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## TALKING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Carnegie Mellon

This course is designed as a seminar built around two inquiry projects. In the first, reading and dialogue phase, we will look for rival hypotheses about the sources and markers of cultural/social difference. What are the differences that really *make* a difference?

In the second phase we will not just talk about, but *use* difference as a resource or tool for a “hands on” inquiry into the problem of “identity making” at CMU. Do students in this diverse community go about this in the same way or are they listening to different guiding voices? If so, what do those voices say? We will publish the results of this project on CMU’s Intercultural Inquiry web site. To talk about significant issues across difference—to carry out an intercultural inquiry—is not easy. So throughout the course we will also be studying and testing a toolkit of strategies for dialogue and inquiry that will be useful in both your personal and professional encounters with difference.

### Books:

Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/ La Frontera*. Ante Lute. 1987

Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. U. California Press. 1996 ed

Linda Flower. *Problem Solving Strategies for Writing in College and Community*. Harcourt. 1998 (PSSW)

### January Tu 14 Introduction

What comes to mind for you when you read or think about difference and talking across difference. What images, situations, ideas are floating in your mind around the notion of difference? Why did you choose this seminar? What did you think it would be about?

## I. MARKERS OF DIFFERENCE

### Th 16 Difference is Created by Race and Ethnic Identity

**Read.** Ronald Takaki. *A Different Mirror*

What are the sources and critical features of difference that really “make a difference” according to these writers? Why do they think that?

### Tu 21 How is Difference Represented at CMU’s Martin Luther King Day?

**Read:** PSSW, Ch 17. Dialogue and Inquiry. Learn how to “rival”, p 403-413.

This will be a key strategy for our class discussions and inquiry.

**Go to at least 2 MLK Events on Jan. 20**

**Due: Write & post a 1 page Discovery Memo (Bring a copy to class)**

Events like MLK Day foreground distinctive ways of thinking about difference, about its sources, and its consequences. Write your memo to us identifying/interpreting two or three forms of difference (ones that seem to “make a difference”) that you see foregrounded by different speakers, responders, or events. (See the note on Discovery Memos at the end of the syllabus)

**Th 23 A Rival View: Slipping In and Out of Cultural Identity**

**Read.** Lynell George. Gray Boys, Funky Aztecs, and Honorary Homegirls

Lena Williams. Little Things in the School

Are the markers of difference an identity you can put on or take off?

**Due:** Note on Strategies:

What are the strategies you use for reading these articles, for deciding what is significant; for developing what you will contribute? Draft a note to share with the seminar about what you notice. (See end of syllabus on Notes)

**Tu 28 Difference is Marked by Discourse**

**Read.** PSSW Chap. 1 Portrait of Writers in Action p 3-38, & p. 173-174

Chap. 14. “Its about Literacy” p. 317-326

**Due:** Note on Discourse An Account of Entering a Discourse

Write a paragraph about a time when entering a discourse made you feel like an “outsider” to a social practice, as James Gee describes it on p. 319.

**Th 30 A Rival View: The Ways We Interpret Experience**

Michael Omi and Howard Winant. Racial Formation

PSSW The Reader’s Response p 185-197

**February**

**Tu 4 What If the Difference Is Inside?**

**Read:** Jake Lamar. *Bourgeois Blues*

**Th 6 The Images in Our Heads**

**Read.** Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands*. Chap 1 & 2 & 3.

What does it mean to “enter into the serpent?”

**Due:** Note on Reading Anzaldúa. This text challenges its readers. What were the difficulties you encountered reading or dealing with Anzaldúa’s work?

Would you discuss them? Then outline a tentative plan of action for addressing the difficulties you encountered.

**Tu 11 Wild Tongues**

**Read.** Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands*. Chap 4 & 5 & 6.

**Th 13 A Mestiza Consciousness**

**Read.** Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands*. Chap 7

Are there any forms a mestiza consciousness could take at CMU?

**Tu 18 Developing a Problem Analysis with Collaborative Planning**

**Read.** PSSW, Chap. 5 Making Plans and Chap. 8 Analyzing a Problem

**Due:** Come to class with some rough notes for your Problem Analysis paper on “the problem of talking across difference” which is due shortly.

**Problem Analysis Paper:** Identify a situation out of your experience in which talking across difference raises a problem of identity—or conflicting identities. Turn that “situation” into a well-defined problem and help us understand its critical features. Use at least 3 of the concepts from our readings to help analyze the problem and, at the same time to evaluate their usefulness. What is their “explanatory power” in your case? Keep your paper to 3 pages—make every word count. (20 points. Evaluation criteria are found on p. 166 PSSW.)

**Schedule Ahead:** Set up an appointment to meet with your Collaborative Planning Partner some time after the next class and before you finish your paper. Remember you will need to have a personal tape and access to a tape recorder you can share.

#### **Th 20 Communication for Collaboration**

**Read:** Deborah Tannen. “ Cross-Cultural Communication”  
What effect would these differences have on Planning Partners?

**Due.** A verbal plan for your Problem Analysis paper that you, as Planner, can present to your CP partner. Come prepared to be a focused Supporter . Review p 117-118 for how to make this session most useful to you. Bring your tape and tape recorder to get a start on the planning session during class.

#### **Tu 25 Evaluating Your Collaboration and Your Analysis**

**Due. No Late Papers.** Your 3 page analysis. We will do an evaluation in class.

**Due:** A Note on Planning. Write a note on what you learned about your own planning in the CP session. This will be the other focus of discussion.

#### **Th 27 & March 4. Conferences**

**Due:** Your Portfolio + a Note in which you 1) evaluate the completeness of your portfolio and 2) the most important thing you think it shows about your learning. Come to our conference prepared to direct the discussion in what ever direction you wish. The agenda is yours; make the time useful to you.

### **MARCH**

#### **Th. 6 BREAK**

## **II. AN INQUIRY INTO THE VOICES OF IDENTITY AT CMU**

#### **Tu. 11. Strategies for Intercultural Inquiry: Critical Incidents and Observation**

**Read.** PSSW Chap 14. Out of the Classroom & Chap 15. Observation. (Esp on critical incidents 340 & 368)

**Prepare.** What Makes a Good Critical Incident?

Select the Thought Provoker and Example from these 2 chapters that you think is the best example of a Critical Incident that captures someone else's "situated knowledge." Come prepared to describe the 4 key features of the story that justify its winning the "best critical incident" award. Our goal is to develop our own criteria for interviewing.

**Schedule ahead.** Plan to do critical incident interviews with your Network after the next class (They will be due next Tuesday). Go after strongly "situated" critical incidents of identity building events. Get at least 3 strong incidents.

**Tu 13. What is Situated Knowledge?**

**Read .** Linda Flower. Talking Across Difference and the Search for Situated Knowledge. CCC 55, Sept 03

What are your "public identities"—the categories (many of which we have discussed) in which people would be likely to put you? Do those help or conflict with your own project of building your personal identity? What would be an example of your own "situated knowledge" about "identity building." We will use the experiences of our group to define both these notions.

**Read.** The Talking across Difference Reports will offer you some additional incidents for comparison. Find then on the English Dept site at:  
<http://english.cmu.edu/research/inquiry/five.html>

**Tu. 18. Sharing Our Data**

**Due.** Bring a first draft of your initial set of critical incidents (written up from your field notes or tape recording). We will try to consolidate our discoveries into a set of rival interpretations of the experience of identity building. Plan on collecting at least 3 strong incidents (you may want one from home for contrast)

**Th 20. Intercultural Classrooms**

Video on Barriers to Dialogue

**Tu 25- Th 27. SPRING BREAK**

**APRIL**

**Tu 1 Discoveries and Making a Team Project Plan**

**Read.** PSSW Chap 17. Dialogue and Inquiry.

**Due:** Post and bring your 2 page Discovery Memo on how CMU students deal with the problem of identity building. What are the voices that they are listening to? Attach your set of critical incidents (use pseudonyms for your Network). And add a paragraph documenting the backgrounds or experience of the people in your network who contributed critical incidents. (This can be confidential and not posted)

**The Project:** Today's discussion launches our final inquiry project. Each team will need to find (create) an example of identity building that illustrates some of the important voices you have uncovered in your investigation so far. You can then take this example or problem case to take to your Networks and use it to draw out rival hypotheses about the voices at work in this case—and the alternative voices they could imagine from their own experience. In your final report you might want to dramatize your findings as a dialogue, that reveals the set of perspectives and voices you uncovered in your theoretical readings, your critical incidents, and in your rival reading sessions.

**Th 3 Alternative Ways of Knowing**

**Read.** Belenky et al. *Separate and Connected Ways of Knowing* p.63-75

**Tu 8 Voices of Identity**

**Read:** Belenky et al. *Separate and Connected Ways of Knowing* p.100-115

**Th. 10 Finding Oneself**

**Read:** Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart* p. .Preface & p 55-63

Bellah and his team document different ways people think about individualism. Do you see any of these at Carnegie Mellon? What form do they take here?

**Tu 15 Voices of Individualism**

**Read:** Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart* p. 142-153 & 289-296

**Schedule Ahead:** Plan now to meet with your Network ASAP after the next class.

**Th 17 Draft Team Problem Case**

Come with ideas in mind and the text of all your examples at hand so your team can use this time to draft its problem case.

**Tu 22 Writing for the Public Sphere**

**Read:** Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart* p Appendix 297-303

What would this team say to us about our final project?

**Th 24 Draft Team Dialogue**

Use this time to compile the results from your network, draft your report, plan your presentation, and schedule what ever additional time you need.

**Tu. 29 Presentations**

**MAY Th 1 Presentations**

**All Papers due 1 week from today, Thursday, May 8, 5:00 pm.**

**SOME NOTES ON WHAT TO EXPECT**

### **What Does a Seminar mean?**

You are a necessary part of every class, not a spectator.

“Being there” is not enough. You are expected to have done the day’s reading, note taking, and thinking before class.

“Being willing to talk” is also not enough. You should come *prepared* to contribute to the issue on the table: come with notes that include your answer to the question of the day, an observation, or a question.

### **Assignments**

**Notes:** These are one or two paragraph notes that require some reflective thinking. They let us have a discussion built on everyone’s best thought-out rather than ad hoc contribution.

**Discovery Memos:** These brief, to-the-point memos are designed to share insights. Use a standard memo format:

To: The Seminar

From:

Subject:

Date:

We want to know what you learned. Tell us what your reflection, observations, interview (or whatever) turned up. Elaboration based on specific, telling details is critical; but make every word count. Consider focusing on 2 or 3 key points. No one is looking for earth shaking generalities; give us specific, interesting, closely observed discoveries. Your interpretation may help others make sense of what they observed.

### **Grading**

I will use the following criteria to evaluate your papers.

Discovery Memos:

Explicitly stated insights based on detailed, close observations

Portfolio

The portfolio contains the assigned Notes and Discovery Memos developed in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the semester. Attach a Note to it in which you 1) evaluate the completeness of your portfolio and 2) the most important thing you think it shows about your learning.

Problem Analysis:

Criteria are those on page 166 of PSSW

Final Group Report:

Diversity of perspectives; depth or insight; and detail or elaboration

Final Individual Assessment of Your Learning:

The same features as a Discovery Memo with a supported analysis and specifics.

Because of the collaborative nature of this course a grade of C or above requires that you come *prepared* to participate in/contribute to all classes and meet the deadlines for handing in and posting all written work.

### **Strategies**

Over the course of the semester we will try out a number of methods for talking across difference. By the end you should have a good sense of:

- Rivaling
- Strategic Reading
- Collaborative Planning
- Critical Incident Interviews
- Observation and Reflection
- Seeking Situated Knowledge
- Holding a community problem solving dialogue
- Conducting an Intercultural Inquiry
- Building an Intercultural Network

### **A Note on Building an Intercultural Network**

Talking across difference starts with one-on-one talk with people who share your desire to explore differences. The first step in building this network is to identify people who will agree to meet and talk with you a few times over the term. You need to find at least 3-4 people who represent kinds of difference that are important for you—people who do not share your cultural background. This may mean inviting people you only know by sight to contribute to a discussion. Our experience is that people often feel complimented by the fact that you are taking a serious interest in their perspective, that you want to go beyond small talk and really listen.

Sometimes you may want to form a small group of 2 or 3 from this class, and each invite a member from your personal Networks to the discussion. Hint: Food lubricates thought. At other times you may choose to meet with your personal group and let them share this experience with each other..

The second step in creating such a Network is getting to “significant talk.” The strategies we learn in this class will help. As will the fact that you are coming to your Network with some genuinely interesting questions.