questions they needed to ask. Movement toward greater empathy with diverse voices appeared to be a progressive phenomenon which improved and benefited from repeated exposures over time.

Finally, successful diversity encounters are enhanced by group involvement. Too often, multiculturalism is presented as an individual learning challenge, with the need to change individual thinking and individual attitudes. Although we incorporated individual-oriented

learning into the Voice Project, we did so within a group-oriented setting. This group dynamic contributed to a heightened sense of risk, as discussed above, but also encouraged students to share information and resources as they listened to each other's struggles to understand their voices' experience, ultimately effecting a richer mix of resources and insights within a supportive atmosphere. Just as norms of discrimination and bias are often reinforced by group membership, sources of enlightenment and insight are also enhanced by group participation. Rather than a problem "I" must solve, multiculturalism becomes a goal "we" embrace.

Through persistent observation, reflection, and engagement across time with a voice other than their own, participants in the Voice Project found themselves exploring, refining, and defending new perspectives and positions, nurturing an atmosphere of recognition and sensitivity to differences important in learning and development during the college years. We believe that the real value of this project, as a transformative approach to multicultural education, may lie in its contribution to students' learning to think contextually with respect to issues of student development and campus environments. Creating and speaking in voice challenged these students to take the emic perspective in considering how a different set of cultural assumptions might shape and define the goals of education and the methods selected to pursue them. Finally, we conclude that higher education will be better served by individuals who have developed a habitual instinct toward empathy for another. Being careful to listen to and understand others encourages more voices to be heard and affirmed, conditions that can only enhance the learning of all.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Carney Strange, Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403-0219; strange@bgnet.bgsu.edu

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