Organizational Change Within Universities:
Beyond Multiculturalism

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Introduction

Increasing diversity of populations in many countries place demands on institutional structures to be responsive to the needs of minority communities. Universities, and especially schools of social work, are expected to be open to these new challenges of diversity. It is argued that inclusiveness should be integrated into the overall strategic responses of institutions. This paper describes the attempts by a faculty of social work to become more inclusive by introducing initiatives in minority student recruitment and retention, faculty development, curriculum development, community outreach and research. The paper also raises critical issues involved in the process and discusses the lessons learned.

Urban populations everywhere are changing rapidly in terms of their ethnic composition. Large scale migration of non-European people to North American cities have made the cities in Canada and the United States more heterogeneous. There is also the indication that the minority populations of today will be significantly larger. For example, in the United States, "the most significant increases are occurring and will continue to occur in the year 2000 and beyond among women, people of colour, immigrants, and older populations" (Asamoah 1995: 116). In Canada, it has been estimated that by the year 2001, about 18 percent of the population will be ethno-racial minorities. In urban centres like Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Calgary, about 20 to 40 percent of the population will be ethno-racial minorities. In Toronto, the ethno-racial minority population will increase from 35.1% in 1996 to 44.6% in 2001 (Samuel 1992).

Diversity is referred to as attributes of individuals and groups that mark their identity such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability (Lee 1992). Inclusiveness is the notion of providing equality of opportunity and eventually equality of outcome for non-dominant groups in society. This article discusses how an actual organization (The Faculty of Social Work at University of Toronto) is attempting to become a more equitable and accessible institution and identifies important lessons for other organizations attempting similar efforts.

Universities and Access

In Canada, numerous authors have commented on the systemic barriers which prevent minorities from equitable participation in institutional structures (Abella 1984; Head 1986; Doyle and Visano 1987; Medeiros 1991; Henry, Tator, Mattis and Rees 1995; Reitz 1985; Sinclair-Jones 1995). Universities tend to perpetuate, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, the pervasive inequalities that exist in the wider society. Universities in North America, particularly in the US, have a long history of excluding minorities. Inspite of a number of judicial investigations, racial discrimination is well entrenched in higher education in the US (Persico 1990; Feagin, Vera and Imani 1996). In Canada, Henry, Tator, Mattis and Rees (1995:195) contend, in contrast to popular opinion, that higher institutions of learning have followed exclusionary practices:

The lack of minority representation at faculty and administrative levels continues to be a problem; the teaching of a basically Eurocentric curriculum has also become an issue and harassment or overt racism continues to plague minority students. The
University, like other institutions, has denied and resisted change in the name of academic freedom and the merit principle.

Manifestations of racism at universities are found in the lack of representation of minority groups at the level of faculty or senior management. There is often discrimination in the making of tenure decisions or promotions. Student recruitment—both undergraduate and graduate—is also a problem. Students from minority backgrounds face subtle and overt signs encouraging them not to apply or attend universities. Both the curriculum and the generally hostile environment of the university (racial harassment from fellow students, administrative staff and faculty) also discourage minority students from attending the university (Henry et al. 1995).

The response to the demonstrated need for change within the university system has been very slow (Henry et al. 1995). At the structural level, university responses have, in general, been inadequate. The three most common courses of action which have been taken by universities are token changes which are not sufficient for creating effective change and ensuring access and equity for minority populations. These strategies include: the establishment of a committee to deal with race relations (which primarily deals with student complaints), establishment of a special advisor to the Presidents of the universities and, appointment of a special committee to identify barriers to racial minority members of the academic community. Most of these approaches do not achieve adequate results due to lack of resources, bureaucratic indifference, the fatigue factor and lack of leadership (Henry et al. 1995).

Social work education is also imbued with racism and insensitivity to the needs of minority students (Dominelli 1989; Christensen 1996). An exploratory survey of accredited Canadian schools of social work revealed that most schools do not have required courses dealing with multi-cultural and multi-racial issues; and that incorporating diversity elements in the curriculum has had only limited success (Christensen 1996).

Inclusive Universities

Most responses to the challenge of diversity have revolved primarily around the areas of curriculum change and teaching skills (Aponte 1995). Curriculum is just one element of the whole educational experience. "The unwavering support and commitment of the administration, as well as necessary resources are critical" (Davis-Russell 1990: 177). In attempting to establish an institutional climate that honors diversity, it is important to remember that "in the historical development of our institutions, there are no models" (Persico 1990: 56). The organizational structure of universities is such that there is often considerable autonomy for Faculties or Departments. This provides opportunities for individual Faculties to initiate programmes of change to accommodate the rising needs and expectations of culturally and socially diverse groups. This also makes it possible for individual faculty members or academic units to avoid addressing the issue directly.

Persico (1990) proposes an eight step model to create a diverse institutional climate that honors diversity. These are: establishing institutional commitment; creating a culturally diverse faculty; creating culturally diverse administration; creating a culturally diverse student body; creating student-faculty support systems; generating financial aid funds; altering the core curriculum; and preparing for the consequences of change. Most models indicate the need for systemic change to respond to diversity. "Diversity responses, in other words, need to be well integrated into the organization's overall strategic responses. Systemic thinking is critical to diversity issues" (Griggs and Louw 1995: 12).

Faculty of Social Work (University of Toronto)

The Faculty of Social Work, at the University of Toronto, was established in 1914 as the first programme of social work education in Canada. The programme was accredited from 1919 by the AASSW/CSWE, New York, and since 1978 by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work. The recently revised mission statement of the faculty, reads:

The Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto will promote social justice and equity through interdisciplinary knowledge building and education for practice in social work and social welfare. The Faculty of Social Work will provide leadership for excellence in the development and testing of new knowledge that will have an impact on social policy and social work practice at all levels; in social work education that will prepare graduates for ethical, competent, innovative and effective professional social work practice; in the development of social work policy and
social work practice at all levels; and in promoting and maintaining an academic environment conducive to social justice and equal opportunity for all groups in society, whether based on class or gender, or racial, ethnic-cultural or native heritage.

The following is a description of an organizational change model introduced at the Faculty of Social Work to respond to the challenge of diversity.

**Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) Initiative**

This initiative was introduced in 1992 as a comprehensive change strategy for the Faculty of Social Work. The major components of this initiative are: minority student recruitment and retention, faculty recruitment and development, curriculum development, community research and, community outreach (Meeks 1991). A committee consisting of students, alumni, faculty and field supervisors was established to oversee the developments in the above areas. This committee is called the AMNI Committee and is a standing committee of the Faculty Council, which is the governing policy-making body of the faculty composed of faculty, students, alumni, field instructors and a faculty member from a cognate department.

**Minority Student Recruitment and Retention**

The issue of minority student recruitment has received much attention at the faculty in recent years. The admissions office of the faculty does extensive outreach to undergraduate programmes in various universities and to various ethnic communities. Special grants from the university administration for the recruitment of minority students have supported this effort. Similarly, attempts are made to offer financial assistance and other supports to students to help them get through the programme. Members of the faculty, designated as “faculty advisors,” make themselves available to the students for consultation.

**Faculty Development**

Faculty development, as an ongoing activity, has high priority in the AMNI initiative. Over the past three years, members of the faculty have participated in a number of workshops on anti-racism and working with diversity. The faculty retreat each spring concentrates on AMNI issues and the need to integrate diversity content in the curriculum. The faculty retreat in May 1996, for example was on “cultural competence in graduate education and research” and was organized in conjunction with the Department of Behavioural Sciences of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto. Scholars from the US and Canada, who have done a significant amount of work on diversity issues presented and facilitated discussions of the faculty.

A “diversity faculty position” to be shared one-third with the Women’s Studies Programme, was approved by the University in 1995, to teach courses in the areas of race, gender and class. In the recent rounds of funding cuts that have impacted the operations of all faculties and divisions of the university, the equity officer of the university was able to successfully argue for the retention of this position. The University also initiated an Ethno-racial Fund three years ago to provide seed funding for new ethno-racial activities in Departments and Faculties. We have been successful in obtaining money from this fund to support our AMNI initiatives.

**Curriculum Development**

Significant curriculum changes have taken place over the last two years at the Faculty of Social Work. Student evaluations regarding anti-racism, multiculturalism and native issues content in the 1994 spring term courses highlighted the uneven attention to this area in different courses. The annual focus group discussions with students on course offerings and the MSW programme at the faculty also stressed the need to include more diversity content in the curriculum. The experiences in the field practicum settings, where the students came face to face with diversity issues on a daily basis, contributed to their awareness of the need to have these issues embedded in their social work education.

The faculty decided to move in two directions: to introduce a new required course in the area of anti-racism, multiculturalism and native issues and, to infuse more diversity content in the existing courses. The Associate Dean of the Faculty of Social Work assumed leadership for the development of the required course. Work on this course started in the spring of 1995. Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues is, more or less, a synonym for issues of diversity at the faculty. The objectives of
the AMNI course were: to provide a knowledge base relevant to the issues of systemic racism and other exclusionary practices in Canadian society as a historical and contemporary phenomenon; to develop analytical and research skills to integrate the special experiences of minority populations in the practise of social work; to create awareness of one's own values and experiences in relation to others; and, to develop competencies to equip students to practise social work in diverse communities. To accommodate different components of diversity, the course was designed with four modules:

- **Anti-racism**: This module explores the history of immigration to Canada and the issues of individual and systemic racism. It also examines the anti-racism organizational change initiatives at the state and community levels and the resulting challenges to social work.

- **Native issues**: This module examines the unique experiences of Native Canadian populations in the colonial and post-colonial Canadian state and the struggles of native communities for self determination.

- **Issues of Diversity and Inclusiveness**: This module examines the effect of interlocking oppressions of sexism, ageism, classism, sexual orientation, racism, disabilities, poverty, immigrant status, native status etc. on individual and group experiences and the implications for social work.

- **Cultural competence**: This attempts to develop the skills required at various levels of practise, necessary to work competently with members of different cultural groups.

The next set of decisions were made around the issue of how to implement this proposed course: should it be a separate course, or should it be accommodated within the four existing, required courses at the MSW Year 1 level? Introducing the proposed AMNI course as a free standing course posed certain problems. The faculty had reorganized its MSW programme only two years ago and had reduced the required course load at MSW Year I from five to four. It would be rather "foolhardy" to return to the School of Graduate Studies with a request for one additional required course. Moreover, it would not be wise to let students identify the AMNI course as the additional work that has come their way during the first year of the programme. Therefore, the decision was made to integrate the four modules of the proposed AMNI course with the existing required courses at the MSW year I level. An important issue was the need to create a visibility and presence for the course, so that these four modules did not just become a number of lectures in the existing well developed courses. The solution to this was found in presenting the course materials during the first three weeks of the fall semester. Each of the modules took six hours each and, altogether the course had 24 instructional hours, which is equal to 12 weeks, the average length of a graduate course. The module on Anti-racism was offered as part of "Social Welfare Policy in the Canadian Context," Native Issues was offered as part of "Theoretical Foundations," Issues of Diversity and Inclusiveness was offered as part of "Knowledge and Values," and Cultural Competence was offered as part of "Elements of Practise." The first assignment in each of the courses was to be based on each of the these modules. The course was offered during the fall semester of 1995. Experienced resource persons were brought in specially for the Native Issues module.

A review of the experiences of students with the AMNI course was carried out during the fall term by a professor emeritus of the faculty in collaboration with a student committee. The review identified some significant issues. Some of these are as follows: there needs to be clarity with regards to the definitions of AMNI and the broad issue of diversity; the discontinuities and the perceptions of tokenism created by the delivery of three weeks of AMNI content at the beginning of the fall term needs to be addressed; there is value in experiential knowledge; and there needs to be more integration of AMNI content in the courses offered at the Faculty (Bellamy 1996).

In order to address the issues raised by this review, the curriculum planning group for MSW Year I developed the idea of a "diversity assignment" for fall 1996. The purpose of the assignment is to immerse the students in an experiential exercise involving intersecting diversities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, immigrant status, etc., and to enhance their ability to apply multiple theoretical and conceptual perspectives from the four required courses towards understanding these issues. Students worked in groups of five with a faculty member acting as a consultant. They had to collect first hand information about populations or communities that experience multiple oppressions
related to gender, race, immigrant or refugee status etc. At the beginning of the second month of the fall semester the students made presentations of their findings to a panel which graded these presentations on predetermined criteria for each of the four required courses. This integrated diversity assignment counts for the first assignment for all of the four required courses. This establishes AMNI content as an integral part of the respective courses and, at the same time highlights the importance of bringing input from different social work domains to address diversity issues.

During the early part of 1996, a special committee of students and faculty had started work on curriculum planning for the next academic session, for MSW year II which consists of students who have proceeded from year I and those incoming students with BSW degrees. In response to the student demand for integration, the committee approved a restated version of the general objectives for the curriculum at the Faculty of Social Work to read: “prepare students for culturally competent anti-racist and anti-discriminatory social work practice in diverse communities.” The committee further recommended that the two required courses and field practicum at the MSWII level should treat the issues of diversity as integral parts of the courses and to clearly outline this intent in the course outlines. Thus “Research Methodology,” which is a year long course explores the issues of conducting research in diverse communities. “Critical Appraisal,” the other required course in year II includes studies on diverse communities and pays attention to diversity in its analytical framework for examining social work research. The Practicum office is currently planning for integrative seminars, where the challenges and experiences of responding to the needs of diverse clients and communities will be discussed and shared by students.

Integration of diversity content in all the elective courses has also been recommended and implementation is under way. Student evaluations of courses each semester provide ample opportunities for the students to comment on the nature and extent of diversity content and discussion in these courses.

Community Research and Community Outreach

In order to achieve these objectives of the AMNI initiative, it was proposed that a centre called the AMNI Centre be established at the Faculty of Social Work. The AMNI Centre of the Faculty of Social Work was launched on 14 October 1995. The Centre occupies the ground floor of the Faculty building. The overarching purpose of this project is to assist in improving the quality of services provided to ethno-racial minority groups through the generation, dissemination, application and exchange of knowledge to support the development of ethno-racial competence in human service providers (Meeks 1995).

An advisory committee which consists of faculty, students and a cross section of the community sector in Metropolitan Toronto meets on a regular basis to plan the activities of the Centre. A faculty member is the Academic Director of the Centre, which also offers a practicum position for a student in MSW year II. The centre is developing a resource library which will emphasize the theme of knowledge construction from grassroots activities. Studies and reports produced by community agencies in Canada will be housed in the centre. The United Way of Greater Toronto has promised to transfer their collection of materials on anti-racism and multiculturalism to the AMNI Centre. The AMNI centre is establishing ties with the newly established Toronto Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS), which is an extension of the Metropolis project of the Canadian government. CERIS is also housed at the Faculty of Social Work.

A survey of community agencies in Metropolitan Toronto was carried out by the centre to find out how the AMNI Centre could work most productively with community agencies and avoid duplication of any work that is traditionally carried out by the agencies. The AMNI Centre also featured a number of guest speakers during the 1995-1996 academic session. The major theme of all these lectures was culturalism to the AMNI Centre and the faculty. CERIS is also housed at the Faculty of Social Work.

Organizational change for inclusiveness is an ongoing long-term activity. Each stage should proceed from the learnings of the previous stage. As such, the impact of introducing and sustaining
institutions change has to be assessed periodically. Our current evaluation efforts are focusing on the five elements of the AMNI initiative. Changes in each component of the model are made only after a comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation is addressing such issues as: what are the experiences of faculty and students with the AMNI initiative? How can we enrich the educational experiences of minority students at the faculty? Do we make a choice between anti-racism and diversity even though the two are complimentary?

Critical Role of Resources

Commitment to organizational change can only be as good as the resources invested, both financial and human. At a time when deep cuts are affecting every area of the university's operations, adequate resource allocation has been committed to the AMNI initiative. This was facilitated by the inclusion of the AMNI initiative in the faculty's recently approved five year strategic plan. This, in our view, has saved it from marginalization and tokenism. Current fundraising efforts to endow the centre will ensure its survival.

The Benefits of Establishing New Partnerships

In the light of increasing popularity of "empowering strategies" and "involving community," it is important to critically examine the nature and scope of the initiatives (Pulkingham 1993). The AMNI initiative involves establishing partnerships with communities hitherto not included in the Faculty's traditional set of activities. It involves the faculty reaching out to communities that are relatively new to Canada. A number of issues have emerged in this process including: gaining entry, the power of academia, imposition of the dominant world view, danger of raising expectations and exploitation of community resources. Some positive outcomes of these activities to date include: joint research projects, greater involvement with the community and richer materials for classroom teaching.

The Need for Positive Incentives

In the traditional merit system of the university that emphasizes research, publication and teaching as the criteria for tenure and promotion, is there a place for community outreach and service? Perhaps it is an understatement to state that initiatives of this type require energy and commitment from members of the teaching faculty. In an organizational context that places a premium on formal academic activities, how can legitimacy of working with the "community" be established?

Students

Students are arguably the major stakeholders in this change process. Whereas some students actively demand a training preparing them to work with diversity, there are different comfort levels in response to diversity issues, especially when these issues have particular personal significance. For example, students may position themselves differently in relation to existing and historical social relations of oppression and therefore have different expectations regarding the political positioning of faculty members and the material they deliver in class. The possible reproduction of similar social relations in the classroom and student reactions against it often pose difficult challenges in the classroom for both faculty and students. Members of the Faculty of Social Work are now beginning to document such experience and try to develop creative and constructive strategies to address them.

Pivotal Process of Curriculum Development

Universities guarantee academic freedom and individual faculty members have the right to determine what they teach in the classroom. It is essential for faculties who are advancing the diversity agenda to respect the academic freedom of their colleagues. In professional schools such as social work, however, there are external processes impacting on curriculum such as accreditation by professional bodies. Certain knowledge and value orientations are considered fundamental by the social work profession. Community and faculties are expected to cover those contents. The need to balance academic freedom with the responsibility to provide a curriculum that is sensitive and responsive to the realities of society has been articulated (Dei 1996). Within a particular school, there can also be mission statements which are shared and supported by faculty members. The Faculty of Social Work has pursued a strategy of encouraging faculty members to participate voluntarily to advance the AMNI agenda. In the fall term of 1996, for example, a group of faculty
members collectively designed and experimented with a diversity exercise which attempted to integrate all the first term required courses of the MSW programme. This exercise sought to advance the diversity agenda collaboratively while at the same time allowing individual faculty members to decide on the specific content they wanted to teach.

**Conclusion**

The imperatives of responding to the issues of diversity are twofold in social work: the values of the profession which specifically refer to the need for equity and social justice, and the arena of societal responsibility. Integrating diversity into organizational life need not be viewed as confrontational because "a collectivist perspective in a multicultural world view does not exclude white people. It just gives them an equivalent rather than a dominant voice to settle societal differences in an ethnically complex environment" (Gould 1996:40). Moving our current institutions towards greater inclusiveness is a critical step in achieving a more inclusive society. It is not an easy journey, but well worth the taking.
REFERENCES


