

Operational Diversity: Saying What We Mean, Doing What We Say

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Abstract

Diversity issues, ranging from individual learning styles to institutional equity, are central to teaching and learning, but identifying and addressing these issues is a formidable task. At the Center for Instructional Development and Research, our staff is gaining ground on this work through the Inclusive Practices Portfolio, a collaborative forum for documenting, sharing, and supporting our individual and organizational diversity initiatives. The process of developing the our Center's portfolio and the portfolio itself are mechanisms for change within the Center and a model for change at our institution and beyond.

We often hear that instructors on our campus agree in principle to campus diversity policies, but many remain unsure how to translate these policies into more inclusive classroom practices. Our staff at the Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR) have faced a parallel dilemma, knowing that diversity issues are central to questions of teaching and learning, but uncertain how to integrate attention to diversity into our work with instructors and administrators in their efforts to improve teaching and learning on campus. In response to these parallel dilemmas, CIDR staff began working together to articulate our beliefs about diversity, translate these beliefs into action, and assess the outcomes of our actions. This work has been documented in CIDR's

Inclusive Practices Portfolio, which provides us with a central location for integrating our ongoing individual and collaborative efforts. Our experience has demonstrated that a general commitment to diversity and inclusive practices can be transformed into identifiable actions, which in turn provides a basis for assessment, review, and planning for future growth. We also believe this experience provides a framework for others who wish to mobilize around a commitment to diversity.

Challenges and Opportunities of Diversity and Inclusiveness

Part of the challenge of addressing diversity is the nature of the topic: Diversity spans many issues, from individual learning styles to institutional equity, each associated with a wide range of possible actions (Gay, 1994). Much of the campus conversation about diversity has been in terms of recruitment and retention, issues that are only indirectly related to our work as instructional developers. Thus we found ourselves wondering how to best represent and respond to the complex array of issues included under the umbrella of "diversity," how we fit within the university's broader commitments, and how to prioritize among the many possible actions we could take.

Adding to these challenges is the fact that diversity is a politically charged topic. It is dismissed by some as political correctness; for others, it revolves around a single issue such as racial inequality. Our institution expresses commitment to diversity, but public reaction is mixed: Surveys of state residents show that most want graduates to be able to work effectively in culturally

diverse settings, but many are opposed to affirmative action or hiring TAs with accents. ¶Each of these perspectives potentially influences our clients in their work and, therefore, potentially influences how we work with them.

We found it fairly easy to agree about the challenges of addressing diversity, but we were not satisfied to continue leaving the challenges unmet. ¶To paraphrase social activist and educator Myles Horton (1990, p. 136), we felt we knew the basic reasons for our problems, but we wanted to get further than that. As a result, we began to take intentional steps to expand our knowledge, skills, and understanding of ourselves (Kardia, 1998; Marchesani & Adams, 1992), and also to articulate our assumptions and document our efforts so that they are subject to review and critical examination (Banks, 1998). Without a singular measure of "inclusiveness" as a basis for assessing our work, we began assembling our expressed beliefs, records of actions taken, assessments, and reflections into the Inclusive Practices Portfolio. Within the framework of the portfolio, our goal is to "analyze, clarify, and state [our] personal values related to cultural diversity, and to act in ways consistent with [our] beliefs" (Banks and Banks, 1995, p. 157). Most importantly, the portfolio has helped us work toward this goal both as individuals and as an organization, in order to make it possible to express CIDR's values and assess the consistency of our actions as an organization on our campus.

Organizational Change

Before the current work on the portfolio, CIDR already had a long history of involvement with diversity issues on our campus. CIDR produced a widely used video on the topic, "Teaching in the Diverse Classroom," sponsored campus-wide forums and guest speakers, and collaborated with campus-wide diversity initiatives. Furthermore, in our work with individual instructors we have had numerous opportunities to raise questions related to diversity among their students and its implications for their teaching. However, in spite of this long history and shared commitment to diversity, we found that as a group we were not necessarily thinking about diversity in the same ways or systematically assessing our work in the area. As the make-up of our staff changed over time, we did not have the same experiences to provide common reference points as a basis for shared values and collaborative actions. We also discovered we were not consistent in our decisions about bringing diversity issues into consulting. CIDR's goal already focuses on better learning for all students (Banks, 1993), but should we proactively raise diversity issues, only respond to instructors' explicit questions about diversity, or speak in terms of better learning for all students even when instructors explicitly ask questions about student diversity?

Prompted by these questions, we began very simply with a conversation in a staff meeting about the implications of diversity on our work with clients. This seemingly straightforward process led us to the realization that our individual experiences and knowledge of diversity issues had provided us with a

diverse range of insights on what we could do. However, this collection of interrelated ideas was difficult to encompass within a single shared vision for CIDR's role on campus. We wanted to collaboratively articulate this vision, building on the strengths of our diverse individual interests and experiences related to addressing the challenges and opportunities of diversity on our campus, but we were also wary of the exclusionary processes that often accompany group effort. Senge (1990) defines this unfortunately common group process as an organizational learning disability, whereby "joint decisions are watered-down compromises reflecting what everyone can live with, or else one person's view foisted on the group" (p. 24). We wanted our collective activities to be based upon a fundamental recognition of our own diversity, and as such to become the nexus for sharing, improving, and supporting our individual endeavors.

As we sought to implement this organizational change, it became very important to identify and acknowledge the organizational structure and culture of our Center so that the process we had embarked upon would not only reflect and affirm that organization, and would also illuminate areas for change. This notion is congruent with much of the diversity, multicultural education, and organizational change literature, which argues for both institutions and individuals to begin their work in this arena by first examining themselves (Gay, 2000; Gillespie, 2000; Kardia, 1998; Laylock, 2000; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Marchesani & Adams, 1992).

The underlying organizational framework of CIDR draws heavily upon a Total Quality Management (TQM) model that empowers individuals to work within and across teams to address and manage our daily activities. We are guided by five basic principles in particular that were drawn from Warren Deming's (1986) work in this area: (a) client orientation, (b) continuous improvement, (c) empowerment of our staff, (d) teamwork, and (e) professional development. In some ways this organizational identity positions us well to pursue change, but it also posed obstacles. For example, in one of our first conversations on diversity we found ourselves struggling to align the principle of client orientation, which often requires a responsive stance, with a desire to take on a more proactive role initiating change with our clients.

Our organization employs several of the structural elements and values of a TQM model, but the culture of our center more closely resembles that of a learning organization. In learning organizations "learning takes place in individuals, teams, the organization, and even the communities with which the organization interacts Learning results in changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors" (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, p. 8). Continuous learning on all levels serves CIDR staff and the campus community well, and is generally manifested in workshops, peer observations, and literature exchanges. However, few topics are as broad reaching, multi-layered, and personally challenging as diversity, and it remained a challenge for us to intentionally pursue organizational change over and above the learning of individuals and working groups within the

organization. It was for this reason that the Inclusive Practices Portfolio was developed as an important orienting point for our efforts: providing a forum for documenting the complexity of the topic (diversity) and the task (collaborative learning to promote organizational change), and doing so within CIDR's normal practices of data collection, analysis, and reflection (Nyquist & Wulff, 1988).

Saying What We Mean

The cornerstone of the portfolio is a Diversity Statement, developed through a series of interactions with one another, the diversity literature, and other members of the campus community. This statement attempts to make explicit the implicit assumptions guiding our practices (Rando and Menges, 1991). Our drafting of the statement began with a challenge by Professor Geneva Gay of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, to define our roles on campus with respect to diversity, and to determine the actions we were uniquely situated to take in those roles. This challenge helped us start in two ways: First, rather than trying to develop a comprehensive statement about diversity in higher education, we were encouraged to focus on the role our organization might be able to play on our campus. Second, it focused us on the actions implied by the principles we were trying to articulate.

In response to this challenge, staff members worked in groups to articulate or map out our organization's central roles on campus with respect to diversity. Groups presented their work to one another, and an editing group worked with the notes and concept maps to draft a statement which attempted to

distill the work from each group into a single document. This draft was circulated among the staff for feedback and went through numerous revisions until staff agreed that it represented our organization's roles on campus.

Groups of staff members were then asked to draft a set of action statements implied by these roles. The action statements similarly went through numerous revisions, and these led us back to revise the diversity statement itself as we faced the challenges of putting the earlier draft into action. The process of articulating our principles and actions spanned a twelve-month period, ending with a staff consensus that it adequately represented the values and priorities of our work on campus, and also with the understanding that the document was still open for further development. A current draft of the statement is provided in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Doing What We Say

After coming to a consensus on the statement of principles and actions, we further developed the action statements using the Standard Practices Survey. Staff members were asked to indicate for each action statement; (a) the extent to which it is part of their typical consulting practice, and (b) the extent to which they think it should be part of their typical consulting practice. Sample items showing the format of the instrument are provided in Figure 2.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Survey responses indicated that staff's consulting practices were most consistent (that is, ratings for "is" most closely matched ratings for "should be") for items directly related to exploring immediate classroom contexts and teaching practices (for example, items *l* and *f*). Practices were least consistent for items that implied working collaboratively with individuals or offices outside of CIDR (for example, items *r* and *q*). The next least consistent practices were for items most explicitly related to diversity and inclusiveness (for example, items *a* and *b*). Table 1 represents the results of the survey for our consulting staff.

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

The survey results provided us with important information about our consulting practices, which we used in three ways. First, we revisited the original statement and discussed possible revisions; for example, do all staff members need to take time to stay informed about university policies and departmental changes, or is it sufficient for CIDR leadership to keep informed and pass information along as needed? Second, in our discussion of the survey results we discovered areas that we unintentionally neglected in our draft statement: (1) explicit attention to faculty diversity and identity development (in addition to diversity among students), and (2) as part of our beliefs about how

change takes place, explicit attention to ongoing follow-up with clients and encouraging them to share their experiences with colleagues.

Third, and most importantly, we used this information to help us start examining our practices and identify areas in which we need to put our commitments into practice more effectively. Based on the survey results, staff members were asked to select a professional development activity designed with the specific goal of examining attention to diversity in our consulting practices. Examples of professional development activities included maintaining a journal of interactions with clients, taping consultation sessions, inviting colleagues to observe consultations, and presenting cases for peer review (see Figure 3). Reports and reflections on these experiences were documented and added to the Inclusive Practices Portfolio for others to review.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Following these activities, staff will review the Diversity Statement and re-take the Standard Practices Survey. Individuals can target specific areas for continuing development by referring to colleagues' records in the Inclusive Practices Portfolio in order to see who has worked in that area previously and who might be interested in additional collaboration. We will also make plans for external review, asking others in the campus community to assess our Portfolio,

and asking our clients to provide feedback on their experience working with our staff on issues of diversity.

Effects

As we have taken steps to articulate our goals and assess our actions, with respect to diversity on campus, we have also been mindful of the overarching question that originally prompted us to take these initiatives: As instructional developers, how can we contribute to wider campus efforts to foster a more inclusive teaching and learning community? Our efforts have helped us as a group to become more mindful of the gap between our personal and organizational values and the even larger gap between our beliefs and our actions, but how has this work affected the larger community we are a part of?

Our most direct effect to the campus is through consulting services to individuals and departments. Our work with the Inclusive Practices Portfolio has raised individual staff members' level of attention to diversity issues, and they report changes in the questions which they ask and issues which they raise as a result of our paying attention to these issues. It has also contributed to our development of materials, workshops, and internet resources that we provide for the campus. We will continue to document staff members' reports of changes in their consulting, client feedback, and other professional development activities that allow us to examine and improve our consulting and its impact on campus. Our hope is that through these ongoing processes of documentation, reflection, and development, the portfolio will continue to evolve as a record of our

collective best practices and improvement over time.

Another effect of our work has been to demonstrate the possibility of change. Since our work was reported in our university's staff newspaper and on our Center's web site, we have received feedback from the campus community and have also been approached by others to assist them in the process of instituting similar changes. With a more specifically articulated statement of our own roles on campus, we are also better prepared to collaborate with other units in broader institutional initiatives. Finally, our own experience with the complexity of this process has also given us a greater appreciation of what it would take for departments to go through a similar process.

The Inclusive Practices Portfolio provides a structure for ongoing critical self-examination. Noffke (1995) describes this action research process as one in which:

Understandings and actions emerge in a constant cycle, one that highlights the ways in which educators are partially correct, yet in continual need of revision, in their thoughts and actions. The process does not end, as with traditional notions of research, with richer understandings of education for others to implement; rather, it aids in an ongoing process of identifying contradictions, which in turn, help to locate spaces for ethically defensible, politically strategic actions (p. 4).

Like the process Noffke describes, our work with the Inclusive Practices Portfolio is not expected to reach a definitive end. Collaboratively documenting

and reflecting on our practices is helping us locate spaces for our Center to take action, assess outcomes of the actions we are uniquely situated to take, and position ourselves for ongoing active participation in our university's diversity initiatives.

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