Use Classroom Safe Space to Tear Down Barriers to Inclusion

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Abstract: The assumption that a diverse environment or setting is inclusive is problematic. Organizations still practice a barrier to inclusion, tokenism, which involves an overemphasis on recruitment of an arbitrary number of underrepresented group members. Tokenism may contribute to the appearance of a diverse organization, but it undermines underrepresented group members' abilities to contribute in an organization's decision making, leadership, and community outreach. One way to mitigate tokenism in society is to address it with university students. This study examines ways to use the classroom as a safe space to effectively incorporate the similarities—differences dialectic and the Staircase Model of Intercultural Communication Flexibility in intercultural pedagogy. Thematic and statistical analysis of 32 students' sensemaking activities revealed five themes regarding students' experiences with diversity and inclusion. Analysis of student responses to a course assessment questionnaire indicates that the classroom provides accessible ways to communicate about the similarities—differences dialectic.

Keywords: Pedagogy, peer-to-peer communication, identity, tokenism, inclusion

1. Introduction

Higher education provides many college students with opportunities to interact with people who they perceive to be different from themselves. In *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making It Work,* Daryl G. Smith (2009) asserted that diversity must be a national priority in higher education. Diversity should be likened to technology on campus, in so far as its ability to play a central role in preparing students for an interconnected, pluralistic, modern and global society. This worldview is supported by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), which emphasizes a need for "inclusive excellence," whereby a diverse and inclusive campus merits the most advantageous learning environment in higher education (Haring-Smith, 2012). A diverse student body and campus community involves individuals who are culturally, ethnically, and racially different.

Ironically, as the push for greater diversity and inclusion in higher education gains momentum, racial injustice and systemic inequalities threaten to stymie progress. After the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States of America, then President Barack Obama used his final, farewell address to galvanize people of all races, ethnicities and cultures when he said: "For every two steps forward, it often feels we take one step back. But the long sweep of America has been defined by forward motion, a constant widening of our founding creed to embrace all, and not just some" (Obama, 2017). In this moment in time, teachers are thrust into an unenviable position, to ignore racial injustice, systemic inequalities

and protests happening all over the U.S.A., or encourage dialogue in the classroom about these issues, while maintaining less-than-hostile classroom environments (Maingi, 2017). The situation becomes worse if the teacher does not recognize her implicit bias, or the implicit bias of students, and how their beliefs and behaviors toward people of various racial, ethnic, and social identities is troubling (Stats et al., 2015, p. 32–35). Teachers' beliefs affect their expectations of students, and their actions in the classroom also reflect their beliefs. Furthermore, teachers' cultural, ideological and personal beliefs and attitudes influence the ways they think about subject matter, what they emphasize in the curriculum, and how they respond to students with competing beliefs and attitudes (Pettit, 2011). Sometimes, well-meaning teachers might discriminate against their students without realizing it. Research indicates that students' backgrounds, their beliefs and attitudes, impact their behavior in the classroom too (Packard, 2013). Some teachers acknowledge that "… negative reaction by students can be attributed to their lack of openness to diversity or stereotypes and prejudice" (Cruz, 2018, p. 50). Chavella T. Pittman (2010) indicated in her study that women faculty of color report: "white male students (1) challenged their authority, (2) questioned their teaching competency, and (3) disrespected their scholarly expertise" (p. 187). Both teachers' and students' implicit biases are a liability in inclusive campus environments.

Campus communities are increasingly diverse in terms of students' age (i.e., more non-traditional students older than 25 years old), generational status (e.g., first-generation college student), socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability status, religious differences, and military status and immigrant status (Clauss-Ehlers & Parham, 2014; Haring-Smith, 2012; Hurtado, Alvarado & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). Institutions must assess intergroup dynamics on campus, in order to ascertain how diversity plays a role in inclusive campus environments (Hurtado, Alvarado & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). It is important to note that increased diversity on campus does not mean increased harmony across differences (Clauss-Ehlers & Parham, 2014). According to *Campus Racial Incidents* (2013) verbal comments and other acts of harassment continue to be reported. Sometimes, rhetoric regarding campus diversity is not put into action, and there seems to be a contradiction that many institutions live with; they want to think that they are colorblind, but they are not (Crenshaw, 1997; Martin, Trego & Nakayama, 2010; Simpson, 2008; Warren, 2003). The impact of this pseudo-colorblindness impedes institutions' ability to react effectively when diversity on campus leads to conflict and contestation. Despite improvements with recruitment and retention of students from a variety of backgrounds, students can feel like a number— alone, isolated, and seen, but not heard. Perhaps, they feel like tokens. Tokenism is an impediment to intercultural communication flexibility, which involves compositional diversity or numerical representation for the appearance of equality, yet, it is no more than a perfunctory or symbolic effort. Tokenism on campus "affords credentials to the organization among the politically correct communities of both 'town and gown'" (Hughey, 2007, p. 56). Janice D. Yoder (1991) posits in *Looking Beyond Numbers*:

> The initial effects of being a token, or one of a small group of low-status newcomers, seem to be performance pressures, social isolation, and role encapsulation, as well as, for women, sexual harassment and limited opportunities for promotion. Gradually, as the novelty wears off and the minority group increases a bit, the work situation

> becomes more comfortable. However, when numbers of a low-status group increase substantially… the reaction is stepped-up harassment, blocked mobility… (p. 188).

If institutions are sincere in their efforts to promote more diverse and inclusive environments on campus and in society, they must engage their student bodies. AAC&U's *Engaging Diverse Viewpoints: What Is the Campus Climate for Perspective-Taking?* indicated that learning from difference is a catalyst for intellectual and moral growth for students (Dey & Associates, 2010, p. ix). Instruction should facilitate interaction between students whose different perspectives and life experiences contest one another's accepted beliefs, values and norms, and expands what is considered "normative" (Cuba et al., 2011). An opportunity for students to develop an understanding of structural inequality, intergroup empathy, communication skills in action, and collaboration is provided when student interaction is encouraged during in-class and online instruction (Gurin, Nagda & *Zúñiga*, 2013). Benefits of learning from difference include cognitive openness, attitudes favoring equal opportunity, increased course participation and more complex thinking (Clauss-Ehlers & Parham, 2014; Hurtado, Alvarado & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). Students learn from their peers, so institutional programming and curriculum should provide a peer's point of view, allowing a classmate's experiences to be a lens affecting observation, to live vicariously through his or her social reality. The objective of this research is to use classroom discussion, peer-to-peer communication, and students' self-reflexivity to examine students' understanding of their experiences and classmates' experiences with tokenism. Is tokenism a barrier to inclusion in their social settings (e.g., collegiate, professional, and personal settings)? Furthermore, an aim of this research is to identify actions students deem necessary to promote inclusion in their social settings.

2. Use of Learning Environment as a "Safe Space"

Addressing issues of diversity, tokenism, and inclusion can be difficult in any learning environment, especially since instructors and students oftentimes are apprehensive of being perceived as politically incorrect. It is easier to avoid issues that make us uncomfortable. How can we learn from one another if we are not willing to reveal who we are? In *Perspectives on Instructional Communication's Historical Path to the Future*, learning in the field of instructional communication "is at the intersection of the instructor, the student, and the meanings exchanged between and among teachers and learners" (Preiss & Wheeless, 2014, p. 312). Despite feeling vulnerable in learning environments where dominant ideologies are challenged, instructors and students must be willing to wrestle with volatile discussions (Boostrom, 1998; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Mayo, 2010). Creating safe spaces for difficult dialogues is necessary if a learning environment is going to be inclusive and effective in dealing with these issues.

Safe space is an educational metaphor for designing classrooms that address volatile, tension-filled learning encounters, where everyone feels vulnerable and sensitive to scrutiny (Gayle, Cortez & Preiss, 2013; Preiss & Wheeless, 2014). "Safe spaces do not guarantee that students will grapple with opposing viewpoints" (Preiss & Wheeless, 2014, p. 319). However, students may be more likely to learn problematic content when their assignments help them explore who they are, encouraging them to juxtaposition their viewpoints with their peers, and

instills in them self-motivation to learn (Montero, 1995; Ortiz, 2000). Learning environments that provide students "a range of inputs, outputs, and means of expression that contribute to educational experiences" enrich the individual and the community of learners (Freytag, 2008, p. 134). Learning environments that provide a safe space for students to experience active adaptation in an intercultural encounter promote positive effects for students. A growing body of research attest to the positive effects curriculum experiences with diversity have on student cognitive and affective outcomes (Chang, 2002; Denson & Chang, 2009; Nelson Laird, 2005, 2011; Nelson Laird et al., 2005).

Theoretical assumptions of a dialectical approach to intercultural communication as articulated by Martin and Nakayama (1999, 2013) provide a framework for understanding how adaptation in an intercultural encounter engenders positive effects for students in a safe space. The dialectic defines a thing or process based on its seemingly opposite, interdependent, and complimentary aspects. Within the context of a safe space a differences—similarities dialectic helps instructors, students and members of the classroom community understand "the relationship between the differences among cultural groups, but also the similarities that unite individuals across cultures" (Brown, 2004, p. 290). The differences—similarities dialectic enables communicators to identify similarities and differences among cultural groups, and anticipate in a group changes over time. Culture encompasses a group's beliefs, values, norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, and patterns of thinking transmitted over the course of generations (Jandt, 2001). As culture evolves, misunderstandings and challenges in intercultural communication is inevitable.

The more groups believe they have something in common the more they discover they are different. This process of self- and group discovery is ongoing and continually prompting changes in perception and behavior. "Once someone assumes similarity or difference, their resulting communicative actions are influenced by their perceptions" (Root, 2013, p. 64). Perceived similarity increases the likelihood of empathy and closeness, while perceived difference triggers distancing or stereotyping. This dialectical tension is also understood within the context of relationships; "someone can only be similar/different to someone else, not on their own" (Root, 2013, p. 64). The relationship between cultural groups affects how individuals and groups manifest identity and representation. Stuart Hall (1996) addresses the importance of this dialectical tension in the process of becoming rather than being: "not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p. 4). Cultural groups become aware of how they are represented through contact between persons. People who "consciously avow or ascribe a distinctly different identity" based on their cultural heritage during contact engage in intercultural communication. Representatives of various cultures exchange information about their cultural groups, yet, they have limited control of how other groups use those representations. Misuse of cultural representations leads to appropriation of culture. Appropriation is a barrier to effective intercultural communication. This barrier arises among college students when there is lack of awareness of divergent cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors, or when bias exists and it is perceived as normative.

To promote cultural awareness and mitigate appropriation of cultural representation educators and students must be responsive to the dialectical tension inherent in the similarities—

differences dialectic. Use of sense-making activities including students keeping a journal or students completing reflective writing assignments enable students to explore the similarities—differences dialectic. Students are empowered to express their emotions, personal struggles, and disagreement, while being accepted in a safe space (Miller & Harris, 2005). Students should become aware of and sensitive to different values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions in "diverse aspects of life as well as culturally different modes of behavior" (Dumessa & Godesso, 2014, p. 2). Students who learn how to adequately self-assess and appraise their activities are able to bring about prejudice reduction (Vyacheslavovich et al., 2016). Sense-making activities provide students with an opportunity to answer questions about themselves and their classmates, uncovering similarities and differences in their intercultural encounters (R.T. Halualani, 2010). These activities provide a context for classroom and out-of-the-classroom discussions regarding identity, representation and interpersonal communication in a multicultural university and global society.

3. Pedagogy in a "Safe Space"

An open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interview is a method qualitative researchers use to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and attitudes. Interviews consist of open-ended questions that allow participants to respond to a query in their own words, and these questions are better able to measure participants' salient concerns than a fixed set of responses (Geer, 1988). When the open-ended questions are posed in a questionnaire the verbal and visual components must work together. This means having clarifying and motivating instructions, large answer spaces or boxes, and question stems that enable participants to take information and use it for comparing, contrasting, inferring, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating (Smyth, Dillman, Christian & McBride, 2009). When the open-ended questions are posed during face-to-face communication the interviewer must be prepared to ask probing, follow-up questions that elicit additional information from the interviewee. The face-to-face interview also enables the interviewer to indicate in field notes any behavior of the interviewer that provides context for the responses given. Perhaps, the nonverbal behavior of the interviewee sends a message that resonates more intention than anything spoken. Interviews during naturalistic inquiry are useful to researchers who want to understand student experiences in and outside of the classroom.

When interviews are done in a classroom setting as part of classroom activities it is important to focus on students' talk. The face-to-face communication and written responses to questionnaires provide additional insight into the way students understand course material. Pedagogies of diversity that are meant to engage students in discussions regarding diversity, tokenism, inclusion and interconnectedness may or may not be effective. Students' talk enables faculty to determine if students fully and holistically comprehend course material (Brooks & Ward, 2007). Oftentimes, even if it is discernable to an instructor that students comprehend something it is challenging to determine if they internalize information, reflect upon it, and juxtapose the experiences of others with their own. Understanding the role empathy plays in these discussions helps instructors identify students' progression in the Staircase Model of Intercultural Communication Flexibility (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). The Staircase Model explains how many communicators begin intercultural encounters at the unconscious

incompetence stage and through deepening their intercultural process thinking advance to the conscious incompetence stage, conscious competence stage, and ultimately reach the unconscious competence stage.

In order to understand student experiences regarding diversity, tokenism and inclusion in their social settings, especially as members of the campus community, students completed a questionnaire regarding these topics. The questionnaire was disseminated after discussion of course material regarding diversity, tokenism, inclusion, interconnectedness, and intercultural communication flexibility. The purpose of the activity is for students to reflect upon their experiences with these topics. The instructions for the questions are the following:

> Read the definitions below for diversity, tokenism and inclusion. Afterward read the statements on pages 2 - 6 pertaining to the definitions. Reflect upon your experiences and the experiences of others that you feel are relevant to the statements. Address these statements in the space provided. If you need additional space, you can write on the back of the page.
>
> Diversity: The state of having people who are different races or who have different cultures in a group or organization.
>
> Tokenism: The practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly.
>
> Inclusion: Deliberately aiming to involve all types of people.
>
> The questionnaire consists of the following statements:

1. Does diversity matter in 2015 (year changes depending on the semester)?

2. What is the difference between diversity and inclusion?

3. Have you ever been a part of a group, organization or institution that is diverse, but during interactions there is a lack of inclusion?

4. Are you aware of any instance(s) on campus of tokenism? If your answer is "yes" then describe what happened, and explain if you feel what took place prevented inclusion.

5. What should be done in diverse groups, organizations and institutions on campus to lessen or eliminate tokenism, and promote inclusion?

In a subsequent discussion about how individuals evaluate the meaning of verbal and nonverbal messages and make decisions and pass judgement based on those evaluations there was a dialogue about understanding the impact our judgements have on our lives, as well as

on the lives of others. In order for students to understand the experiences of their classmates they interviewed one another using face-to-face communication. Interviewers sought verbal and nonverbal responses from an interviewee, who addressed the statements posed in the questionnaire, as well as any probing questions asked during the interview. The purpose of the interview was to fully investigate the effects of diversity, tokenism and inclusion on peers' lived experiences. The duration of the interviews was at least 30 minutes.

Students digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed them. They engaged in two types of reflection. Firstly, they engaged in reflection-in-action, which is thinking about something while immersed in the act of doing it (Sommers, 2011, p. 100). Secondly, they did reflection-in-presentation, which involves articulating the relationships between oneself and others after an encounter, and understanding the impact of communication context on everyone's perspective (Sommers, 2011, p. 100). Students wrote a self-reflection essay juxtaposing their experiences with peers' experiences in order to gain an awareness of how diversity, tokenism and inclusion mediate collegiate experiences and social realities of individuals on campus and in society. In the essay students addressed the following questions:

1. What similarities and differences exist between your experiences and the experiences of the interviewee?

2. Would you change your responses to any of the statements for Activity 1? Why or why not? Elaborate.

3. Has your point-of-view regarding diversity, tokenism and inclusion changed? Elaborate.

4. Why should college students and the campus community care about these issues?

Students who chose to have their information collected for this research project gave their consent for their questionnaire, interview, and self-reflection essay to be analyzed. Participants also completed a demographic survey for the project and a classroom assessment of the sense-making activities at the end of the semester. A thematic analysis was done. A thematic analysis "often involves an inductive exploration of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories" (Nassaji, 2015, p. 130). In accordance with confidentiality and anonymity protocols—research will be kept in a safe and secure location and after three years it will be shredded and discarded.

4. Findings

During the 2015-16 academic year, students who were enrolled in intercultural communication courses at a medium-size university in a large and diverse metropolitan area completed sensemaking activities addressing diversity, tokenism, and inclusion. Once the activities were completed students who wanted their work included in the study completed a consent form, a demographic survey, and an assessment of the activities. Preliminary review of this information during the summer of 2016 indicated that students did consider the classroom a safe space

to juxtapose diversity, tokenism, and inclusion, and to express their uncensored attitudes and opinions. During the 2016-17 academic year the sensemaking activities were added to the course curriculum, and students continued to offer feedback at the end of the semesters regarding the use of these activities. The findings provide a breakdown of who participated in the study, their attitudes and behavior regarding diversity and inclusion and its manifestations on campus, off-campus, and in their personal and professional lives.

4.1. Demographic Survey Findings

The majority of students enrolled in intercultural communication courses during the 2015-16 academic year participated in the study including 32 people, and among whom 34% were male and 66% female. The racial make-up of the participants was 63% white, 22% Hispanic American, nine percent biracial, and six percent African American. Every student identified as middle-class. The vast majority of students identified as Christian, agnostic or atheist. The majority of students were not the first in in their family to attend a college or university.

4.2. Cluster Analysis Findings

For the second activity participants were paired with a peer, so they would have someone to interview. This dyadic relationship provided participants an opportunity to share their experiences pertaining to diversity, tokenism, and inclusion with a classroom peer, which would enable them to discern the similarities and differences they have with one another. These dyads were coded into four clusters based on participants' similar or dissimilar experiences:

1. Participants who had experienced lack of inclusion or tokenism, who interviewed a classroom peer who had similar experiences. They were 45% of the participants in the study.

2. Participants who had experienced lack of inclusion or tokenism, who interviewed a classroom peer who had not experienced lack of inclusion or tokenism. They were 26% of the participants in the study.

3. Participants who had not experienced lack of inclusion or tokenism, who interviewed a classroom peer who had similar experiences. They were 13% of the participants in the study.

4. Participants who had not experienced lack of inclusion or tokenism, who interviewed a classroom peer who had experienced lack of inclusion or tokenism. They were 16% of the participants in the study.

A key finding, 87% of students participated in an interview where either the interviewer, interviewee, or both had experienced lack of inclusion, tokenism, or both phenomena. Furthermore, 13% of students participated in interviews where neither party had experienced

lack of inclusion or tokenism. Examination of the latter group's experiences provides insight into their understanding of lack of inclusion and tokenism. Students who grew-up in homogenous environments assert that they had limited opportunities to interact with peers who they perceived as being different. Some students claim that they do not look for lack of inclusion or tokenism, so they are not aware of it. Yet, other participants who have never personally experienced or witnessed tokenism, believe it occurs. Other participants focused more on group membership than individual behavior, emphasizing that group segmentation is natural and people tokenize themselves by identifying with groups. Some participants provided contradictory responses where they seemed to acknowledge that they have experienced lack of inclusion, but lack of understanding contributes to distance between groups and sometimes there are legitimate reasons for exclusion. Coding participants' responses for the first and second activities provided insights into students' lived experiences and the experiences of their friends and family, which illuminated why students need a safe space to discuss issues pertaining to diversity, tokenism, and inclusion.

4.3. Thematic Analysis of Sensemaking Activities

The participants' "talk" was thematically categorized to gain a better understanding of their sensemaking in encounters with family, friends, peers, supervisors, subordinates, co-workers, and acquaintances, especially when circumstances pertained to diversity, tokenism, or inclusion. Themes were salient within and between the clusters identified in the cluster analysis.

4.3.1. Theme #1: Diversity Matters, Inclusion Matters More

Diversity was defined as having people from a variety of backgrounds and identities, who choose to express themselves according to their beliefs, traditions, and practices. In the United States, diversity has propagated because of freedom of expression and human migration. Participants understand that technology allows them to immerse themselves into a diversity of ideas and experiences without leaving home. Technology allows them to sojourner, immigrate or emigrate without leaving home. One student remarked, "Technology has made it so we are able to interact with the entire world, so now we are communicating and competing on a global scale." Diversity is a term that signifies difference, and in some settings addressing difference is an opportunity and a burden.

Perhaps, as one participant maintains, "it is important we coexist with people who are different than us because from school to work and everything in between we see all kinds of people." Yet, one of her peers believes coexistence is only the beginning, she wants something more:

> Diversity has become a buzzword for universities and colleges to talk about how many different people go to their school, but this does not necessarily mean that they're being included in decision-making. The idea that diversity is a "fix" for every problem is only half the battle. In order to actually have representation and true diversity, there must also be inclusion.

The majority of participants agreed with this sentiment. Diversity is important, but inclusion

is more important. Nobody wants to be treated like a number. Participants recognized that people want to feel included. Another participant emphasized, "inclusion is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual." Diversity should involve everyone having a voice, a seat at the table, and the agency to participate in collective decision-making for the group or organization.

4.3.2. Theme #2: Inclusion Nurtures Listening

Similar to the distinction that participants made between diversity and inclusion, they also distinguished between hearing and listening. A participant explains the relationship between these four processes when he noted, "diversity allows everyone to speak their minds, and inclusion says they will listen to what is being said. During inclusion everyone is listening rather than simply hearing." For the second sensemaking activity participants interviewed one another, transcribed the interviews, and the interviewer compared and contrasted their responses for the first activity with the responses of the interviewee—this exercise allowed the interviewer to be self-reflexive and use their mutual experiences to better understand himself, his peer, and their place in society.

Participants revealed that tokenism was an impediment to self-reflexivity in a diverse environment. Tokenism was passive, as was hearing, and inclusion was active, and akin to listening. According to one participant, "listening is important for people who donate their time and effort in a group, they need to feel included mentally, emotionally, and physically." Listening to someone else's experiences provided students with someone else's viewpoint; students learned something new, and what was "foreign" became more accessible and relatable. Two participants who interviewed one another explain the role listening played in their sensemaking. She mentioned, "If I were to go back and change my responses now to Activity 1, I might expand a little more. I have interviewed and learned from listening to someone else's experiences."

> He concurs, "The conversation that we had was very eye-opening. It shows that we should not be afraid of diversity or be afraid of offending anyone. I would not say my point-of-view regarding diversity, tokenism, and inclusion has necessarily changed, but I would say it has expanded. I have become more aware about what others think about these topics. In return, I can put myself in someone else's shoes, and understand the way they understand issues that revolve around inclusion.

4.3.3. Theme #3: Dialogue Encourages Empathy

Even today, there are still issues when speaking about diversity with different races. Especially with the #BlackLivesMatter vs. #AllLivesMatter, which was used and discussed by many people our age on Twitter or other social media sites, this group setting of asking questions may get heated. If put in this situation, I would want to ask how people of different races would like to be shown acceptance from people of my background.

This participant's quote exemplified her peers' motivation to learn more about one another. Difficult dialogues can "get heated" and withholding judgement until you know more about someone's journey is not easy. The activities allowed participants to explore their emotions regarding sensitive topics. They became more self-aware and more cognizant of how they perceive others and how others perceive them. Self-disclosure allowed participants to see how similar they are, and to appreciate what makes them different. In circumstances where they disagreed because of their differences, participants learned they could disagree without being disagreeable. Participants were empowered through dialogue, and empathy made it easier for them to recognize that because an environment is diverse does not mean it is inclusive.

4.3.4. Theme #4: Peer Communication Promotes Learning

Students recognize that they search for information to confirm their beliefs, but they are receptive to information that does not reinforce their perspectives. Initially, the majority of students affirmed that they don't think they would change their responses to the first activity post-interview with a peer. Yet, many of them indicated in their reflection papers a willingness to make changes in their views as they became more exposed to a variety of viewpoints. A participant stated in his reflection paper:

> Even though we are close in age we were able to see tokenism in different situations. I did change some of my responses to activity one. When completing activity one, I was nervous of including information or I could not recall any situations to put down. During this activity I felt more comfortable with my partner. I prepared to provide an effective exchange.

Participants valued the peer relationship that developed during the second activity. Peers learned to "not judge a book by its cover" and even if someone does not share the same identity or culture, or they come from a different background, do not perceive their difference as indifference. Underneath the surface someone who is perceived as uninterested or apathetic maybe willing to learn if a peer takes the initiative to teach and be taught too.

4.3.5. Theme #5: Learning Acceptance Requires Effort

Before engaging in this assignment I believed that if there was diversity in a place there definitely was inclusion and no tokenism. You can have a place full of diverse people, but the positive impact will not be seen or felt unless you have inclusion. When we do not have inclusion in our schools we leave room for ignorance, judgement, false accusations, racism, and discrimination towards others.

This participant's quote reflects the sentiments of her peers. School should be an appropriate space to learn about negotiating difference, and instructors and students should work together to co-create tolerance and acceptance. However, participants expressed concern that in public schools, at work and during leisure activities, too many people do not make a concerted effort to accept one another, which produces mistrust, acrimony and conflict. Participants held

themselves and the leadership of their groups and organizations responsible for their inaction. Moreover, students recognized that colleges and universities are where adults go to learn, so they believed it was imperative to learn about diversity and inclusion in class.

4.4. Analysis of Student Responses to Assessment Questionnaire

The majority of participants, 94% of them, agreed or strongly agreed that the first and second activities contributed to their understanding and their peer's understanding of diversity. Moreover, 84% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that both activities contributed to their understanding of their own experiences and the experiences of their peers regarding tokenism. All of the participants believed the activities contributed to an understanding of their experiences and peers' experiences regarding inclusion. For the issue of whether or not the activities helped students develop empathy the results were not unanimous—32% strongly agreed, 49% agreed, and 19% were undecided. Overwhelming, participants indicated they identified behavior or actions that "you and peers can undertake" in order to reduce and eliminate tokenism in diverse settings. Only 10% of participants were undecided regarding the last item and no participant disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

4.4.1. Assessment Theme #1: Education Matters

Participants in the study believe knowledge is power. They have enrolled in college to better themselves, and they perceive their education as a means to an end—to learn about the world and use that information to create better lives for themselves and their peers. Courses that address tokenism and inclusion are deemed "highly beneficial." Students appreciated lecture and discussion which utilized numerous examples of diversity, tokenism, and inclusion. Dialogue during the discussion of these topics furthered their understanding of inclusion and interconnectedness. Participants, regardless their experiences before taking intercultural communication courses agreed, "Education on the concept of tokenism is the best way to eliminate it. Before taking this course, I was naïve as to what these terms meant. Therefore, I did not know how to prevent it. Without proper education, the problem can't be prevented." Students needed to be shown the effects of the problem to reduce tokenism. One participant asserted that "before studying this I didn't even know inclusion existed and I assumed diversity meant interconnectedness." A theory discussed during the course that explained intercultural communication competence, mindful listening, and empathy was the Staircase Model. The Staircase Model provided students with "a physical understanding" of how to connect with people who are culturally and socially different than they are.

The Staircase Model is a "visual model" illustrated in textbooks and online. One participant commented, "I think the video part of the lecture with staircase model was the most helpful for me because it answered the questions I had about diversity moving from a place of incompetent to competent communication. It helped me understand that diverse groups are not necessarily inclusive groups." Other participants felt the model explained the links between topics, "to connect the dots and put everything we've learned together." The Staircase Model demonstrates that as students move up the ladder, which is a gradual process with no guarantee a person will

reach the top, a person can reach what students described as "total inclusion." A participant was adamant, "just because there's diversity, it doesn't mean everyone will be included. If you are flexible with intercultural communication and are on the highest step of the staircase model you are more likely to guarantee inclusion."

4.4.2. Assessment Theme #2: Self-Awareness

A recurring topic in participants' commentary is that people must change their mindset before they change their behavior. Participants advocated for educators to be more proactive in addressing inclusion and interconnectedness. Sometimes, classrooms are full of various cultural and social groups, but instructors only "scratch the surface" regarding controversial topics including tokenism, racism, sexism, and homophobia in course curriculum and activities. A participant explains why educators must do more:

> To change (reduce or eliminate) tokenism first change the mindset of those encountering diversity. We cannot force people to abandon biases, but we can show them perspectives of other people to create empathy.

Participants were adamant that through education students can learn to become more self-aware of their actions and the actions of others. They believed that awareness of the role their actions played in the treatment of others, especially in circumstances that involved tokenism could change lives. A participant made a comment that was representative of the attitudes and opinions of her peers: "Being aware of when tokenism is happening is the largest part in order to reduce or eliminate it. From there, we can be sure to address the problem or report it." Furthermore, another participant addresses how integral change is to reducing or eliminating tokenism: "Tokenism can only be affected to change if those that initiated the tokenism can change." Participants agreed the more research and conversations students had about "this topic, the better developed our opinions will be." Many students came to the same realization as their peer, "by talking to other people and really exploring it myself, I was able to get a better understanding that they (diversity and awareness) don't guarantee the other (inclusion)." If society does not condone lack of inclusion or tokenism, then society must create practices, rules and regulations to support inclusion and eliminate tokenism.

4.4.3. Assessment Theme #3: The "Carrot and the Stick" Metaphor

Everyone will not change, even if presented with evidence that a more rational decision is an option. Participants understood that diversity is complex, and as one student put it, "diversity is only the top of the iceberg." She continued, "In order for diversity to really matter everyone must feel like they are part of the in-group… everyone must feel respected, included, and taken into consideration." The "carrot" portion of the "carrot and stick" metaphor involves offering a party something it desires in exchange for reciprocity, compliance, or obedience. Participants indicated that most people want to be a part of the in-group, they want to feel like they belong. They believe belonging is a compelling incentive to persuade people in diverse settings to be

more inclusive. The carrot is people of various cultural and social backgrounds will include you if you include them. However, some people are not persuaded by the "carrot" and they are not interested in embracing people who are different. In some settings there are members of the out-group, who are in the minority, and they exist in non-diverse settings, and encounter people who are not compelled by any "carrot" to include them. Participants recognize that you may not be able to change everyone's mindset to adopt inclusivity. However, they deemed inclusion to be very important, and supported the "stick" portion of the metaphor too. One participant addressed the need to enforce inclusion by "raising awareness and having punishments for those who do not comply with rules regarding tokenism and inclusion." Participants stressed a need for "higher status individuals" within organizations to set rules and standards and to check-in periodically to evaluate employees. Leaders must convey to everyone that inclusion is beneficial for their organizations and society, and lack of inclusion and tokenism are not tolerated.

5. Conclusions

According to the Yale Center for Teaching and Learning (2018), when addressing issues of racial awareness, inclusive teaching strategies and an inclusive class climate, instructors often lack resources for teaching diversity in the classroom. Banks' (2002) approaches for teaching diversity and inclusion in the classroom, as discussed in research by Hussey, Fleck and Warner (2010), details how best to include diversity into the course curriculum. There are multiple levels in which a teacher may deliver curriculum pertaining to diversity and inclusiveness including the contributions approach, additive approach, transformation approach, and social action approach. The contributions approach is a first step to multicultural education, and involves learning about unfamiliar cultural norms, such as culturally-specific food, clothing or dance, as well as holidays that celebrate various cultures. The additive approach requires the teacher to add an activity, unit or module devoted to diversity and inclusion, with an intent to increase students' awareness and multicultural sensitivity. The third step involves the transformative approach, which requires the overall course structure and curriculum to foster understanding, self-reflection, critical evaluation of one's own biases, a dialogue to share personal revelations and an emphasis on tolerance.

This study involves courses utilizing Banks' approaches, whereby overall course structures and curricula occur in a safe space that incorporates the similarities—differences dialectic and the Staircase Model of Intercultural Communication Flexibility. Within the safe space, students engage in sensemaking activities that encourage understanding, self-reflection and critical evaluation of their biases. Moreover, sensemaking activities discussed in this study involve peer-led dyadic and small group learning, a useful pedagogical tool to engender empathy, which is "the ability 'imaginatively' to enter into and participate in the world of the cultural Other cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally" (Calloway-Thomas, 2010, p. 8). Peer-led dyadic and small group learning, more commonly known as Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL), involves the use of peer-to-peer communication to lessen students' tendency to feel isolated, and enhance their learning and achievement (Snyder, Sloane, Dunk & Wiles, 2016). Peer-led dyadic and small group learning paired with a traditional lecture format are more effective than solely

lecturing empathic constructs; scholars have found general empathic constructs for explaining and/or establishing the cross-cultural empathy problematic (Broome, 1991; Howell, 1983; Ridley & Lingle, 1996). Without students use of empathic communication during sensemaking their self-reflection and critical evaluation might not produce cross-cultural empathy.

After students participated in sensemaking activities, many of them wanted to take their experiences with cross-cultural empathy and empathic communication, and put it to use. The fourth step for infusing diversity and inclusion into the course curriculum involves the social action approach, which emphasizes teachers assigning students projects that require social action, and students using projects as opportunities to participate in cultural awareness events (Hussey, Fleck & Warner, 2010). In order to address the perils of lack of inclusion, students recognized a need for sharing what they learned with peers and community leaders who do not venture on campus. Unfortunately, the finite amount of time in the course schedule prohibited the teacher from implementing both the transformative and social action approaches. There was adequate time to implement the transformative approach, and use sensemaking activities to integrate diversity, cross-cultural empathy and inclusion into students' understanding, self-reflection and critical evaluation of their biases, but the absence of social action projects or opportunities for students to engage with community stakeholders hindered the implementation of the social action approach. Since students believe community stakeholders should encourage people to be receptive to building relationships with individuals outside of their own cultural and social groups, it is imperative that future research addresses how to structure a course safe space to incorporate both transformative and social action approaches.

Gary Burnison (2015) asserts that while "diversity honors our differences, inclusion bridges them" (p. 4). Students want more proactive institutional and classroom-based initiatives where they learn communication skills that enable them to negotiate identity along an in-group and out-group boundary. Fear of the unknown, avoiding those who are perceived as unlike us (known as "othering" someone), is unnecessary and students recognize the usefulness of safe space on campus, so students can engage in difficult dialogues. Students need a place to share their lived experiences and they need to be taught how to engage in a constructive dialogue about their social and cultural similarities and differences. Many students expect their higher education to include classroom experiences, seminars, and activities that bring students of various backgrounds together to develop interpersonal skills for negotiating their identity and engaging in competent intercultural communication. However, students admitted to being surrounded by diversity, but not always engaging with people in those environments and settings who they perceived as different. Students need to be proactive in their own education and seek out opportunities on-campus and in the community to be inclusive of individuals who are not a part of their in-groups. The sensemaking activities used during the 2015-2016 academic year (focus of this study) provided students a safe space to self-reflect on their experiences with diversity, tokenism, and inclusion, as well as interview their peers about their experiences with these topics. Students completed the activities having a better understanding of their peers' experiences. During the 2016-2017 academic year students' feedback affirmed these findings. An outcome of the activities is students developed empathy for someone they perceived as culturally or socially different than themselves, yet, they also realized that they have more in common with one another than they initially thought possible.

Students who became more self-aware of their similarities and differences were more likely to show empathy. For students who did not realize tokenism existed or that it was a problem, they became more empathetic once they listened to someone else's experience with it or lack of inclusion. There was a causal relationship between self-awareness and attitude change. After the conclusion of activities students wanted to continue sensemaking and self-reflection. A sense of belonging manifested among empathic students who wanted to engage in more dialogue, mindful listening, and intercultural communication flexibility. Students sought environments and settings that were more diverse and inclusive, and some of them removed themselves from spaces that were not inclusive.

There are implications of the study that impact research of safe spaces, tokenism, and sensemaking. Safe spaces in classroom settings is a pedagogical tool used to create feelings of safety and security for students. These spaces are extremely useful when controversial topics are being discussed. They are supportive environments where students feel less guarded about who they disclose information to and what they disclose information about. Safe space was helpful in the intercultural communication courses that were of interest to this study, but they do have limitations. Safe space in a classroom setting can be highly combustible. The instructor must balance being facilitator and disciplinarian without creating a "chilling" effect that adversely impacts discussion. If an instructor can balance the roles of facilitator and disciplinarian a safe space provides favorable conditions for dialogue and empathy. However, students respond differently to these conditions. For students who believed tokenism was self-inflicted or that people tokenize themselves, dialogue in a safe space did not engender empathy. When students created their probing questions for interviewees, this probing question was asked repeatedly: "Do you believe there are benefits to tokenism?" A common reply interviewees provided interviewers: "it would be helpful for them to be exposed to different groups and cultures even though it is a wrong reason for it." It was difficult for students to reconcile tokenism being morally wrong, yet, in some instances it contributed to diversity. The expectation is that sensemaking helps "make sense" of something confusing or nonsensical. Students seemed unsure how to address sensemaking that contributed to their confusion. Students were also confused about how to create safe space outside of the classroom. Future research should examine safe spaces outside of the classroom to determine how their permutations adapt to the environment and ameliorate or exasperate cultural and social divides.

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