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RECOGNITION OF PREVIOUS EDITORS

The *Forum for International Research on Students and Teaching* is the evolution of *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education* (RTDE), the scholarly journal of the New York College Learning Skills Association. For over thirty years, RTDE provided a space to share best practices for faculty and staff engaged in the often-challenging task of supporting students as the transitioned – either from high school, work, or international studies – to the college classroom. It is with sincere thanks that we recognize the editors of *RTDE*.

Rita Pollard, Fall 1985 1(1) – Fall 1987 3(1)

Rob Erwin & Janet Snoyer, Spring 1987 3(2), Spring 1988 4(2), Spring 1989 5(2) – Spring 1990 6(2)

Janet Snoyer, Fall 1987 4(1), Fall 1988, (5)1

Patricia A. Malinowski and Susan D. Huard Fall 1990 7(1) – Spring 1994 10(2)

Patricia A. Malinowski Fall 1994 11(1) – Spring 2006 22(2)

Mary Ellen Mulvey Fall 2006 23(1) – Fall 2010 27(1)

Marie Hannan-Mandel Spring 2011 27(2) – Spring 2017 33(2)

Kim Ballerini, Fall 2017 – Spring 2019

Jesse M. Redlo and Emily S. Ryan Radder, Fall 2019, Special Issue

Jesse M. Redlo, Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, Special Issues

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome readers!

I have the distinct honor of inviting you to the *Forum for International Research on Students and Teaching* (*FIRST*). While the name may be new, the New York College Learning Skills Association (NYCLSA) has a long history of supporting research in our field. For nearly forty years we have shared insights with issues of *Research and Teaching in Development Education* (RTDE). Our field, though, has expanded beyond the physical and virtual walls of developmental education. While we will continue to highlight scholarship on teaching and learning, our new journal name reflects the powerful opportunity of centering the work of our centers and classrooms on student learning.

In this issue you will find two scholarly articles that explore the intersection of diversity and learning. The six co-authors of “Antiracist spaces for students to grow in classrooms and student services” explore how several of the terms included in the Colleagues of Color for Social Justice (CCSJ) glossary resonate with their own identities and experiences. Their deeply poignant reflections on diversity are authentic, demonstrating the benefit of regularly engaging in practices that encourage self-awareness. In “Constructivist practices in first-year education courses: Utilizing manipulatives to represent diversity and impact student engagement”, Riegel demonstrates one way we can encourage students to see a diversity of perspectives and its value within their own learning. Both articles challenge us to consider how diversity initiatives at our institutions can influence our shared teaching and learning environments.

In addition to sharing new research, we asked Sharon Green to interview the first three editors of *RTDE* – Rita Pollard, Rob Erwin, and Janet Snoyer – to share their insights as we build upon their significant work of starting a journal for our field. Their observations about the importance of scholarly publications and the shifts in the field of higher education are lodestones to guide me as I step into the editorial role and hopefully to you as well as you consider your contributions to the field.

We close this issue with two new columns. The first spotlights a dissertation, highlighting forthcoming research that we believe will help shape our profession. The second reminds of us an article previously published in *RTDE* that may inspire our continued scholarship.

Safe journeys,

Nichole LaGrow
FIRST Editor

ANTIRACIST SPACES FOR STUDENTS TO GROW IN CLASSROOMS AND STUDENT SERVICES

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Abstract

While the national conversation about antiracism and racism has introduced a new vocabulary to many Americans, far fewer deeply understand their meanings and applications to everyday life. This article selected seven of these vocabulary terms and applied them to the classroom and student services for secondary and postsecondary students. These terms include *ally*, *imposter syndrome*, *intersectionality*, *racial humility*, *privilege* and *check your privilege*, and *social justice*. The coauthors of this article often wrote in a first-person style as they shared real-life examples and the solutions they chose to combat a toxic learning environment. Each coauthor is a member of Colleagues of Color for Social Justice. This article extends the national dialogue on the pervasive presence of racism through real-life examples in educational settings.

Keywords: academic access, antiracism, education, glossary, pedagogy, racism

Introduction

Part of the problem with the national dialogue about race is a misunderstanding of the actual definitions of the words and, more importantly, how to apply them to real-life situations. While words involving race and antiracism are commonly used in the media, too little attention is spent on applying those words practically to everyday life. This article focused on classroom and student service activities.

This publication is one of a series published by a writing group named Colleagues of Color for Social Justice (CCSJ). In the fall of 2020, the CCSJ was created for educators of color in higher education to produce publications and media projects that intersected with race and social justice. At their institutions, our fifty members serve and provide leadership through their roles in academic affairs, enrollment management, and student affairs. This group grows organically as we conduct our work. Future CCSJ projects include an audiobook of glossary terms voiced by students of color, identifying the demeaning and racist language used to label marginalized students, and other projects initiated by CCSJ members.

The first publication by the CCSJ members was an antiracism glossary of 48 antiracism and racism terms that have enormously impacted American society (Pokhrel et al., 2021). A unique feature of that glossary included detailed examples of the harmful impact of racism. It was a painful process for many of the coauthors who were educators of color to share personal examples of the racist environment they experienced and endured daily. That glossary inspired this one which provides longer descriptions of the impact of racism in their work setting. This article takes a handful of these terms and applies them to the classroom and student services for secondary and postsecondary students. These terms are *ally*, *imposter syndrome*, *intersectionality*, *racial humility*, *privilege and check your privilege*, and *social justice*.

Dr. Kendi, who has written widely on racism and antiracism, provides encouragement for this publication. The following are the final words shared by Kendi from *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019):

> Racist power is not godly. Racist policies are not indestructible. Racial inequities are not inevitable. Racist ideas are not natural to the human mind…But racism is one of the fastest spreading and most fatal cancers humanity has ever known… When we lose hope, we are guaranteed to lose. But if we ignore the odds and fight to create an antiracist world, then we give humanity a chance to one day survive, a chance to live in communion, a chance to be forever free. (p. 238)

Review of the Professional Literature

The following literature review identifies some of the significant authors and researchers in this field and the solutions they have promoted for making this a more just world for all races. Some authors offer practical solutions for changing the

classroom learning environment. Bauer and Clancy (2018) identified curricular practices to create a socially-just learning environment for students of diverse races. They encouraged instructors to approach the learning environment from the student's perspective rather than the instructor's point of view. Blackwell (2010) critiqued the approach taken by many instructors in the classroom environment. Blackwell stated we needed an antiracist pedagogy to make the classroom accessible for all races. Brunsma et al. (2012) identified practical steps to dismantle the walls of Whiteness that were prevalent in college classrooms. Harbin et al. (2019) identified best practices for teaching about racism. The coauthors argued that change required intentional course design and guided class facilitation to engage students in hard conversations. Sue (2013) identified the necessity for race talk as an essential part of conversations among diverse racial groups in the classroom. Race talk might threaten participants, be very emotional, and sometimes result in racial microaggressions. Sue identified specific protocols for these conversations so that the end effect was a positive learning experience for students of all racial groups.

Several widely-read books have influenced the national race dialogue. *In White Fragility* (2011), DiAngelo identified a significant stumbling block for White people to understand the impact of racism in American society. She identified several steps to overcome this condition. The first step in overcoming White fragility was recognizing its existence. Farr (2014) offered insight into the profound nature of racism that operates beneath many White people's conscious level. Solutions were provided for awakenings to occur among the students. Professor Kendi's books influenced the general public and the academic community. His 2019 book on *How to be an antiracist* brought together the theories, manifestations of racism in America, and antiracist actions to overtake it. Kendi ended his book with a hopeful vision for a new society that embraced antiracism to create an equitable society for all races.

Overview of Selected Antiracism Glossary Terms

This article is based on the 48 terms defined in a previously published glossary, *Antiracism Glossary for Education and Life* (Pokhrel, et al., 2021). This article's coauthors selected a few of these 48 terms and applied them to their classroom spaces and student service activities such as TRIO. They explained how those terms were practically applied. The authors shared personal stories of their interactions with students and how they sought to create an antiracist learning environment that benefited students of all racial groups.

Besides the antiracism glossary by Pokhrel et al. (2021), several other race glossaries were influential with the authors of this article. Those included the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre (2018), Center for Equity, Gender, and Leadership (2021), Georgetown University Library (2020), Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Institute (2018), Race Forward (2015), and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (n.d.). This publication builds upon the work of these race glossaries by providing detailed

examples that illustrate the glossary definitions and offered actions to overcome the negative impact of racism by embracing antiracist actions, behaviors, and thoughts.

One of the co-authors completed each section of this article. First, the term was defined by the glossary previously created by Pokhrel et al., 2021. Then the coauthor applies the term to the classroom or a student service activity such as the federally-funded GEAR UP and TRIO programs. This fuller application of the term to education provided a larger context for understanding. The coauthors of this article often wrote in a first-person style as they shared real-life examples and the solutions they chose to combat a toxic learning environment. The goal was that the national dialogue on race could be improved and deepened through these real-life examples.

We begin our application of the antiracism glossary terms with the term "*ally*". The right for racial justice must involve all in society, including those with privilege and power. A White educator wrote this section.

Ally

Definitions: (a) "A person who supports a group other than their own" (Berkner Boyt, 2020, para. 10); and (b) A person who acknowledges disadvantages and oppression of other groups and takes action to stand with them and oppose the oppression (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, n.d.); (Pokhrel et al., p. 77).

Lawrence and Tatum (2004) outlined how White faculty could serve as essential allies to change the classroom learning environment. Through a lengthy professional development program, White faculty moved their White identity from colorblind to an active force for antiracism in the classroom. First, it was essential for the faculty to recognize their White privilege before they were motivated to change their beliefs and behaviors in life and the classroom. Teel (2014) identified actions that White instructors could take to be an ally for change: diversifying the syllabus, listening more to students as they requested modifications to the classroom learning activities, and reevaluating the course learning goals by understanding the needs of the students of color.

As a White faculty member, I have been on a rapid learning curve concerning myself with issues related to antiracism and racism. Living in the same city as the murder of George Floyd and other people of color has accelerated that personal introspection and movement to becoming a partner in the struggle for racial equity. I moved from focusing on not committing racist actions in the classroom and behaving in a colorblind fashion to becoming an active ally with my colleagues of color. I began to understand White privilege and how I could leverage it to be an ally by using my influence to advance conversations on structural racism in education. We all need to be involved in solving the issues and constructing a socially-just society. In conversations where only Whites were present, I spoke up on behalf of people of color and confronted others when they expressed disparaging comments, displayed ignorance of issues that impact people of color, committed microaggression

behaviors, or voiced ignorant and stereotypical statements. My academic writing projects made it clear that they intersected with race and social justice issues. Understanding my limitations, I invited colleagues of color to coauthor publications, which led to the creation of *Colleagues of Color for Social Justice*, a writing and media production group. The group is described in an earlier paragraph in this article.

Our next glossary term is a common experience of many people, regardless of their racial background, economic status, and prior life experiences. Being an Ally as a White person with people of color requires a changed perception of self to join others. However, what if a person has internal limitations that inhibit their behaviors? The following term describes an affliction that confronts many people.

Imposter Syndrome

Definition: Also known as impostership describes a psychological phenomenon in which people are unable to internalize their accomplishments. Impostership characteristics are largely organized into three subcategories (1) feeling like a fake, or the belief that one does not deserve one's success; (2) attributing success to luck or other external reasons and not to one's own internal abilities; and (3) discounting success, or the tendency to downplay or disregard achievement of success (Dancy, 2017, p. 933); (Pokhrel et al., 2021, p. 83).

Imposter syndrome is a "psychological phenomenon in which people are unable to internalize their accomplishments" (Dancy, 2017. p. 933). Anyone could have feelings of being an "impostor" however, research suggested women and minority groups were particularly vulnerable. As a result, they could have negative feelings about achievement, experience self-doubt, or lack self-confidence. Students conflicted with academic achievement may push themselves with higher expectations, creating more internal pressure to succeed. Women and minority students may also have issues of social belonging and how their White counterparts perceive them. There are three subcategories of this phenomenon: (a) feeling like a fake, (b) attributing success to external reasons, or (c) simply discounting the success they have achieved. Helping students overcome these challenges in the classroom can occur by implementing small behavioral changes that could prove valuable to all students and result in their higher academic achievement and a higher rate of persistence toward graduation.

As faculty members, we can help students recognize that their thoughts of feeling like a fake is not unique to them. Other students experienced similar identity crises at various points of their academic careers but seldom discuss these feelings with their friends and other students. Several faculty members describe how they are taking different approaches with helping their students to succeed academically. Tim Riordian of Alverno College suggested we study our students with the same intensity as we study our disciplines. Riordan and Roth (2004)

argue for new learning pedagogies that foster higher levels of academic engagement in the learning environment for students. Yeager et al. (2013) promoted the idea that faculty needed to examine the learning environment from the student's perspective rather than from their own. This is difficult for some faculty since they are separated by a generation or more from when they were in the classroom. One strategy I used with students is to have a peer mentor or a former student from my class talk with the students during the first week of the semester. I am intentional about often selecting a student of color. This works exceptionally well for first-year students or older returning adults believing they do not deserve the opportunity to be in college. This intervention allows the diverse, more senior student to share stories of their college experiences and listen to concerns the students in the class may have. Inviting a student speaker normalized the thoughts of "feeling like a fake" as a range of everyday challenges and not specifically related to an individual (Walton & Crum, 2022) or accomplishment assumptions.

Students attributing success to luck or other external reasons and discounting success or downplaying achievement of success can be supported in a variety of ways. Introducing the concept of growth and fixed mindset (Dweck, 2007) or sharing the ideas of tenuous behavior with students can help them understand how success is created and maintained. I have had success talking with students about growth mindsets and that sometimes things feel out of their control, but they have the capacity for success by being strategic rather than reactionary. Some students tell me they have used the growth and fixed mindset information with their family and friends.

To reinforce the changed behaviors, I have students write letters to themselves at the beginning of the semester talking about their hopes and fears of attending the class. At the end of the semester, they read their letters and write a letter to themselves to read next semester. Some students give me letters to share with students in upcoming semesters. In the final letters, students write about what they did to overcome their self-sabotaging behaviors and thoughts. Some students are surprised to read their thoughts from the beginning of the semester. It is incredible what impact sixteen weeks can have. Overall, noncognitive or social-psychological interventions can help students value their place in academia without fearing subconscious thoughts. While many strategies help students overcome the ideas of impostor syndrome, a brief list with references provides a good overview of some of the strategies mentioned here. The *Project for Education Research That Scales* or *PERTS* offers free classes for students and educators which help apply evidence-based approaches to advance educational excellence and equity on a large scale. There is an online class for students outlining the concepts of social belonging and a short course on belonging for educators.

The *imposter syndrome* can impact our self-perceptions and future actions. Building upon this understanding of how our view can affect us, the following glossary term unravels our views of self and others. The next section on "*intersectionality*" reminds

us all of the complicated nature of the struggle for equity and equality. The author provides numerous suggestions for improving the intersectional experience of students. The following paragraphs state that all live at the intersection of multiple identities.

Intersectionality

Definition: ”Analytical framework through which the relationship among systems of oppression can be understood. African American women made an early contribution to this analysis in the 19th century. Recognizing that they experienced racism and sexism differently from both Black men and White women even while they shared commonalities with both, they argued that a struggle that did not simultaneously address sexism and racism would only perpetuate both” (Diversity Advisory Council, n.d., section I, para. 4); Pokhrel et al., 2021, 84).

Despite its lengthy pronunciation and spelling, the term “*intersectionality*”, can simply be defined as “Intersecting or bringing together of several factors (race, gender, religion, sexuality, etc.) that identify, as well as determine how an individual will be perceived or classed in society” (Edwards et al., n.d., section I, para. 9). As a result, such factors have much bearing on the level of oppression (if any) versus privilege that an individual will likely experience for a period, or throughout their lifetime. In 1989, Professor Kimberle Crenshaw coined this term to bring awareness and understanding to society regarding the sad reality of systematic racism and oppression (Crenshaw, 2017).

Examples of Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a problem in our world today. Various personal accounts and experiences make this statement relevant. For example, a Deaf, gay, Hispanic male has three identity factors intersecting with one another. Not only is his deafness considered a disability and a roadblock to his success, but his sexual identity may also be looked down upon because of traditional societal views regarding sexuality. To add, his race is of the minority crowd, so he would not readily be afforded the same opportunities that even a Deaf, gay, Caucasian male would. So, in such a case, he would fall into three separate marginalized groups: disabled, LGBTQ, and minority. All these factors come together and can result in oppressive treatment from various arenas of society. As an example of this glossary term, as a former graduate student at a college, I informed my White professor by using an American Sign Language Interpreter that I needed accommodations for my courses. Even though we seemed to have a good conversation until this moment, the professor replied, “Oh, you can use English Language Support Center. It would be very helpful for you.” I was puzzled and wondered why he said that. It made me realize that I am Hispanic and Deaf. It is how he made those assumptions. Being Deaf or Hispanic does not mean that I cannot write well. It made me feel inferior.

Another relevant example is that of a Black female. Not only is she considered unequal

by racist society because of her skin color, but she is also demoted in ability due to her gender. Therefore, she will experience life very differently than males of her own race because of her gender. According to Burns et al. (2012), “Women of color make up 33 percent of women in the workforce. Breaking it down by race and ethnicity, 67 percent of women in the workforce are non-Hispanic White, 13 percent are Hispanic, 13 percent are Black, 5 percent are Asian, and 2 percent are other” (p. 3). These statistics confirm that females of color are substantially underrepresented. By extension of these statistics, women are misrepresented in multiple aspects of modern life in the workplace, entertainment, politics, and other areas. The opportunities for advancement and the privilege of being seen, are truly lacking. Such is even the case in the educational system. Low-income minority families are at the core of underprivileged society, and thereby, limited to opportunities for quality education and succeeding alongside their Caucasian peers. Even low-income Caucasian students fair better than Black students because Caucasian students have skin color working in their favor. However, there is a solution to the problem. Much acknowledgment and effort towards change are imperative for the possibility of true action.

Potential Solutions to Intersectionality. Much of what we learn early in life is a result of our training, not only in the home setting but largely too, in the classroom. Therefore, the mindfulness of educators can be a steppingstone towards helping to eradicate *intersectionality* within the educational system as well as in society. Teachers can do much to help students understand that unconscious bias can quickly expand, leading to unpleasant and negative consequences for many. But how can this be done? Several suggestions are practical in this situation. For example, teachers can challenge students to self-evaluate why they believe what they do and analyze why their views may differ from those of their peers. Fostering this type of self-reflection can create a consciousness in the students as to how people are different individuals and how those differences may be perceived in society. Furthermore, the action of student self-reflection with a specific prompt for consideration of their multiple identities can shed light on how those differences can impact us individually. In other words, diversity and inclusivity are high points for discussion for students through careful guidance by the teacher. Educational institutions can equip faculty with the necessary tools and resources to create an inclusive classroom and campus environment. In addition, students and faculty should be encouraged to regularly provide feedback as to how diversity could be better achieved. Lesson plans and curricula can be screened to identify and address unintended biases. Teachers can create a “*safe space*” for students to be open and express themselves concerning their personal experiences with intersectionality. The promotion of diverse voices is a major step to creating an atmosphere where color, gender, sexual orientation, and religion (among many other factors) play no part. Teachers also need a “*safe space*” for them to share their curriculum and pedagogical choices for peer review by other faculty members that is not part of the annual

performance review process. Safe spaces for both the students and the teachers can help make change occur at deeper levels for building a more inclusive and caring learning environment.

Understanding *intersectionality* provides a deeper understanding of our identity as a complicated set. It provides a strong motivation for self-reflection about our own lives and those of others. Intentional self-reflection regarding inclusivity and intersectionality can prompt humility when considering the lives and challenges people of other races face. That brings us to our next glossary term, *racial humility*.

Racial Humility

Definitions: (a) Learning across the lines of racial difference (Gallardo, 2013); and (b) a look back (at prior racial injustices) in order to move forward (Perkins, 2018). (Pokhrel et al., 2021, p. 87).

Racial humility, also known as *cultural humility*, is a humble and respectful attitude towards individuals of other cultures. The term was developed as an evolution of *cultural competency* (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). When cultural competency is used as a goal to defeat social injustice such as bias, racism, cultural appropriation, and microaggressions, it overlooks the fact that no one can know everything about every culture, race, and individual difference. *Racial humility*, conversely, admits the limitation of one's cultural competency and focuses on consistent effort for self-reflection, assessment, and improvement. Hence, *racial humility* is not a goal but rather a lifelong approach and humble attitude toward the continuous improvement of our cultural intelligence.

Examples of *Racial Humility*. *Racial humility* is more than just high-profile activities like extensive diversity training; a great example of *racial humility* is engaging in conversations around racism and social justice. Mindful questions, comments, and body language are required when discussing these topics, but unintentional mistakes are bound to happen. With *racial humility*, we admit our fault without being defensive and remain humble to learn from our mistakes. As an example, let us imagine a college-wide diversity council meeting. An engaged White faculty member used the term "*dreadlocks*" to explain cultural appropriation when worn by a non-Black person. A Black faculty member pointed out that this term has derogatory connotations due to its historical background. The White faculty member showed *racial humility* by apologizing for the mistake and thanking them for the call-out. Afterward, this faculty researched the term "*dreadlocks*" to further understand its history and how it is derogatory. After gaining more knowledge, he followed up with his Black colleague to continue the conversation and to thank him for the learning opportunity.

Like cognitive development, improving your *racial humility* starts with reflection and self-awareness. Additionally, mindful critique of your actions and how they impact others is another example of *racial humility*. For instance, after grading an algebra quiz, a faculty member took time to reflect and realized her different attitudes toward low scores performed by either an Asian-

American or Black student. She noted her unconscious bias towards certain students and decided to apply anonymity in the grading process. To combat her bias, the faculty member also read about Katherine Johnson and other Black mathematicians who contributed to technological advancement.

Applications of *Racial Humility* in Higher Education. Engaging in the conversation on racism, or having deep reflection to challenge your implicit bias, while great examples of *racial humility*, are not easily practiced. Many of us are hesitant to jump into conversations where we know we will make mistakes or offend others due to a lack of knowledge. With an ever-evolving pool of information, learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion can be overwhelming. As educators in higher education, we can create a brave environment to support *racial humility*. A brave environment, as opposed to a safe one, is where participants are willing to be vulnerable to teach and learn. We can be role models by demonstrating *racial humility*, and engaging in conversation while showing how to handle mistakes.

Many scholars and professionals contributed to the emergence of *racial humility*. In their 1998 article "Cultural humility versus cultural competence," Tervalon and Murray-García introduced this concept to improve equity in healthcare and the patient experience. As a concept analysis, Foronda (2016) shared the consequences of the term. Fisher-Borne (2015) and Lekas (2020) focused on the differences between cultural humility and cultural competency in social work and education (Gallardo, 2013). Alsharif (2012) highlighted the importance of *racial humility* through the lens of student support.

Conclusion. *Racial humility* is a lifelong learning approach that helps us humble ourselves to understand others better. It permits us to be unskilled while also giving us the accountability to counteract our complacency. Our communities are changing, and educators can participate in this movement by embracing and incorporating *racial humility* in and outside the classrooms.

Racial humility is essential for our increasingly diverse world. Developing this trait requires both introspection and changed behaviors with others. This introspection leads directly to the following two glossary terms, *privilege* and *check your privilege*.

Privilege and Check Your Privilege

Definition of Check Your Privilege: "When someone asks you to "check your privilege," they are asking you to pause and consider how the advantages you've had in your life are contributing to your opinions and actions, and how the lack of disadvantages in certain areas is keeping you from fully understanding the struggles others are facing and in fact may be contributing to those struggles" (Oluo, 2019, p. 63); (Pokhrel et al., 2021, 79).

Definition of Privilege: (a) “A right that only some people have access or availability to because of their social group membership. Because hierarchies of privilege exist, even within the same group, people who are part of the group in power (White people with respect to people of color, men with respect to women, heterosexuals with respect to homosexuals, adults with respect to children, and rich people with respect to poor people) often deny they have privilege even when evidence of differential benefit is obvious” (Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Institute, 2019, p. 15); and (b) “These advantages can often be ascribed to certain social groups: privilege based on race, physical ability, gender, class, etc. But these privileges can also lie in areas that you may have not considered, like sexuality, body type, and neurological differences” (Oluo, 2019, p. 60); (Pokhrel et al., 2021, 86).

The goal here is to address what “*privilege*” and “*check your privilege*” would look like in education, focusing on TRIO and GEAR UP students. These two programs are federally funded to provide access and preparation for a successful experience in postsecondary education with higher grades and higher rates of persistence towards graduation. Requirements for TRIO student participation often include being economically disadvantaged and historically underrepresented in college. GEAR UP students attend secondary schools that are financially impoverished and fail to equip them with the intellectual and social capital that they will need when they attend postsecondary education. We will look at several perspectives of professionals and students.

White Privilege Surveys. To understand “*privilege*” and “*check your privilege*”, the results from the use of several surveys were studied to determine the relevancy of these terms in the education environment. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie created the *White Privilege Test* that is cited frequently by educational researchers in the professional literature.

The open-ended survey was given to a group of TRIO and GEAR UP adults and participants to obtain a sense of their feelings on White Privilege. These students came from marginalized backgrounds: students of color, economically-disadvantaged, and families in which no one had attended college. The demographic breakdown of those that completed the test was 28% staff and faculty, 6% veterans, 10% adults, 10% high school students, and 40% college or university students. This survey was anonymous, confidential, and used only for generating results for this article. I also examined the *National Civil Rights Museum White Privilege Test*. The questions on that survey did not adequately apply for the GEAR UP and TRIO students. Following are the results of using the survey for adults and students.

Results for Adults. The results of the *White Privilege Test showed many adults were* not overly concerned about using the terms Privilege and Check Your Privilege. The consensus of the survey respondents was

that privileges are benefits enjoyed by an elite group. For example, driving is a privilege, but voting is a right. In the United States, there has been a history where people have been privileged to exercise all their rights while others have not. So, what happens to people who do not have privileges because of their race, creed, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, or veteran status? Often the topics have become a general acceptance. Everyone is striving for better status and not interpreting their status as privileged. As described in the following paragraph, the results for the students who completed the survey will be quite different.

Results for Students. The student's reaction to Privilege and Check Your Privilege in an education space as measured by the survey is that they know who likes or supports them based on how others react to them. Students lives are different based on the feelings generated through their interaction with others. Students react negatively to persons reacting negatively to their responses and the students find it hard to feel positive towards those individuals or groups. It also affects the positive success of students. Some students feel they are not helped, and not given positive grades because they believe they are inadequate or deserving, or they do not fit along with others in the classroom. Some students are conscious of their actions, and others are not. The end result is that it fosters an environment that impacts the students. Students feel they are questioned about their desire to pursue STEM, engineering, math, or other subjects that have few people of color. Included in the responses were students in sports without several persons of color like baseball.

Students felt that being in a TRIO and GEAR UP program made the difference in being accepted and appreciated. There was the feeling that the staff cared, wanted the best for them, and helped them at college or completing college and preparing for a future. Included was the feeling that they saw people who looked like them and people who are successful. There was the feeling there was no judgment, and they could do whatever they desired.

This evaluation of the different experiences by adults and students of *privilege* and *check your privilege* were dramatically different. The adults were less sensitive to the negative impact of those terms to their lived experience. On the other hand, the students found the terms described a negative learning environment. The majority of the GEAR UP and TRIO students were from marginalized backgrounds of being a student of color, economically-disadvantaged, and being the first in their families to consider a college education. Lacking social capital, lacking privilege, and experiencing negative experiences and lacking verbal support by teachers that did not check their privilege of being White and college-educated. This placed the students in high risk of academic failure. GEAR UP and TRIO programs provide a supportive learning environment for the students to overcome the barriers so they can achieve their dreams.

Staff working in those programs often come from similar marginalized backgrounds as the students. They are careful to focus on creating learning activities where students

can achieve academic success and build experiences that enhance agency, self-confidence, and a vision for their future lives. Staff is trained to be sensitive with the power differentials in the classroom between teachers and staff with students who are struggling due to lack of academic preparation by public education and challenges the students may be experiencing due to poverty and a lack of role models within their families who have succeeded in education. The staff understands privilege and how to live in a society that is composed of structural racism and how to overcome it.

Our final glossary word to examine is *social justice*. The discussion about *privilege* and *check your privilege* is focused on a person's reflection of how they relate to others and the power they possess, whether they recognize it or not. Ending our discussion with this term is appropriate since it encompasses the previous ones.

Social Justice

Definitions: (a) The condition in which all people have equal access to education, employment, wealth, healthcare, well-being, justice, freedom, and opportunity; (b) a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure (Adams et al., 2007); and (c) "individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency and a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live. These conditions we wish not only for own society but also for every society in our interdependent global community. The process of attaining the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and capabilities for working collaboratively to create change. The goal of social justice education is to enable people to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their socialization within oppressive systems and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities they are a part" (Bell, 2007, pp. 1–2); (Pokhrel et al., 89).

What are the global issues for creating an environment that reflects *social justice*?

According to the Pachamama Alliance (2021), “Social justice issues can be delineated into two categories, which are interrelated and often co-dependent: inter-social treatment and unequal government regulation. Inter-social treatment involves the treatment of certain groups of people based on personally-held biases and prejudices. These prejudices often manifest with sociological categories: race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, education, and mental or physical ability. Unequal government regulation involves laws and regulations that purposefully or otherwise create conditions that obstruct, limit, or deny certain groups equitable access to the same opportunities and resources available to the rest of society. These laws can intentionally (explicitly) or unintentionally (implicitly) create the conditions for social injustice. Areas in which government policy often gives rise to social inequality and injustice include voting laws, policing laws, environmental laws, health care laws, education laws, and labor laws” (para. 2–5).

So, what does this mean for the classroom? Simply, educators must be mindful of *social justice* concerns and be willing to make space for changes in their classroom practices, the structure of learning environments, interpersonal communications, tutoring, mentoring, coaching interactions, and other campus activities (Bauer & Clancy, 2018).

Blake noted “The first way to promote social justice in the classroom is to create a community of conscience. This environment ensures that students’ voices, opinions, and ideas are valued and respected by their instructors and peers. Teachers can establish a community of conscience by creating rules that teach fairness in classroom discussions and behavior” (n.d., para. 8). A classroom is a place where it is vitally important for students to have their voices heard. They must feel comfortable speaking and assured that someone is listening.

Randolph & Johnson (2017) offered suggestions on delivering classroom practices through a *social justice* lens. For example, a traditional classroom practice would be to have “students attend a community event and interview a native or heritage speaker” (p.114). The authors recommend changing the assignment to “students attend a cultural event and interact with native and heritage speakers. Students reflect on themes of intercultural communicative competence (attitudes, conversational roles, openness to new perspectives, etc.) based on their interactions” (p.114). The bottom line is that “lessons on *social justice* are less about your opinions [as a teacher] and more about helping your students uncover and express theirs” (Lynch, 2019).

Conclusion

Lasting change occurs when the nuances of language are explored, understood, internalized, and applied to a person’s lived experience. It is much easier to debate the general concepts of antiracism and racism than to implement them in the classroom and other student learning spaces. A handful of detailed definitions were applied to the classroom and student services for secondary and postsecondary students. These terms were *ally, imposter syndrome,*

intersectionality, racial humility, privilege and check your privilege, and *social justice*. A common theme that emerged from these glossary terms and improvement were the terms self-awareness and reflection. Both were indicated as some of the actions that White persons could take to overcome structural racism in society. Understanding person thoughts and actions (or lack of actions) help to perpetuate the divisions within society. This article continues a more nuanced national dialogue on racism through these real-life examples in educational settings. A deeper understanding of these words takes us beyond avoiding racism by understanding that antiracism action is necessary to cleanse the learning environment for our students regardless of their ethnic or racial background. They promote better learning for all.

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CONSTRUCTIVIST PRACTICE IN FIRST-YEAR EDUCATION COURSES: UTILIZING MANIPULATIVES TO REPRESENT DIVERSITY AND IMPACT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of a thoughtfully designed activity that used manipulatives to represent student diversity and impact student engagement within a constructivist course for first-year education students at a small private liberal arts university. The activity encouraged students to represent their own diversity by building something of value using clay models. The analysis of the clay models revealed five themes: sports/hobbies, animals, jobs, nationality/culture, and education. The study also examined student engagement throughout the semester. Notably, results indicated student engagement increased over time, with above-average engagement observed among students in peer interactions. Additionally, student-to-material interactions and LMS activity remained consistent throughout the semester. Findings suggest the clay model activity, and the course as a whole, fostered diversity representation and enhanced student engagement in the classroom. The course serves as a model for promoting social justice and inclusive education on campus.

Keywords: manipulatives, constructivism, diversity

Introduction

Elements of equity and diversity shape curriculum, pedagogy, classroom organization, technology, and the expectations held by various educational stakeholders. It follows that courses addressing the integration of these concepts are commonplace within educational preparation programs (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2022). However, these courses are often pedagogical in nature and focus on theory, multiculturalism, and/or culturally responsive teaching (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2023). Given this gap, a course entitled Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion was established at a small private liberal arts university in the American Northeast to a) introduce the prospective teacher to the issues of respect, appreciation, and celebration of diversity in the educational setting and b) examine the myths and origins of prejudice and discrimination. The course was designed with a constructivist practice, considering the experiences, values, and multiple identities of the students as the foundation from which learning, development, and wellness were facilitated. The goal was to have prospective teachers explore strategies to enhance learning for students with cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, physical, and mental differences.

This study looks at one activity, clay models, that was thoughtfully designed using manipulatives and administered within the first week of class to highlight class diversity, open dialog regarding the topic as it pertains to the first-year students, and discuss best practices for valuing the diversity of their own future students. Specifically, the study addresses ways in which first-year education students represented their own diversity through identifying something of value using clay models, and ways the clay model activity impacted student engagement within the course. Although this course is not (yet) required for all education majors, its success in developing a better understanding of diversity as it pertains to future teachers has made it a model social justice course on campus.

Diversity Representation

Building respect for each other's diversity among college first-year students is crucial for fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. As students come from various backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, it is essential to create spaces where diversity is not only acknowledged but also celebrated. Pascarella et al. (1996) found that fostering an openness to diversity during the first year of college life could be achieved through participation in thoughtfully designed student experiences and involvement in diverse peer-to-peer engagement. By intentionally promoting respect for diversity, students can develop empathy, understanding, and open-mindedness, which are important skills for their personal and professional growth (Taylor et al., 2022). Respecting each other's diversity allows first-year students to engage in meaningful dialogue, appreciate different perspectives, and challenge their own biases

and stereotypes (Dewitt, 1994; Timar-Anton et al., 2022).

In addition to building respect for diversity, it is essential for college first-year students to actively learn about diversity through gaining knowledge and understanding of different cultures, religions, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, etc. By learning about diversity, students can expand their worldview, challenge preconceived notions, and develop a broader perspective on social issues. This learning process involves exploring historical and contemporary contexts, engaging with diverse literature and media, and actively seeking opportunities to interact with individuals from different backgrounds (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Through intentional educational initiatives, such as the clay model activity described in this study, colleges can create inclusive curricula and co-curricular activities that promote diversity education and provide students with the tools to navigate diverse and multicultural societies.

Furthermore, college first-year students should be encouraged to think deeply about their own diversity. This involves self-reflection and introspection to recognize and appreciate their unique identities, experiences, and perspectives (Dewitt, 1994). Void-Holmes (2021) states that "Working towards an improved understanding of diversity requires self-reflection and introspection, understanding your own history, experiences, and opinions and being aware and honest about your own personal biases and prejudices" (para. 5). By engaging in critical self-reflection, students can gain a better understanding of their own biases, privileges, and social identities. Thinking deeply about their own diversity enables students to develop self-awareness, cultural competence, and a sense of personal identity that is inclusive and respectful of others. It also provides an opportunity for students to explore the intersectionality of their identities and understand the ways in which their various identities shape their experiences and interactions with others. Building respect for each other's diversity, actively learning about diversity, and encouraging deep thinking about one's own diversity are all essential components of fostering inclusive and transformative college experiences for first-year students. "Educational institutions have a key role to play in…promoting respect for diversity as a social value" and creating environments that provide diverse learning opportunities and encourage self-reflection (Domínguez-Martínez & Robles, 2019, p. 544). By integrating these aspects, institutions may cultivate a generation of college graduates who are prepared to contribute positively to a diverse and inclusive society.

Engagement Through Manipulatives

Engaging college first-year students in their learning is crucial for their academic success and overall college experience (Nunn, 2021). Many college freshmen are transitioning from high school, where they may have been passive recipients of knowledge, to a more independent and self-directed learning environment. By actively engaging students in their learning process, educators can enhance their motivation, critical thinking skills, and overall

comprehension of the subject matter (Piaget, 1964). Thus, it is particularly important for college freshmen to be actively engaged in the learning process as they navigate new academic challenges and develop the necessary skills for future success (Nazione et al. 2011).

One effective approach to engage college freshmen in learning is the use of manipulatives. Manipulatives are frequently used in elementary and middle schools but literature demonstrates that they are also effective tools for adult learners (LoVerde et al., 2019). Manipulatives can be defined as concrete objects that allow students hands-on experience while being actively engaged in learning (Horan & Carr, 2018). McNeil and Jarvin (2007) define manipulatives as concrete objects used to help students understand abstract concepts (e.g., diversity). These hands-on learning tools provide students with a tangible and visual representation of abstract ideas, making the learning experience more concrete and meaningful. The use of manipulatives provides an effective approach to enhance engagement and promote active learning in college classrooms. By engaging multiple senses and incorporating kinesthetic learning, manipulatives can help college students actively process information and make connections between theoretical concepts and real-world applications.

Incorporating manipulatives into college classrooms not only enhances student engagement but also promotes active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Krontiris-Litowitz, 2003). When students have an opportunity to physically interact with manipulatives, they can construct their understanding through hands-on exploration, observation, and manipulation. This approach fosters a deeper level of comprehension, as students are actively involved in the learning process rather than being passive recipients of information. Moreover, manipulatives encourage collaboration and peer-to-peer interaction, allowing students to discuss their observations, compare strategies, and learn from each other's perspectives. Thus, the use of manipulatives provides an effective approach to enhance engagement and promote active learning in college classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

Constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes that individuals actively construct their own knowledge and understanding through interactions with the environment and others (Piaget, 1964). It is an approach to learning that holds “reality is determined by the experiences of the learner” (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256). Constructivist learning theory was used as a conceptual framework when developing the clay model activity. Learners actively participated in the learning process through the use of manipulatives to determine the reality that all students would be approaching course content from various perspectives (Ausubel, 1978; Bruner, 1966). Additionally, the significance of social interaction and collaboration in constructivism (Dewey, 1938) was emphasized through think-pair-share conversations focused on similarities and differences (Kaddoura, 2013). Together, the

use of manipulatives and think-pair-share provided constructivist a foundation for the dialog surrounding class diversity.

Methods

This qualitative study utilized two approaches to data collection. The first included student-constructed clay models. This approach was used to provide a holistic interpretation of first-year education student's understanding of diversity. Students were provided with clay of assorted colors and given the direction "Build something important to you." Through this activity students engaged in their own construction of diversity within the classroom rather than just passively being taught about the concept. Student diversity was ever-present throughout the activity; artistic ability, item selection, prospective of representing the item, and specific use of colored clay to mold items all demonstrated student diversity before conversations surrounding diversity began. The assortment of colored clay outlined in Figure 1 was key to the activity's success, given the desire for students to represent their items as authentically as possible (i.e., in their preferred colors scheme) and view the many differences in resulting items, both in construction and color. Also important was the instructor's participation in the activity. Not only did this model expectations, but by building their own item of importance, the instructor had an avenue to participate in the dialog surrounding diversity that occurred during and after the activity.

Figure 1 Assortment of Clay Provided

The second approach to data collection included student engagement data related to the impact utilizing manipulatives could have on fostering participation within a higher education classroom. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do first-year education students represent their own diversity through identifying something of value?
2. In what ways, if any, did the clay model activity impact student engagement within the course?

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify students enrolled in a course entitled Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the fall of 2022 at a small private liberal arts university in the American Northeast. A sample of 32 students enrolled across two separate sections with the same instructor participated in a clay model activity within the first week of class. The sample of participants included primarily white (68.75%) females (78.81%). The majority of participants were between the ages of 17

and 22 (93.75%) and in the first year of their teacher education program (90.63%).

Data Analysis

The first research question addressed how first-year education students represent their own diversity. Content analysis, defined by Holsti (1969) as, “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 14), was used to address this question. Given that content analysis is useful for examining trends and patterns for groups (Stemler, 2000; Weber, 1990) and may be applied to areas other than text analysis (Wheelock et al., 2000; Stemler, 2000), it follows that this method would be utilized to uncover patterns related to student representation of their own diversity through the clay model activity. Clay models were analyzed using processes derived from Mayring (2021) to code data in a systematic manner. First, an inductive process was used to apply an open code to each model, identifying what the model was intended to represent. Then, similar codes were gathered into overarching sub-categories. Finally, similar sub-categories were grouped together under a main theme using in vivo coding, involving the use of short phrases or words as themes (Saldaña, 2013). The identified themes served as the basis for reporting content analysis results.

The second research question addressed the ways the clay model activity impacted student engagement within the course. An observation protocol modeled after Smith et al.’s (2013) Classroom Observation Protocol was utilized throughout the semester-long course. The instructor would rate on a scale of one (below average), two (average), or three (above average) the level of course engagement that was occurring each week, including student-to-student interactions, student-to-instructor interactions, student-to-material interactions, and Learning Management System (LMS) activity. The baseline (i.e., “average”) for instructor ratings stemmed from the instructor’s experience teaching in higher education. Although two classes occurred each week for each section, only one observation protocol was completed at the end of the week reflecting on data collected from both classes. Data points for each level of course engagement were identified: student-to-student interactions were observed in class; student-to-instructor interactions were observed in class and through email/text

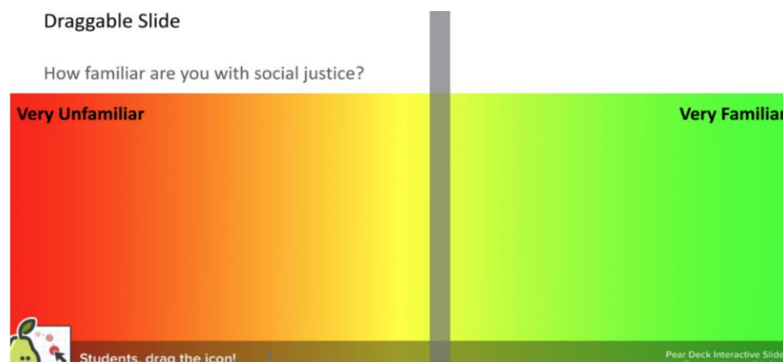

Figure 2 Pear Deck Sample Student Engagement Slide

messages outside of class; student-to-material interactions were determined through student response rates to interactive presentations presented with PearDeck.com (see Figure 2); and LMS activity was gauged using built-in LMS analytics.

Findings

Diversity Representation

The first research question addressed how first-year education students represent their own diversity. Figure 3 outlines the specific clay models that participants molded, as well as the final themes these models were categorized into. The first theme (1) that occurred was sports/hobbies. Given the importance of athletics at the institution, it follows that the highest percentage (25%) of participants indicated values associated with sports. Additionally, as the institution is located in the northeast, the prevalence (25% of models that reflected sports and hobbies) of references to winter sports like hockey and figure skating. The second theme (2), animals, and third theme (3), jobs, each had 21.88% of participants mold items related to that category. With animals often being considered part of a family (Charles & Davies, 2008), it is not surprising that many indicated them as valuable. Although the percentage of undergraduate students employed while enrolled continues to increase (US Department of Education, 2018), it is surprising to hear that first-year college found *value* in their jobs. However, it follows that many may find value in earning an income associated with their jobs.

The fourth theme (4) that occurred was nationality/culture. Although the sample of participants included primarily white females, there were several participants (18.75%) who modeled an item related to their nationality/culture. With strategic initiatives focused on bringing international students to the institution set in place, it follows that international students would highlight these values when given the opportunity. The final theme (5) that occurred was education (12.50%). Given the participants were prospective teachers enrolled in an education course, it follows that they would innately value education.

*Figure 3 Clay Models (*instructors clay model)*

Table 1 Instructor Observations

	Student-to-Student Interactions	Student-to-Instructor Interactions	Student-to-Materials Interactions	LMS Activity
Week 1	1	2	2	3
Week 2	2	2	2	3
Week 3	3	2	2	3
Week 4	3	2	2	3
Week 5	3	2	2	3
Week 6	2	2	3	3
Week 7	No Data Collected	No Data Collected	No Data Collected	No Data Collected
Week 8	3	2	3	3
Week 9	3	2	3	3
Week 10	3	2	3	3
Week 11	3	2	3	3
Week 12	3	2	3	2
Week 13	2	2	3	2
Week 14	2	2	3	1
Week 15	No Data Collected	No Data Collected	No Data Collected	No Data Collected

Surprisingly, an anticipated theme of "family" did not appear. This does not indicate that participants did not value their family members, but rather could not choose only one member. Directions stated they had to build "something" which many interpreted as only one item.

Student Engagement

The second research question addressed the ways the clay model activity impacted student engagement within the course. Table 1 demonstrates the prevalence of each area of engagement (i.e., student-to-student interactions, student-to-instructor interactions, student-to-material interactions, LMS activity) across the semester. Prior to the pandemic, LMS activity would not typically be high for students at the beginning of the semester. However, it follows that activity within the LMS would be above average from the beginning and throughout the fall 2022 semester as the course occurred after the COVID-19 pandemic, when students high school experience likely relied heavily on an LMS for virtual courses. It also follows that LMS activity would lessen as the semester winds down; students typically do not log-in or remain in the LMS as long when there are fewer course deliverables, they are working on final projects outside of the platform, and they already know their grades.

With the exception of two weeks (fall break and final exams), student-to-student interactions increased each week after the first week (where the clay model activity took place), with peers demonstrating above average engagement with each other the majority of the semester. Given that the majority of students were freshmen and not already acquainted, the clay model activity at the beginning of the semester may have contributed to this above average comfort and willingness to interact with peers. Although student-to-instructor interactions may have remained average throughout the semester, with questions being asked primarily at the beginning and end of the course, student-to-material interactions increased midway through the semester. This above average Pear Deck participation indicates that students were exceedingly comfortable and willing to engage with material related to equity, diversity, and inclusion that were explored during the second half of the course (e.g., extended responses, multiple answers, etc.).

Limitations

Several students chose to model their nationality/culture within the activity, however the demographics of the sample included primarily white females. Although this is indicative of both the current public school teaching workforce (Education Week, 2020), it also illustrates the need for diverse teachers to join the field and represent the diverse student population across the nation (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Additionally, the directions provided to students indicated for them to "build something important to them." Directions were purposefully developed to be simplistic, however the verbiage may have inadvertently directed participants away from selecting items of value that could not be easily molded or items that incorporated multiple things (e.g., family). It is recommended for revisions to

be made to direct students to “use clay to represent what is important to them.”

Discussion

The findings resulting from the constructivist activities purposefully embedded in this course lend themselves to several conclusions. First, the representation of diversity among first-year education students was varied, with participants exhibiting different aspects of their identities through the clay models they created. The themes that emerged (i.e., sports or hobbies; animals; jobs; nationality or culture; and education) provide insights into the values and interests of the participants. The themes reflect the unique backgrounds and experiences the students use as a foundation for future course conversations and highlight their individual diversity, as well as the diversity of the class as a whole. Second, the clay model activity had a positive impact on student engagement within the course. Student-to-student interactions increased throughout the semester, indicating a growing level of comfort and willingness to engage with their peers. This suggests that the initial clay model activity may have fostered connections among students, leading to ongoing interactions and collaboration. Additionally, consistent student-to-material interactions, as demonstrated by increased participation in Pear Deck, highlight an engagement with course content. The clay model activity at the beginning of the semester may have contributed to creating a conducive learning environment in which students felt comfortable engaging deeply with the material.

The constructivist activities promoted an understanding of peer differences and meaningful course engagement. By placing these activities towards the beginning of the semester, students comfort increased with engaging in content related to social justice. This increase in engagement resulted in an increased awareness of diversity as evident from student course evaluations at the end of the semester. Incorporating manipulatives, like the clay model activity, can enhance student engagement and promote a sense of belonging and connection among students. By acknowledging and valuing students’ diverse backgrounds and interests, educators can create inclusive learning environments that foster active participation and meaningful interactions. This study provides a model for constructivist practice in first-year education courses, and demonstrates the impact a single, thoughtfully designed activity can have on course dynamics. Further research and exploration of the long-term effects of such activities on student engagement and learning outcomes would provide valuable insights for educators seeking to implement constructivist approaches in their instructional practices.

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REMEMBERING OUR BEGINNING: INTERVIEWS WITH THE FOUNDERS OF THIS JOURNAL

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Dr. Rob Erwin
Professor, Advanced Teacher Education
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Janet Snoyer
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The Mentoring Alliance

Interviewed by

Sharon Green
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Thirty-eight years is a long time. NYCLSA is proud that we have published this professional journal for nearly four decades. But like most fields, ours has evolved over time. Although this issue continues NYCLSA's long tradition of offering high-quality scholarly articles and thoughtful reviews to help colleagues stay current in our field, we are now broadening our focus.

For the past 38 years, the name of our journal was *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education* (*RTDE*). Our focus has been on the field of learning assistance/developmental education in higher education. Our new name is *Forum for International Research on Students and Teaching* (FIRST). As this name implies, we are expanding our reach to more educators and offering opportunities for more researchers to publish. Learning how to learn is not exclusively a concern in higher education. The recent pandemic brought this awareness into sharp focus. We also recognize that helping students become more effective learners extends beyond the US border.

Transitioning our journal to a new name and a broader focus prompts us to reflect on how this journal began - and how those who worked so diligently in the 1980s to make it a reality feel about these changes. Who were the forward-thinking educators in our field who inaugurated this journal in 1985?

I recently interviewed Dr. Rita Pollard, our first editor; Dr. Robin (Rob) Erwin, our first co-editor; and Janet Snoyer, our second co-editor. Their responses to my questions reveal their dedicated and ambitious efforts to enhance our profession with a scholarly journal. Rita, Rob, and Janet also share their thoughts on how our field has evolved and how this journal aims to address that evolution. Here is what they had to say.

Sharon Green (SG):

Tell me about your role in developing NYCLSA's scholarly journal.

Rita Pollard (Pollard):

I collaborated with a supportive and generous team of women and men to launch the journal. I remember the day June Crawford, NYCLSA's first president and then a NYCLSA board member, approached me to ask if I would be interested in serving as the first editor of a then-to-be developed journal that would serve researchers, teachers, and counselors working in learning assistance programs, what people in the field referred to as remedial and developmental education. NYCLSA's board trusted me to create a vision for the journal, its title, manuscript submission guidelines, ideas for the journal's cover design, and a host of other editorial duties: soliciting manuscripts; orchestrating the review process; corresponding with authors; working with a production team. Working long-distance in what I call the "pre-Google-doc" era made the work interesting and a bit more complicated. Bob Hackworth of H&H Publishing (some might know the self-paced math books H&H published) who lived in Clearwater, Florida, generously offered to typeset the journal. A graphic artist working in North Carolina converted my (hazy!) ideas into mockups of the journal's cover design. A typist living in the Buffalo, New York, area retyped manuscripts using a then state-of-the-art Wang computer and then shipped the discs to Bob Hackworth in Florida. The copy would come back to me to edit, and Bob would handle editing and layout changes. Honestly, it's been so long that I cannot recall exactly how we handled mailing the journals to NYCLSA's members, but, no doubt, J. Wixson "Wick" Smith of Rochester Institute of Technology, who served as NYCLSA's longtime membership secretary, contributed much to that effort.

Rob Erwin (Erwin):

I was hired at Niagara University in 1983, when NYCLSA was a very young organization, and Niagara University's Learning Center (college developmental studies program and staff, as we thought of ourselves then) was very committed to growing the effectiveness of our work and our field. We were similarly committed to NYCLSA. Our program director was June Crawford, who was a recent co-founder of the organization and very proud of her Learning Center staff at Niagara University. She encouraged and supported our involvement at every step of the way. Our colleague Rita Pollard took on the role of first editor of this journal, and she set in motion many great things for *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education (RTDE)*, including setting a high standard for article quality; developing editorial procedures (such as the cultivation of a strong editorial board and double-blind peer review); making arrangements with a local printer and for handling the logistics for mailing the journal; and promoting the journal in the developmental education world. Rita invited me to contribute a column about developmental-reading-related concerns for each of the twice/yearly issues. Although Rita had

others to lean on during her work, including the NYCLSA board, she would discuss matters with me as a contributor and also with other Niagara University Learning Center staff. We had what I regard as a strong team in our Learning Center -- June Crawford, Rita Pollard, Wendy Duignan, and me. All four of us had significant leadership roles in NYCLSA and/or in *RTDE* over a span of several years, with the other three each serving as organization president and I served as journal co-editor.

As Rita Pollard was stepping away from editorship, Janet Snoyer and I both applied to be editors. NYCLSA's board suggested we do this work as co-editors. So Janet and I learned to work together (quite well, in my opinion) and we did our best to continue the editorial standards and procedures begun by Rita. My recollection is that Janet and I did this for two terms of editorship. We tried to divide the work between us, and it seemed to be successful enough. We both marveled that Rita Pollard started the journal and did the work alone that we were challenged to accomplish as a team! We enjoyed the collaboration and completed the editorial tasks along with our busy "other lives" as teaching professionals. We also were affirmed by the appreciation of our readers and of the organization.

Janet Snoyer (Snoyer):

I took over as a co-Editor with Rob Erwin. It seemed too big a task for one person at that time, and it helped me build a collegial relationship with Rob.

SG:

To broaden our focus and attract authors not just in learning centers but in related fields while maintaining the focus on research and teaching to help students learn, NYCLSA has changed the name of our journal to Forum for International Research on Students and Teaching (FIRST). How do you feel about this change and our expanded focus?

Pollard:

NYCLSA's decision to retitle the journal and to expand its focus is such a wise move. What I most appreciate about *FIRST* is that it preserves the focus on the research/teaching relationship. In the very first issue of *RTDE*, I wrote about the reciprocal relationship between research and teaching--how each informs the other. *FIRST*'s international focus should not only enhance the journal's reputation and visibility, but it could lead to some interesting cross-cultural collaborations. Collective research findings from multi-disciplinary, global projects could add power to what we think we understand about teaching and learning and could elevate the status of learning assistance as a field.

Erwin:

The field that I knew as college developmental education has evolved significantly from the 1980s when I was at my peak of involvement. As a field evolves and perhaps matures, it is normal for conditions and perceptions and

organizational strategies to change. I regret that I have not been able to keep current with the field since leaving it in the early 1990s, even though I continued to teach in the HEOP pre-college summer program until 2005. My career moved fully into teacher education and I have been striving to keep current in that area. Therefore, I am not aware of the range of issues that have led the organization to decide on the name change, but I trust the wisdom of the current leaders. The stated rationale in the stem of your question seems to justify the decision, from my perspective.

Snoyer:

I love the journal's new title. It will bring in more interest and allow you to cover what other countries are doing, given how the internet eases this. At the same time, you maintain the focus on research and teaching.

SG:

Reflecting on your work in developing our esteemed journal as well as your experience working in learning assistance, what are your most significant insights about the role of learning assistance in higher education?

Pollard:

Most educators would probably agree that reinforcing students' critical thinking and academic skills and abilities, extending what students know and understand, and are able to do, and helping students become more reflective, self-aware, and confident learners are vital missions--not only to support students' academic success, but also to develop informed citizens. The work of learning assistance centers lies at the heart of these aims. The work of learning assistance centers' administrators, counselors, and faculty members is hard, interesting, vital, and, I fear, sometimes underappreciated in higher education, especially when one considers these missions.

Erwin:

There will always be a meaningful benefit when colleges offer academic support to their students, because at every campus (no matter how selective their admissions) there will be students who experience academic struggles. Colleges and our society have a vested interest in keeping academic standards high (witness the impact of national learning standards for K-12), so college-level academic support programs can help struggling students toward academic success in meeting those high standards. Colleges owe support to all students, but some students arrive at college less well-prepared to excel, often through no fault of their own (which may include generational or situational poverty, poorly funded public schools, long-standing effects of discrimination, etc.). Society needs these students to achieve academic success that can lead to life success; this can break cycles of academic failure and failure to achieve a productive adult life.

Snoyer:

The need for learning assistance for college students continues to grow exponentially since my days as the chief learning counselor at Cornell University. Now, learning assistance needs to take into consideration the emotional health (normal, post-Covid now ubiquitous vagaries in adjustment to the demands of higher education) and mental health and neurodivergence (diagnosed and undiagnosed chronic challenges that stem from such conditions as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, physical-sensory, and less easily observed learning disabilities, including twice exceptional, and giftedness).

The staff and faculty tasked with serving this wide-ranging student population need to be trained in counseling, teaching, mentoring, and coaching to provide adequate support. It's a much bigger job these days.

SG:

What advice would you offer to current and future editors of our journal? What would you like to see in future editions of the journal?

Pollard:

I would encourage current and future editors of FIRST to surround themselves with a great team of like-minded people who can support them with the hard work that editing a journal entails. For future editions of the journal, perhaps inviting guest co-editors to work on individual issues would help in attracting more manuscripts. Of course, advertising theme issues well in advance might also help to draw manuscripts that reflect diverse points of view on timely topics. Traveling to many conferences as time and funding permit and personally inviting select conference speakers to submit their conference papers to FIRST would likely help the editors secure some quality manuscripts. Most important, identifying the most pressing research questions in the field and offering modest "teacher-researcher" grants (à la the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)) for classroom-based research projects designed to explore those questions might result in significant contributions to the journal and to the field. (It would be interesting to see what readers consider the most pressing research questions, even without the grants to promote research.)

Erwin:

Reflecting on the early years of this journal and my involvement was valuable; thank you for the invitation to be interviewed. Here is my advice:

- Strive to keep high standards for journal content, editorial processes, and production quality.
- Cultivate positive and professional relationships with each editorial board member and contributing author.
- Strive to keep an objective and neutral intellectual/professional stance in all editorial statements and public presentations. A scholarly journal needs to be regarded as an objective source of information developed by scientific processes of knowledge building. This

neutrality preserves the integrity of the journal and the sponsoring organization.

- Be wary of anything that would contribute to the perception that the journal is too closely aligned with one side of a divisive issue in the field.
- Be ready to commit disciplined and detailed work to the journal publishing effort but know that it is work that is rewarded by good results in the field.

Snoyer:

Editors should use this stint to expand your network to other countries. Find the people who do what your readers do elsewhere. Generate and publish articles on culture-based approaches to working with different populations. Network with advisors whose work may overlap with those in learning assistants at colleges. Find people who are working independently in this area, outside of institutions, to write for you and lend their expertise to institutional advisors. Be inclusive and not threatened by those who have decided to leave university settings and serve students without the encumbrance of a college job to dilute their service to their students. Here's an example of someone whom I know and highly value: Beth Howland.

SG:

NYCLSA is indebted to Dr. Rita Pollard, Dr. Rob Erwin, and Janet Snoyer for their important work in launching this journal 38 years ago.

DISSERTATION SPOTLIGHT

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Academic Resources and Precalculus Students: Knowledge and Use of Tutoring Services, Skill Sessions, and Academic Coaching

Designated spaces that provide supplementary resources in one space are often referred to as learning centers and can be found at the majority of colleges and universities (e.g. Bhaird et al., 2009; Byerley et al., 2019; Grove et al., 2020; Lawson et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2013). However, a large number of factors may influence a student's decision to use these resources, including the difficulty of finding new sources of help when first entering college, their desire to learn the course material, and their prior knowledge (Giblin et al., 2021). This study will look at how, in past, present, and future, precalculus students learn about, decide to use, and experience using academic resources external to their introductory mathematics course at a large, southern, public research university, following the proposed theory of source selection by Giblin and colleagues (2021). The resources focused on in the study will be the mathematics content tutoring offered by the campus learning center (LC), mathematics content tutoring offered by the campus student success center (SSC), academic coaching offered by the SSC, and skill sessions offered by the SSC. In particular, I ask:

1) What opportunities do precalculus students at a large, southern, public research university have to learn about each of the four resources being studied, and to what extent do students identify as being aware of each resource?
2) What combination of resources do precalculus students decide to participate in across a semester, and how do those combinations change over time?
3) Who uses these four resources and what factors relate to patterns or changes in use by students over time?

I will answer these questions using a variety of data sources, including site observations, student surveys and interviews, center use records, instructors and center coordinators interviews, and center and course artifacts.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Bannier, B. J. (2008). The Professionalization of Developmental Education: Have We Arrived? Research and Teaching in Developmental Education, 24(2), 3–14.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/42802306

Abstract

Along with clarifying the need for and defining the field of developmental education, research clearly supports the importance of professional development for both individuals and organizations. A larger question remains: As developmental educators pursue personal and departmental professional development, are we successfully professionalizing the field as a whole? This article examines what it means to professionalize, and evaluates the collective progress of developmental education in this arena. Specifically, this article highlights progress and deficiencies using Cunningham's (1992) five key indicators of professionalization: intellectual elitism, knowledge guardianship, technology, altruism, and self-regulation. Suggestions for improving areas of deficiency are given, and connections between developmental education and adult education are given, and connections between developmental education and adult education are revealed.

Professionalism is defined by intellectual elitism (those that know against those who do not), knowledge guardianship (an official body of knowledge), technology (training for predictable problems that suggests decontextualization of knowledge and objectivity), altruism (benevolence for the public and service from the professional), and self-regulation (professionals call foul, play, if necessary, on their buddies (Cunningmham, 1992, as cited in Bannier, 2008)

The premise of Dr. Bannier's article is an application of Cunningham's (1992) explanation of the professionalization of a field of study.

Bannier's article provides a glimpse into how developmental education evolved into a profession. Much has changed within developmental education over the past fifteen years. While there are definite indications that developmental education continues to grow and develop as a distinct profession, we have also weathered national, institutional, and departmental challenges that have significantly shaped how we define ourselves as a profession.

As NYCLSA re-visions our organization and our journal, Bannier's commentary provides helpful guiding principles for us to consider. We would encourage you to revisit Bannier's article as you consider how developmental education is present in your work and on your campuses.