The Neag School of Education Diversity Council

Report: Pilot Implementation

Cultural Competency Learning Experience

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Report: Pilot Implementation of Cultural Competency Learning Experience

This report is a summary and evaluation of the Cultural Competency Learning Experience (CCLE). The CCLE was a pilot project to determine whether and the degree to which a specific professional development experience could serve as a basis for creating a climate conducive to recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty/staff and student group in the Neag School of Education.

Pilot CCLE:

Participants in the CCLE consisted of 17 Neag staff and faculty members. The group was facilitated by Robert Colbert. The cultural competency development learning experiences began fall 2012 and ended fall 2013. The group met on Fridays between Departments and the full School meetings. The purpose of the learning experiences was to provide faculty and staff with the knowledge, awareness, and skills to engage with a diverse student and faculty/staff body, with particular emphasis on people of Color, in ways that promote a healthy learning and working environment. The long term goal of the CCLE was: (1) create an environment where faculty/staff interact with students and each other in ways that respect cultural differences, (2) increase the number of students and faculty/staff of Color who more fully engage in NSoE, and feel that their points of views and lived experiences are valid, and (3) improve the recruitment and retention of students and faculty/staff of Color. Lastly, the Steering Committee believes that participating in learning experiences aimed at developing cultural competencies will benefit everyone in the school by providing a foundation for future implementation of strategies pertaining to all Action Item areas of the Diversity Action Items.

A. Cultural Competency Learning Experiences (CCLE) with the Teacher Education group took place during the 2012-2013 academic year and into the early fall of 2013-2014. By starting with a group of colleagues who expressed interest and
commitment to this work, the Council/Steering Committee believed, the CCLE would increase the odds both of recruiting participants and offering effective experiences with the entire Neag School of Education faculty and staff.

Below is a brief outline of the CCLE:

1. **Text-Based Discussion Group:** begin fall 2012 (October 5)
   a. Group met once monthly.
   b. Selected readings are assigned, followed by discussions using a protocol to keep focus on the material and provide varied opportunities for folks to share. Between meetings the group’s participants continue with discussions on the established HUSKY-CT non-class site.
   c. Participants were to gain knowledge relevant to becoming culturally competent instructors and colleagues, i.e., theories, models and concepts pertaining to multicultural education.

2. **Racism Workshops:** occurred fall semester 2013
   a. Expert facilitators, Kristel Applebee and Mary Ann Rogers provided this experience.
   b. Participants were to gain experiences to develop awareness and sensitivity for becoming culturally competent instructors and colleagues, i.e., personal values, beliefs, biases, etc. pertaining to cross-cultural encounters in both their professional and personal lives.

3. **Skills Workshops:** this part of the CCLE did not take place.
   a. Expert Facilitators were to provide this learning experience
   b. A set of planned experiential learning exercises were to be designed to prepare participants to instruct and interact with racially/ethnically diverse students/colleagues in a culturally competent manner.
i. **Formative Evaluation:** Spring semester 2014 a formative evaluation implemented. The evaluation will serve three purposes:

a. The Council will know whether and to what degree the CCLE met its goals,

b. The Council will learn what’s needed to improve the next offering of the CCLE, and,

c. Gain material that can be shared with future potential participants.

**Method of Evaluation:**

A 9-item questionnaire based on the cultural competency outcome goals was administered to 8 of the 12 active participants (see attached questionnaire). Below are the results of each item followed by summary and recommendations.

**Pie Chart**

The Knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience has made me more prepared to teach a class with a diverse student body.

The Knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience has made me more prepared to engage with a diverse faculty and staff.
The Knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience has made me more aware of how I might hinder or enhance the creation of a climate conducive to positive interactions among a diverse faculty and staff group.

The Knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience has already influenced my professional life here in the Neag School of Education.

The Knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience has provided me with a knowledge base for continued professional and personal growth.

The Knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience has already influenced my personal life in a beneficial way(s).
**Results Discussion:**

As can be seen in the pie charts for all nine questionnaire items, the CCLE was successful for its intended purpose. Participants responded from agree to strongly agree on all but two of the nine items.
Sixty-two percent of respondents reported they agree – agree/strongly agree that, The knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience (readings, discussion, videos, workshops, etc.) has made me more prepared (than prior to CCLE experience) to teach a class with a diverse student body; while 38% of respondents strongly agreed. That 100% did report the CCLE prepared them to teach a diverse student was somewhat surprising because according to the American Counseling Association, in order to function as competent counselors, trainees need instructional experiences in knowledge, awareness and skills. As shown above, the intent of the CCLE was to provide participants with instruction in all three competency areas. However, this first run of the CCLE focused only on knowledge and awareness competencies. Looking further into the literature for understanding of these results, we find that Constantine, (2006) in her research on relationship between cultural competency categories (knowledge, skills and awareness) and reported cultural confidence, found the awareness component lacking in counselor training. The awareness component was a major part of the CCLE – the racism workshop was what participants commented on as extremely impactful. Perhaps feeling confidence in one’s cultural competence as part of the overall CCLE (Constantine, 2006), knowledge and awareness components were sufficient for participants to gain critical consciousness (Friere, 1995) and subsequent reporting of being better prepared to teach a more diverse student body than prior to the CCLE.

The next two items on the questionnaire pertain to creating a climate or environment in the Neag School of Education that is conductive to a diverse group sharing the same space. Thirteen percent of participants reported they agreed while 87 % agree/strongly agree – strongly agree to both climate items, which were; The knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience (readings, discussion, videos, workshops, etc.) has made me more prepared (than prior to CCLE experience) to engage with a diverse faculty and staff, and The knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience (readings, discussion, videos, workshops, etc.) has made me more aware of how I might
hinder or enhance the creation of a climate conducive to positive interactions among a diverse faculty and staff group. These data are exciting in that the Diversity Council considered the improvement of our climate as critical to achieve prior to Neag implementing the Action Plan. In particular, objectives, recruiting and retaining a diverse student and faculty/staff body is of import, given that poor climate was stated as a primary reason why faculty and students prematurely leave (or do not even apply to) Neag. Additionally, these findings are timely, in that the first of the University Diversity Strategic Plan’s three goals is Develop a University Climate that Actively Supports Diversity and Equity. Part of the University Diversity Committee’s plan is to communicate with all university Schools/Colleges seeking to find strategies shown to be successful in meeting these three goals. Thus, the Neag is now not only poised and ready to expand the CCLE, it can also be a key player in the greater university reaching diversity goals in the new University Academic Plan.

Did the CCLE facilitate professional and personal growth for participants? Results of the next three questionnaire items show that the CCLE did indeed positively attend to participants’ professional and personal growth in the area of cultural competence. First, 13% agreed, and 88% strongly agreed that -- The knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience (readings, discussion, videos, workshops, etc.) has provided me with a knowledge base for continued professional and personal growth. Second, 25% reported they agreed/strongly agreed – strongly agreed that -- The knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience (readings, discussion, videos, workshops, etc.) has already influenced my professional life here in the Neag School of Education in a beneficial way(s). Third, 37% respondents said they agreed/strongly agreed while 63% strongly agreed that -- The knowledge and/or awareness gained from the CCLE experience (readings, discussion, videos, workshops, etc.) has already influenced my personal life in a beneficial way(s).

These results provide direction for another of the Neag Diversity Action Items, Professional development for faculty/staff. Below a brief discussion of
these results and how they might guide the four specific Neag Diversity Action Items:

(a) **Develop a list of all the professional organizations that faculty within the School belong to and investigate the smaller associations within those organizations that serve as advocacy groups for people of color. Have Neag faculty join and become active in those organizations.** Although specifics were not identified, these results do strongly indicate these Neag faculty/staff members are now in a better position to engage in professional organizations that serve as advocates for people of color. Further, developing critical consciousness, which the CCLE promotes is also consistent with professional development pertaining to advocacy for oppressed groups.

(b) **Have faculty document how their teaching, research and service has contributed to enhancing diversity in their annual reviews.** If Neag is serious about faculty devoting time and energy into diversity goals, then diversity should be integrated into the annual review and PTR. This Neag diversity goal is important because it communicates to faculty that Neag is indeed serious about diversity, hence, diversity is included the three categorical areas for annual review. These results on professional development combined with those above where 100% reported confidence from the CCLE to teach a more diverse student group provides a base from which to build professional development focused on faculty including diversity as part of their “regular” promotion, tenure and retention endeavors.

(3) **Create faculty brown bag lunches to discuss articles/research on diversity and the impact on programs in the School of Education.** The CCLE consisted of readings and discussions concerning cultural competency development. Often, these discussions were continued on HUSKYCT discussion board that sometimes led to reading different research articles on related areas. The idea of creating faculty brown bag lunches on diversity would provide the CCLE participants with the opportunity to maintain and expand professional growth and development that began
with the CCLE. Additionally, CCLE participant who were part of this pilot effort might serve as leaders in identifying topics for the brown bag lunches so that others in Neag could benefit from such an experience.

(4) Prepare/Train all faculty members to teach difficult topics in urban education so that it could be taught with confidence. In this pilot CCLE, we were not able to provide participants with training in teaching as it relates to diversity. However, given the reported benefits that all who participated in the CCLE, were they now to participate in training to teach difficult topics in urban education, chances for success are very good. In fact, acquiring the competencies in the skills components of cultural competency normally taught after the knowledge and awareness areas. Lastly, CCLE participants might even serve as leaders in professional development in how to teach difficult topics in urban education.

The next two questionnaire items both asked respondents whether they thought the CCLE should be offered to other faculty/staff and administrators in the Neag School of Education. Results revealed that 13% reported they agree/strongly agree that -- In order to advance the Neag School of Education and or Teacher Education’s goals for diversity, the CCLE should be an experience all Neag faculty and staff participate in – while 87% indicated they strongly agree this experience should be made available to others faculty and staff in Neag. The next item was the nearly identical, with the only difference being -- the CCLE should be an experience all Neag administrators participate in. Twenty-five percent of respondents reported they agree/strongly agree and 75% strongly agree that the CCLE should be offered to Neag administrators. Promoting cultural diversity in a professional environment will only be successful if those in power have cultural competency (reference). Faculty and staff hold power over students and administrators hold power over all in the Neag School of Education. According to Helms (2003) when people of the dominant and minoritized racial groups interact, the chance that dynamics of privilege and oppression will emerge is ever present. Thus, when those in
power are not culturally competent, these dynamics will go “unchecked” and overtime create a toxic environment where diversity cannot thrive. Fortunately, the Neag recognized this environmental threat and is moving toward creating a work and learning space open to feedback for continuous self-correction.

The last questionnaire item asked participants whether they had ideas for improving future CCLE. The range of responses were from strongly disagree/disagree-to-agree. Twelve percent strongly disagree/disagree, 38% were neutral –neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 48% reported they agreed they had ideas for improving future CCLE. These results indicate the need to follow up with respondents to find out what ideas they have and include those in future offerings of CCLEs.

Recommendations for Advancing Teacher Education/Neag Diversity Action Items:

The following recommendations are based on the results of the CCLE evaluation questionnaire discussed above. Two areas to focus on over the following academic year are as follows:

1. Provide a second offering of the Cultural Competency Learning Experience.
   a. Run 2–3 groups (one group for administrators) simultaneously in order to maximize participation
   b. Robert Colbert and past CCLE participants serve as coordinators
2. Operationalize and Implement Diversity Action Item -- Professional development for faculty/staff.
   a. Establish a coordinating committee to be responsible for professional development in the four areas discussed above, and shown below:
      i. Develop a list of all the professional organizations that faculty within the School belong to and investigate the smaller associations within those organizations that serve as advocacy groups for people of color. Have Neag faculty join and become active in those organizations.
ii. *Have faculty document how their teaching, research and service has contributed to enhancing diversity in their annual reviews.*

iii. *Create faculty brown bag lunches to discuss articles/research on diversity and the impact on programs in the School of Education.*

iv. *Prepare/Train all faculty members to teach difficult topics in urban education so that it could be taught with confidence.*

b. The coordinating committee should form 4 four sub-groups so that each can be responsible for one of the above diversity professional development activities.