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Building and Engaged World Citizenship: A World Culture Initiative

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Building and Engaged World Citizenship: A World Culture Initiative

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Building an Engaged World Citizenship
A World Culture Initiative

Janel C. Grant, Author

An Undergraduate Thesis in Anthropology
Submitted to the Department of Anthropology
At the
University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Peggy Sanday, Thesis Advisor

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Introduction

We are constantly bombarded with images of the War in Iraq, the upcoming presidential elections, the fight over gay marriages, and the Martha Stewart Case. So much so, that you would think there was nothing else going on in the world. All too often, this makes people wonder if their concerns, if the issues that they face, are being addressed at all. And even if they were to attempt to bring their issues to the forefront, how can they do it in a big and complex government such as ours? Miniya, a sophomore at University City High expressed this frustration, writing:

I’m not really into politics or government or anything of the sort because it’s complicated. I say that because it just seems institutionalized or too empowering in the sense that people of “higher power” are placed as God in a way. People go crazy over politics by arguing and fighting and blah, blah, blah, but it just doesn’t appeal to me. It seems like whenever people want to do something, politics or the law somehow is affiliated. I’m not against laws or even the government because those characteristics help keep a society, group and community in tact. I can’t fully explain how I feel towards politics...Maybe it’s cause I’m a quiet person and I don’t like drama, but I am a listener. To me, life doesn’t have to be complicated at all, it can be simple—or it should be simple.

The World Culture Initiative at University City High School goal is to transform students like Miniya, who feel alienated and disengaged from government and world affairs, into engaged world citizens. By engaged world citizens, I mean someone who identifies with the global community and participates in public discourse.
Developed by Dr. Peggy Sanday, a Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Karl Janowitz, a Professor in Linguistics at Arcadia University and a teacher University City High School for over 30 years, and Clare Tracy-Stickney, a teacher at University City High School, the World Culture Initiative attempts to facilitate, "intellectual growth, responsibility, and engagement in an increasingly global community by imparting a set of cognitive skills and practical knowledge of the world" (Sanday, 2). This is done through a Cultural Anthropology course taught by Dr. Karl Janowitz at College Town High. The World Culture Initiative uses cultural anthropology "to instill a way of thinking that opens the mind to current events and prepares students to think of the world as a global community of which they are a part and which can impact their lives" (Sanday, 2).

This program is a Public Interest Anthropology Initiative. Public Interest Anthropology (PIA) "is an evolving approach in anthropology which merges teaching, research, and theory development with action and practice in the public sphere" (Sanday, 2). Its focus is public service and social change, using a combination of research and action. Furthermore, it works towards providing the means for "engaging in public debate on relevant social issues as a means of entering the public sphere of debate and action" (Sanday et al., 7).

The cultural anthropology course at College Town High attempts to do this by, as Rappaport comments, using anthropology "for direct social engagement and to think on behalf of the world" (qtd. In Sanday et al. 8). However, this is not a smooth and easy transition to move from disengaged to engaged citizenship. Throughout this paper I will discuss the growth that the participants experienced from being alienated from world
affairs to becoming democratic participants in the public sphere. By understanding the process of becoming an engaged world citizen, my hope is that it will lead to improvements as well as the maintenance of the World Culture Initiative. This is important because to be able to get the citizenry that would normally not participate in the public discourse, to become involved to the level of critically thinking and acting upon the world, is to open the door to more participation in the public discourse and a more democratic world.

In the literature review, I will explore the theoretical foundation of the World Culture Initiative. First, I will discuss the public sphere and its impact on governmental institutions and its response to the concerns of those who participate or are excluded from that sphere. Second, I will discuss critical pedagogy and problem-posing education as a means for not only increasing participation in the public sphere, but as a way to get participants in the public sphere to think and act critically about and upon the world.

I will then discuss the ethnographic methods used in this research paper. These methods include participant observation, ethnic autobiographies, and diary. Along with exams and student responses to articles the results of this study will help us to understand the process and its impact on the participants. I will then conclude with an analysis of the overall value of the World Culture Initiative.
Literature Review

The Public Sphere

Within a democratic society such as the United States, the government holds its power through the consent of the people. Laws, lawmakers and government institutions are representative (or are supposed to be) of the people. But as complex, beauracratized, and extensive the government is, how can the people be heard? Of course there’s the vote, so that we are able to elect representatives that will work in our interests. But more importantly, what makes our society democratic is the fact that we have a public sphere. According to Charles Taylor, the public sphere is “a common space in which the members of society meet, through a variety of media (print, electronic) and also in face-to-face encounters, to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about those matters (259).

Originally elaborated by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in 1962, the public sphere is where the people are able to come together, discuss, and deliberate about issues and ideas in order to come to a common mind. This common mind is expressed in what we know as the public opinion. It is [assumed] that different views are expressed and confronted. These views and information are exchanged and formulated into a common end.

The public sphere takes place outside of the government and in common spaces. By common space I mean the media (tv, print and radio) as well as face-to-face gatherings. Because people do not necessarily have to meet in order to take part in discourse in the public sphere, the public sphere is a “metatopical space” (Taylor, 263).
It is necessary that the public sphere is outside of the government so as not to be tainted by and in order that the public sphere can check the powers of the government. Thus, “what the public sphere does is to enable the society to reach a common mind, without the mediation of the political sphere, in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power” (Taylor, 266). It is imperative to have the public sphere in not just democracies but in all modern societies, “so much so that, even where it is in fact suppressed or manipulated, it has to be faked” (Taylor, 259).

However, there isn’t only one public sphere. Instead, there are multiple public spheres or what Nancy Fraser would call “subaltern counterpublics” (116). The counterpublics are important because in a stratified society such as ours, not all voices, views, and ideas are heard. If there was one public sphere, the discourse would continue to favor the dominant group while reinforcing social inequality:

In that case, members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies. They would have no venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups. In this situation they would be less likely than otherwise to “find the right voice or words to express their thoughts” and more likely than otherwise “to keep their wants inchoate.” This would render them less able than otherwise to expose modes of deliberation that mask domination by, in Mansbridge’s words, “absorbing the less powerful into a false ‘we’ that reflects the more powerful” (Fraser, 122-123).
Therefore, in order for these people to be heard, there needs to be multiple subaltern counterpublics. “They function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics (Fraser, 124).” Thus they are able to impact the discourses that would normally be dominated by the dominant group. Also, the dialogue taking place among these “competing publics” helps to equalize, although not completely, participation within the public sphere. Not only that, but the more subaltern publics expands the discourse to include others that would have normally been excluded such as women, non-whites, and the lower classes.

As stated before, there is a division between the public spheres and the government. However, that division isn’t so clear cut. Subaltern counterpublics are what Fraser considers as weak publics, “publics whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making (Fraser, 134). They become strong publics when they formulate an opinion that is then formed into law. Strong publics are also the legislative and judicial body of our government as well as political parties and special interest groups. Thus the line between the public sphere and the government gets blurred. So, while there is power in public opinion, it gets its power once it is realized in a legally binding decision put out by strong publics.

However, not all people, or subaltern counterpublics gets heard. This is because the “official” public sphere (the national public sphere) is based on the exclusion and silencing of others such as women, Non-whites, the lower classes, etc. Even eliminating the formal barriers preventing the participation of these groups, such as segregation and disenfranchisement, does not guarantee access into the public sphere and thus public
discourse. One reason is the fact that the discourse is structured in a way that favors the
culture of the dominant group. This doesn’t allow for other groups to express themselves
and their issues in their own words and style as well as on their own terms. This in turn
limits their participation within the public sphere. For instance, we wouldn’t be able to
discuss or even fathom issues like date rape or domestic abuse if women weren’t able
(and indeed they were hotly contested) to introduce these terms, and thus, these concepts
into the public discourse. This points to the bigger issue of the lack of multicultural
literacy that is so necessary in order for these disadvantaged groups to be heard.

Why must they be heard? Well, besides the fact that it is their right just as much
as it the right of the dominant group, it is also necessary so that they can “understand
themselves as belonging to a community that shares some common purpose and
recognizes its members as sharing in these purposes; that the various goups, types and
classes of citizens have been given a genuine hearing and were able to have an impact on
the debate; and that the decision emerging from this is really the majority preference”
(Taylor, 276). These are conditions that are necessary for a “genuine democratic
decision.” Furthermore, when people feel alienated from the public discourse and the
government due to their “political powerlessness,” their rights being denied, and their
opinions being ignored, they develop “a fading political identity” which “makes it harder
to mobilize effectively” (Taylor, 285).

Yet this is not the only way in which social inequality impacts the public sphere:
‘The social question’ came to the fore, society was polarized by class
struggle, and the public fragmented into a mass of competing interest
groups. Street demonstrations and back room, brokered compromises
among private interests replaced reasoned public debate about the common good. Finally, with the emergence of welfare-state mass democracy, society and the state became mutually intertwined; publicity in the sense of critical scrutiny of the state gave way to public relations, mass-mediated staged displays and the manufacture and manipulation of public opinion (Fraser, 113).

These issues become more salient since the media, which is privately owned, is for profit. “Consequently, subordinated social groups usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation. Thus political economy enforces structurally what culture accomplishes informally” (Fraser, 120).

These issues within the public sphere itself cannot be remedied short of eliminating social inequality itself, although, Taylor suggests the decentralization of the public sphere as well as the government as a possible solution (279).

Yet the issues facing African Americans not only within the government and the market economy, but in the public sphere as well, has had a deep impact on the nature of their involvement in these institutions. First and foremost, the market economy was built upon the exclusion of African Americans by relegating them to the status of slaves and inhuman. Secondly, the government and its laws were formulated and specifically designed to disenfranchise and dehumanize African Americans by labeling African Americans 3/5th of a man, denying them the rights expressed within the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and allowing the institution of slavery and the slave trade to continue. Third, African Americans were denied access into the public sphere by prohibiting and making it illegal for slaves, i.e. African Americans, to read or write. Thus, they were cut
off from the common space in which public discourse took place. “The system of stratification in the United States based on race and its ideological components served to exclude African Americans both formally and informally from participation within the American bourgeois public sphere. This system also encouraged exclusion of African Americans from subaltern counterpublics such as those associated with the labor, populist and women’s movements of the late nineteenth century” (Dawson, 203-204).

Nevertheless, African Americans had their own subaltern counterpublic in which to bring such issues into the forefront of American politics and policy making, such as the abolition of slavery, the anti-lynching campaigns of the early twentieth century, and the desegregation of public spaces such as schools, transportation, and the workplace. What also made their counterpublic instrumental as well as unique was that “Black institutions and publics have been largely multiclass, at least up to 1970, due to the long regime of enforced segregation” (Dawson, 201).

However, this would not sustain the African American counterpublic for long as patriarchal norms adopted from the dominant society regulated the extent to which African American women were allowed to participate within the public discourse of this counterpublic. Now, “a Black public sphere does not exist in contemporary America, if by that we mean a set of institutions, communication networks and practices which facilitate debate of causes and remedies to the current combination of political setbacks and economic devastation facing major segments of the Black community, and which facilitate the creation of oppositional formations and sites” (Dawson, 201).

There are many reasons for this besides having a leadership that was overwhelmingly male and patriarchal, which can in some ways be attributed the
centrality of the Black church as the premier site for black public discourse and “the importance of male religious leaders in the Black community” (Dawson, 201). Michael Dawson points to the fact that,

The points of possible intersection between a Black counterpublic and other oppositional publics are still extremely limited. The traditional civil rights, progressive and nationalist organizations within the Black community are also in disarray. With these organizations collectively at their lowest ebb since the beginning of the century, no national and only weak local forces exist to provide the type of organizational base necessary for a flourishing counterpublic or multiple counterpublics (Dawson, 221).

Furthermore, “the combination of structural shifts in the international and American political economy, the consolidation of the political right’s domination of public discourse and policy under Presidents Reagan and Bush, and conflict and diverging interests within the Black community have also contributed to the disintegration of the Black public sphere” (Dawson, 201).

I am almost certain, especially in these times of the war in Iraq, an economic recession, and an upcoming presidential election between the George W. Bush and John Kerry, that the African American counterpublic isn’t the only one that has disappeared from the public sphere. So how can we improve the United States and our democracy as well as increase democratic participation within our society and the world, while rebuilding and in some cases developing new subaltern counterpublics? I think Critical Pedagogy provides a framework in which to achieve this.
Critical Pedagogy

Culture isn’t just your beliefs, traditions, and views. It is the result of the unequal power relations that take place within a society. This inequality plays out in racism, gender discrimination, classism, ageism, sexism, ablism, etc. These oppressed groups lose their power to define their own existence. Instead they are forced to adopt a culture that insists on their being less than. “To enforce a common culture…or a common sense…is in fact the imposition of homogenizing social paradigm…that severely limits the possibility for a critical multicultural democracy” (Leistyna and Woodrum, 3). Thus culture becomes a sight of contention between the dominated and the dominator. Critical Pedagogues contend that schools become a principal sight for the reinforcement of oppression through its curriculum, practice, praxis, and theories.

“Critical Pedagogy challenges us to recognize, engage, and critique any existing undemocratic social practice and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social identities and relations” (Leistyna and Woodrum, 2). Therefore, Critical Pedagogy seeks to deconstruct the educational policies, theories and practices that continue to oppress students (whether they are failing or not) and teachers by depriving them of their critical faculties to think about and act upon the world and themselves. Critical Pedagogy challenges the idea that the only way to true knowledge and emancipation is through “objective inquiry, universal reason, and absolute truth” (Leistyna and Woodrum, 3).

There are multiple versions of Critical Pedagogy. The practice of Critical Pedagogy changes from classroom to classroom and participants to participants. It is not
to impose one singular ideology or way of going about things. Instead it gives power to
all involved in order to not just take in and regurgitate knowledge, but to interact, engage,
and transform objects of knowledge in order to produce their own ideas and knowledge
of the world.

Freire defines oppression as “any situation in which “A” objectively exploits “B”
or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (55). Yet
oppression occurs differently based on the circumstances and the people involved. This
is because there are different spheres of social life (economic, political, cultural, etc.)
(McCarthy, 160). The dynamics of different oppressions (i.e. race, class, gender, ability
diversity, etc.) operate differently in different spheres while these spheres interact with
each other. Because of this, the relationship between class, race, and gender is complex,
unpredictable, and can be contradictory at times. In order to understand how this
relationship plays out in schools we have to understand how they play out in the world
and society (McCarthy, 162).

Due to the unpredictability of the relationship between class, race, and gender,
“Individuals or groups in relation to economic, political and cultural institutions such as
schools do not share an identical consciousness and express the same interests, needs, or
desires “at the same point in time”” (McCarthy, 161). Nevertheless, this does not deny
the fact that oppression exists (whether the people choose to see it or not).

“American schools are principal sites for the production and naturalization of
myths and ideologies that systematically disorganize and neutralize minority cultural
identities” (McCarthy, 163). This is because education is seen as a means of the
knowledgeable bestowing the gift of knowledge unto the ignorant. By labeling students
as ignorant they are deprived of inquiry and instead are confined to accepting what is told to them. They are seen as not being able to think for themselves but as others having to think for them. Thus, education is reduced to the teacher (depositor) teaching (depositing) information to the students (depositories). “The scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (Freire, 72). This form of education, what Freire calls the “Banking Model,” denies the humanity of both teacher and student because to be human is the ability to think and act upon and with the world. Once this creative act is taken away, the characteristic that makes them human is taken away.

The Banking Model of education views people as adaptable and manageable beings. The more people passively take in knowledge the less they are able to develop a critical consciousness to think about, understand and act upon and with the world. Thus it serves to continue oppression. And it follows that the oppressor doesn’t wish to reveal the reality of the oppressed situation, since to reveal this reality will allow for the transformation of that reality. “The interests of the oppressors lie in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them;’ for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated” (Freire, 74).

As a “solution” or an “answer” to the Banking Method and the oppressive reality that characterizes societies today, Freire proposing a Problem-Posing Education. In problem-posing education, there are no longer teachers (who teach the students) and students (who are taught by the teacher). Instead there are what Freire calls teacher-students and student-teachers (Freire, 80). Through dialogue, the teacher learns while
teaching students and the students teach while learning from the teacher. It is a relationship in which both teacher and student are responsible for growth and understanding. The teacher can no longer use authority as the basis for the validity of his or her arguments. In problem-posing education everyone involved has authority behind their arguments (Freire, 80).

The teacher-student is always in dialogue with the material and students. She or he doesn’t own the “cognizable object;” instead it is in constant reflection and debate on the part of teacher-student and student-teacher, whether it’s preparing a lesson or project or in dialogue with each other. Students no longer unquestionably accept the “knowledge” that is fed to them. Students and teachers engage in critical thinking together. They examine a particular topic or issue, apply it to their experience and where they are coming from, then begin to question the topic or issue in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of and clearer picture of the topic of issue in a way that transforms it as well as the teacher and students. Furthermore, while giving student’s knowledge the teacher must also present the historical and social factors that went into producing that “objective” knowledge. To not do so is to present something in a vacuum and make it ahistorical when in fact we and the world are a historical being.

What separates Critical Pedagogy from other education theories is that Critical Pedagogy calls for the inclusion of both teacher and student in the learning and teaching process. The point of departure for discussing a topic or issue is the experiences and perceptions that both the teacher and students hold. This is not to put anyone on trial nor is it to be a form of group therapy where everyone compares their oppressions. Instead, it is to unsettle all those involved only to the point where they critically examine
themselves and the world around them in a way that will transform them into agents of change. As they become aware of the interrelatedness of the problems, they become increasingly knowledgeable and critical, thus decreasing the alienation they feel from the material. They can place themselves in relation to the material. This is key because it ultimately leads to the students further engaging with the material and reaching higher understandings of their reality and the world. This is also in hopes that there will be a democratic exchange of knowledge and ideas as well as not to silence the voice of all students (Leistyna and Woodrum, 5).

Yet, in order for there to be any true reflection their must be action. Furthermore, it is necessary to have discourse as well as action in order to case any true change. Liberation occurs through praxis. Praxis is the ongoing process of reflection and action with and upon the world (Leistyna and Woodrum, 5). “People develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 83). The subsequent action that people take is based on how they perceive the relationship between themselves and their world. Therefore, reflection is not separate from action. While acting one is reflecting and after that reflection, action is taken.

One thing that was noticeably missing from Critical Pedagogy theory was a discussion about meeting children’s basic developmental and academic needs. While it is important to recognize and criticize oppression carried out in schools and society, children still need to develop fundamental skills and pass exams. As Enrique Trueba puts
it, "The task is to do this work of critique but also to move towards a realistic approach that links the creation of viable pedagogies to children's empowerment" (593).

Nevertheless, Critical Pedagogy makes an important contribution to educational theory by expanding the scope of analysis from focusing not just on the school setting and local community, but he larger social and global factors that effect everyday educational issues. It makes a firm connection between individual, school, community, country, and world and shifts the educational theoretical discourse from one merely dealing with student or school success or failure to one that recognizes and deals with the deeper complexities of education in relation to society, economics, politics, and culture. It moves away from blaming to putting responsibility on all those involved. Furthermore, Critical Pedagogy fosters hope and recognizes the fundamental rights of humanity. "Any student can tell us what liberation looks like to them and we should listen and then, to the greatest extent possible, make it happen" (Gabel, 196).
Methods

Setting

The World Culture Initiative takes place at University City High School.

University City High School is located in University City, just four blocks from the Northern boundary of the University of Pennsylvania campus. Its total enrollment is 2022 students, the majority of which are African American (97.2%).

Figure 1: Enrollment by Race (2000)

University City is an inner-city school in which the majority of students are in the low income bracket (82%). It is a below average school with a high dropout rate, low test scores and less than half of graduating students consider pursuing a post-secondary degree (InfoResources, 1-2).

Figure 2: Grade 11 Math and Reading Assessment Results
Figure 3: Drop Out Rates

Despite these issues it is still a striving learning institution. Students are broken up into six individual learning communities specifically tailored to the academic abilities and the interests of the students at University City High. Aslo, Penn funded initiatives such as the World Culture Initiative, supplements the education that these students receive at University City High.

The World Culture Initiative runs a cultural anthropology class at University City High, taught by Dr. Karl Janowitz. The class uses the college text, Cultural Anthropology by Conrad Phillip Kottak. Students also read Newsweek weekly and has a major project for every marking period.

The course is also assisted by students and former students from Dr. Sanday’s Public Interest Anthropology course at the University of Pennsylvania. They serve as teaching assistants (TAs), teaching some of the chapters in the textbook, planning and shaperoning trips and events for the cultural anthropology class, as well as assisting the students in their work. The TAs are all full-time Penn students and are from different parts of the country.
Participant Observation

From February 2003 to March 2004 I’ve been a teaching assistant in the Cultural Anthropology course at University City High School. February 2003 to April 2003 I assisted with the class twice a week, leading discussions and shaparoning on class trips to cultural events and sites in the Philadelphia area. September 2003 to March 2004, I co-taught the course, with Dr. Karl Janowitz. During this time, I taught some of the chapters in the textbook, led class discussions on current events, and planned and led the students in a major project. As a teaching assistant, I had a chance to observe the students and fellow teaching assistants for at least an hour every weekday. I documented my observations in fieldnotes that I wrote either immediately after the class or that same evening.

During class time, I wrote no fieldnotes nor made any jottings for numerous reasons. The first is that I didn’t have the time or the opportunity to write notes or jottings while teaching lessons and leading discussions. Because of the intense nature of the course, my full attention was on my duties as a teaching assistant and as a facilitator for class discussions. Secondly, I knew that the students did not want to have notes taken on them while in class because they’d feel, as Kachina, a junior at University City High puts it, “like lab rats.” An incident last year affirmed this when a student got a hold of one of the teaching assistants notes which immediately caused the students to react negatively to the teaching assistants and to resist participation in the course.

Through my participation in the course, I developed close relationships with the students as well as my fellow TA’s and Dr. Karl Janowitz. Furthermore, I developed relationships with the school staff, administrators and students who did not take this
class. As time went on, I became more of a participant than an observer, even encouraging the students to write an ethnography on me, my fellow teaching assistants, and the course.

**Ethnic Autobiographies**

From December 2003 to March 2004, the students, Aliya, another teaching assistant for the course, and myself wrote ethnic autobiographies. Autobiographies are “predicated on a moral vision, on a vibrant relation between a sense of self and a community, on a retrospective or prophetic appeal to a community of spirit” (Fischer, 197). What makes ethnic autobiographies unique are that they use the personal experiences of the author as a starting point for exploring and critiquing oppression, domination, and society’s ills. It’s “retrospection to gain a vision for the future” (Fischer, 198). Yet most importantly, in writing ethnic autobiographies the participants were able to make their “taken-for-granted ways recognizable as sociocultural constructions for which [they] can exercise responsibility” (Fischer, 202). Instead of being a mere rehash of events that took place in one’s life, it serves as a foundation for critically thinking about the self, our society and our world.

Because, an ethnic autobiography was a new concept to the high school students, I developed an outline, based on the description above, in order for the students to learn how to write an ethnic autobiography (See Appendix). Twice a week, the students had in-class time to work on their ethnic autobiographies as well as to ask any questions about the paper. They were graded on their papers, however, before I gave them a final grade, they were given the opportunity to do multiple revisions.
Since I knew what ethnic autobiographies were, I did not have to go by the outline that I'd given to the students. Nevertheless, I wrote a detailed ethnic autobiography which was then handed out to the students to serve as an example.

The ethnic autobiography served another purpose in that it helped me to get to know the students and the students to know me. Through our work on the ethnic autobiographies, we formed a close relationship, and what developed was a safe space for students to express their views and to hold discussions on controversial issues and topics.

Diary

I kept a diary throughout my time as a teaching assistant to document personal thoughts and opinions about the class as well as the other things that were going on in my life at the time. It is necessary to document my ‘own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses as these factors shape the process of observing and recording others’ lives’ (Emerson et al, 11). I wrote in it often but not consistently, right before I went to bed at night. None of the participants were required nor asked to keep a diary.
World Culture Initiative

Engaged World Citizenship

The goal of the course was to get students, both University of Pennsylvania and University City High students alike, to become engaged world citizens. Overall, the students became engaged insofar as the course was concerned. However, the type as well as the level of engagement varied among the students.

Most students expressed their involvement at the level of reflection: on themselves and their society. Some students, like Hakim, Kachina, and Audrey, University City High students, preferred to talk face to face about current events and issues going on in the world:

Kachina raises her hand. I take notice and give her a look that says she can go ahead and speak. Kachina asks me, “Why is the U.S. reluctant to send troops to Haiti when they see what’s going on and yet they’d start a war with Iraq?” Hakim responds to no one in particular, “Because it’s all about money! Iraq has something we want: oil. Haiti doesn’t.” Audrey then asks me, “How come they’re refusing to let Haitian refugees into the country? I thought that we took in political refugees. Isn’t this one of those times?” I respond, “Well, I have my own opinion about why they let in some refugees and don’t let in others. What do you think?” Hakim says, “It’s cause they don’t have anything that we want so we’re not going to help them.” Kachina then says, “I understand that they don’t have anything that we want so we’re not going to help them. I agree. But they should at least let them in. Isn’t that what our country is about?” Then
Audrey says, “Well I’m not sure why they won’t let them in. Maybe it’s because we have such a bad economy.” She then asks me, “I want to know what you think?” I reply, “I personally think that it has a lot to do with race as well as the fact that it’s just not on the national agenda. People are so wary of involvement in foreign affairs, especially after Iraq, that I don’t think they want to get their hands in this one.” Confused, Kachina asks, “But didn’t the U.S. support the current President of Haiti?”

I was very taken aback by this discussion since I didn’t mention anything about the crisis in Haiti nor did I assign any reading on it. This moment more than ever made me aware that the students were paying attention to what was going on outside of the U.S. as well as the U.S.’s involvement in foreign affairs. They were truly concerned and wanted to understand why the situation was what it was and why the U.S. was reacting to it the way in which it was. Yet not all students felt comfortable discussing current events in class. Part of the reason I think was because of age. The students who tend to talk the most in the class are juniors in high school. The sophomores, with the exception of Khalon, don’t speak unless they’re asking a question. The seniors only add their opinions whenever they feel an important point hasn’t been raised. For example:

Laqueta asks me, “Can you explain cultural relativism?” I respond, “Cultural relativism is the idea that we can’t judge another culture…” At this point Kachina interrupts, “By our own.” Deidre gives Kachina a “look.” I say, “Exactly” in response to Kachina answer. Kachina then goes on and adds more to the answer by stating, “However, some cultures may be in violation of human rights.” I affirm that statement then Kachina
asks, “How do you spell exogamy?” I spell it out for her and Laqueta asks, “Do we need to know this for the test?” I tell her she doesn’t need to know it for the test but should know it anyway. I then asks the class if the period has begun yet. Laqueta answers, “technically yes.” So I say, “Let’s start the exam.” At this point Miniya asks, “Can you explain culture being integrated and all encompassing?” After I scanned the textbook for a second I told her, “Culture is all encompassing cause it includes more than just high class definitions of culture such as art and music. Culture is integrated because if one part of a culture changes another part will. No aspect of culture stands alone.” I then begin to hand out the exam. While handing out the exam I say to the class, “Do not turn over your exam until I say so. There should be no books out.” I finish handing out the rest of the exams then I say, “You may now start the exam.” Deidre says, “Oops. Was I not supposed to start already?” I give her a smile and tell her to go ahead.

Another reason some students do not participate in the class discussions are because they may be immigrants. Whether or not they feel comfortable with their English may be a reason. Also, the fact that others who are in the class are designated mentally gifted, while they may identify more with students in the ESOL program, may make them feel a little uncomfortable expressing their opinions. Furthermore, some of the things that we discuss, especially issues that are specific to the united states may not be of interest to them. The only time in which one of the international students participated in class discussion was when Ajani led the class in a lesson on his native
language Amharic. Karl and I had asked if he'd be willing to teach the students some things about his language as a supplement to the chapter on language in the textbook:

As I handed out a chart with the Amharic alphabet, Ajani led the students in a lesson about his native language. Ajani is originally from Ethiopia, yet he's been in the United States since junior high school. He shows the students some how to write Amharic letters, grammar as well as sentence structure, and he explains the differences between the English language and the Amharic language. The students enjoy the lesson so much that Deidre asks, "Can you spell my name for me in Amharic so that I can get it as a tattoo?"

Eventhough some students didn't prefer to talk about current events and issues in class, this did not prevent them, nor exclude them from the discussion. On the contrary, the students were very much involve in debate, yet most preferred to write their opinions in their weekly Newsweek responses. I found their responses to be the most insightful on what it was the students felt about things that are going on. In response to an article, which Miniya describes as being about "...investment and how the fund groups are taking money from people," she states:

Money is something valued in America and even appears to be essential to live a good life. Therefore, people work and conjure up ways to accumulate money...This is where [the] economy comes in. An economy is a system of production, distribution, and consumption of resources. People are investing their cash for more cash basically, but the people on the inside are taking their money from them hoping that no one notices.
That way, the people that are investing their money stay on the bottom, and the ‘higher power’, stays on top, which leads the investors into putting in more in which the higher power can keep taking. It’s like a cycle...Economy (in my opinion), helps to form and structure society in a way. People need stuff, stuff costs money, money’s earned via work. Depending on how much money you make, you are categorized into a group; upper-class, middle-class, or lower-class. So everyones kind of working their way up; some do it by investing, while some do it by stealing...It’s the survival of the fittest...

Most of the students also preferred to express their views and concerns in their ethnic autobiographies. In writing about their own life experiences, students found it easier to comment on society and the issues that not only they faced but what others may face as well. For instance in this passage, Abrianna comments on classism not only in her life but in the United States:

I think that societies especially the American society that we live in assigns class groups to a person based on the amount of money that they make. I consider myself of the “lower class” based on the amount of money that my family makes. I think class systems are a capitalistic way of thinking and it also creates a social gap that leaves room for class discrimination. In America, the “upper class” are respected and given certain privileges because of the high position that they hold within society. The “lower class” people are discriminated against and aren’t given many chances to uplift themselves. I think everybody deserves a
chance to make something out of their life regardless of sex, race, or class...When you are a part of the "lower class" I think it means struggle. I grew up in a single parent home; I have seen what it is like to have to struggle to get by in life. Everything you do is a struggle whether it is finding a baby sitter because you can't afford day care or juggling bills to see which one is the most imperative and should get paid first. For me being a part of the "lower class" has taught me a sense of responsibility and appreciation because I always had to work for what I want. My mother taught me that nothing in life is worth having if it comes easy; easy come easy go.

For the Penn students I found that they preferred to participate in class discussions. However, their discussions haven't gotten to the point of adding a new perspective to the debate but more so to clarify any misunderstandings the students may have about the subject of discussion or to ask questions of the students to find out their opinion on the matter. Furthermore, they preferred the smaller discussion groups as opposed to the big class discussion. However, I found that when I came upon the smaller groups, the Penn students tended to focus a lot on their personal experiences and not really get to deep into the societal and global aspects of the issues that were being discussed, even though I provided focus questions for the groups. This led students to veer off the topic and in many cases, not speak to the issue at all.

However, I do not want to jump to a conclusion on their participation within the discussion since they are new to the class and are in the process of not only forming relationships with the University City High students, but also finding their place within
the discourse that is taking place. Also, it can be hard to find a balance between teaching and being taught by the students; you have to determine how and when to focus a discussion, all the while pushing them to think critically about the world while trying not to indoctrinate them to your particular point of view.

Taking all those things into consideration, I told the Penn students that it would be beneficial to them if that wrote a full-length ethnic autobiography just as the University City High School students had. I figured that it would be a great way for the students to get to know them as well as for them to express some of their views and enter into the dialogue and discursive space that we had in the classroom. However, I faced near total resistance from the Penn students. They felt they shouldn’t have to write an ethnic autobiography since it wasn’t required of them for the Penn course. I found this odd, seeing as Aliya as well as myself wrote full length ethnic autobiographies not only for the students to read but also, at the request of Dr. Sanday. I didn’t push the issue any further, yet I did remind them that the University City High School students have been working on their ethnic autobiographies for the past three months and that before they would be willing to share many of the personal experiences and views that they hold, the University City High School students would have to feel comfortable around them. The Penn students agreed to at least tell the University City High students about themselves by verbally answering some of the questions that the University City High students used as a guide for their ethnic autobiographies later that Friday. Although I still feel it’s not fair and equitable that they didn’t write an ethnic autobiography to share with the students, and yet, expected the University City High students to share theirs with them,
seeing as it was out of my control and jurisdiction as a fellow Penn student, I let the matter drop right here.

So, with no response articles, ethnic autobiographies, and little discussion to go on, I don’t truly know whether or not or even how critically conscious they are about the world. Hopefully, as time goes on and they interact with the students more we will all have a clearer understanding of where everyone is coming from and their views on the world and society.

Nevertheless, as TA’s for the class, Aliya and myself have participated in the discourse more so to push the students think critically about and to help them express their reality. Yet this hasn’t stopped us from presenting our own views and even holding heated debates that left students at the edge of their seat. For instance, in a discussion on what designates a country as third world, Aliya and I got into a heated discussion on whether or not Argentina could be considered a third world country:

Me: “Third world countries would be in Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.” Aliya, with a perplexed look on her face said tentatively, “I don’t think Argentina would be considered a third world country.” I responded, “Argentina doesn’t have the political and economic power that core nations like ours do. It’s a third world country because it doesn’t have what we have.” She then responds, “Just because a country doesn’t have what we have doesn’t make it a third world country.” Not quite sure what I’d just said, I asked, “Did I say that?” Excitedly, Deidre and Abrianna answered, “Yup, you did say that.” All the while the other students were nodding their head in agreement. So
then I retorted, “True. But there are indigenous people who aren’t even on
the global radar and they do not have a strong economy or luxuries that we
have.” Aliya retorted back, saying, “But Argentina is made up of mostly
rich immigrants from Europe. It’s known as the Spain of South America.”
I responded, “While that may be true, I think it is unfair to label Argentina
a core nation because that would ignore the fact that they have a failing
economy, don’t have the resources nor the power that core nations have,
that they are dependent on the World Bank, and that they have a sizable
population of people who’s basic needs and rights aren’t being met.” At
that point Aliya concedes stating, “Well that’s true…”

The students were so in to the debate that they didn’t even notice that the class
was over. Not only that, but seeing that after the class, Aliya and I complimented each
other on the debate and went about as if the heated discussion didn’t even take place, the
students were amazed. Some even shook their heads in disbelief. What started out as a
lesson on the modern world system, turned into a debate that grabbed the attention of the
students, causing them to go home and read that chapter. The following day, they were
ready to discuss the chapter and even had their own opinions about the difference be core,
semi-periphery, and periphery nations.

Aliya and I have also used our ethnic autobiographies as an arena for expressing
our opinions and beliefs about the world and our society through our life experiences. In
my own ethnic autobiography, I talk about how my life experiences not only impacted
my life but helped me to realize the complexity of oppression in our society and what it
will take to end it:
I wouldn’t say that my views departed dramatically from when I first realized my oppression as a child. They have grown and become more in depth, however. I still feel race is the most prevalent form of oppression in the United States. Our country was built on racism and because of that I feel race issues take primacy over others. That is not to say that we shouldn’t fight to end gender and class discrimination. For there to be racial equality there has to be equality on all fronts. If I’m no longer oppressed but someone else is, then we haven’t experienced true liberation. Furthermore, we couldn’t only fight against racism because each individual, in the U.S. and the world, has experienced their own form of oppression and to deny them the opportunity and agency to fight for their rights will only serve to oppress us all even more. Thus, fighting for racial equality for me is fighting for all people. I have grown to appreciate the varied views and experiences of people and the complexity of the relationship between race, class and gender. Not only that, but in fighting for these things I’ve also expanded my worldview to recognize and fight other forms of oppression such as heterosexism, ablism, and religious discrimination… I’m still that Black Jamaican Girl from the streets of Brooklyn. I’ve experienced racism, classism, and sexism because of who I am. However, I wouldn’t trade my experiences for the world. They made me stronger, determined, and mature. They drive me to continue to fight and better understand oppression. I’m not perfect in that pursuit; I make mistakes, I falter, and there are things that I still don’t know or
understand. More importantly however, I am open to receive guidance and knowledge in order to make myself better equipped to struggle for the liberation of the hearts and minds of humanity.

Eventhough there is obviously engagement in world issues and discourse taking place, students had a tough time translating that into action. Some of the University City High School students were already involved in extracurricular groups or church activities, but I didn’t see where the course prompted them to take part in any type of political or community service activities. Most often, if there was any action taken it was in the form of University City High School students resisting what they saw as a bad education. For instance, everyday after class, McKale would drag his feet to go to his next class. He would constantly complain about his engineering class because according to him, “All we do is watch movies all day.” He would constantly bargain with Karl to stay behind and talk to Aliya and myself for as long as possible about the topic for the day or to show us his art.

Other students also took small steps in putting their critical thinking to critical action, in the form of entering other public spheres of discourse. For instance, Hakim, the only student in the whole high school to apply to Penn, came to a discussion on Penn’s campus, hosted by a historically black fraternity and sorority, about relationships in the black community. Although Hakim held back his thoughts, being that it was a new setting where he was the only high school student, he soon opened up enough to challenge those at the discussion to question the confines in which the topic was being discussed. He asked questions like, “How do you define marriage?” and often, when the discussion began to veer off topic, Hakim would ask another question to bring the
discussion back in focus. His comments had the Penn students thinking he was actually a fellow student whom they just haven’t seen before. Unsure, many of them came to me to inquire about him. I must admit that I was proud to say that he was a University City High School student and an applicant to the University of Pennsylvania.

Some students felt the best way for them to take critical action was to resist the new Penn TA’s. The day after or before the Penn TA’s were to come to the class, Kachina would often express the fact that she didn’t appreciate them entering into the class so late in the year. She, along with other students, were suspisous of their intentions and presence in the classroom. Kachina would often say, “I don’t want to be nobody’s lab rat” or “I just won’t listen to them.” Other students would also plan their resistance saying things like, “We know how to handle them” or “Don’t worry, we’ll show them what it’s like to live in the ghetto.” Although I must admit that I had my own suspicions for why they were entering the class and what effect their pressense my have on the current discourse, didn’t express those concerns to the students. Instead, I asked them to give the Penn TA’s a chance because they are here to help, not hurt, the class. I also said that if they have any issues with the Penn TA’s to let them know respectfully or to even write about it in their upcoming project with the new Penn TA’s. Nevertheless, whenever the Penn TA’s visited, the students would be unusually quiet and wouldn’t participate in the discourse as much. On those days, usually only the most talkative ones, Kachina, Audrey, and Hakim, would speak.

For most, if not all of the students, they saw themselves taking critical action in the future and in their careers. On the topic of our current political system, Latoya writes:
Currently, politics are not a big issue to me. Maybe when I become older and I am given the right to vote, my feelings will change. For now, I basically follow after my mom and her beliefs. My mom is a democrat, and sometimes she supports democratic decisions and efforts. As a result, I do the same. Who knows, I may feel totally different a few years from now. But for now, I don’t let politics upset me. Unless I am directly affected, I do not get involved...although I am not very political, politics do in some way affect my life. Lately, the decisions of the government have been affecting my society more negatively than positively. Laws that are being passed are preventing me from doing so many things. In this sense, you would think I’d be more involved in politics. But I’m not, not right now. I have enough responsibilities to take care of. For now, I will let the voters decide.

Latoya brings up a lot of issues in this passage. For one thing, many of the students see their action as manifest in their ability to vote, thus, no vote meant no action. Secondly, most of the students found politics to be upsetting. This was mostly because they felt alienated from the government and many of the current public and foreign policies that have come into action during President Bush’s first term as president of the United States. For instance Hakim writes:

Political views to me, don’t really matter to me. My political view is that we won’t know the truth. The war in Iraq was a smoke screen. Why did we really fight them? The truth will never be told, because the government says it was for the sake of national security. If your belief is
that the government will tell you the truth, you are a damn fool... The government impacts me, because they lie to us... How is it that the government can break the laws that they set forth, but the average citizen can’t do what they do. No matter what we say or do, the government is going to continue to lie to us and we are going to accept it.

Another point that Latoya brought up was that the students felt that overwhelmed with the responsibility of succeeding educationally. For all the students, they saw education as their ticket to a better life; it would either make or break them. Audrey talks about this stress:

As a junior, although I’m receiving SAT and PSSA prep, the actual test themselves are stressing me because in order for me to be a National Merit Scholar I need to have a twelve hundred on my SAT and as of right now I only have a nine hundred eighty. As a student of the class of 2005, I now have to deal with the fact that my PSSA score will be placed on my transcript therefore affecting whether or not I am accepted to the college of my choice. Along with these tests I have to take a placement test at the end of this year so that I can attend classes at the Community College of Philadelphia in my senior year of high school... These are just the academic stresses of my life, not including everything that goes on in school, the drama with my friends, and my relationship troubles. With all this issues to contend with at the tender age of 16, it’s no wonder that the students aren’t more politically involved. They don’t have the time or desire to take on another complex and difficult situation.
For the Penn students, they had more of a chance to and the know how to translate their critical thinking into critical action. First of all, the Public Interest Anthropology course at University of Pennsylvania is an ABCS (Academically Based Community Service) course. Critical action is an integral part of ABCS courses, and thus, participation was action. However, this didn’t necessarily mean that students participation in the course was true action in a critical pedagogic sense. For all the Penn students, our grades depended on our participation. We had a choice in taking the Penn course or in my case, doing my senior thesis on this particular class, yet we all had an obligation to do the work, not because we wanted to or it was right, but because our academic careers rested on it.

That’s not to say that there was no critical action on the part of TA’s. On the contrary, Aliya began working with the class before she even knew there was the Penn course. Even though she’s taking the course now, her involvement was much deeper than what the course required, even doing the work of the other TA’s so that the students would get the most out of the course. For instance, Dewitt, Dinah, Mary, and Gella will be working with the University City High School students in their new project on Multicultural Philadelphia. The design of the project included class and outside trips and write-ups in and outside of class culminating in a final paper and an updated website on the class and their experiences. This project is also the bulk of the TA’s grades in Dr. Sanday’s Penn course. The TA’s had many ideas for what the students can do and how to structure the writing that would best convey their experiences as well as improve their writing skills. However, when it came time to do the tedious work of putting together a syllabus as well as a calendar of events, with the exception of Gella, no one contributed
any events with dates and times for the calendar nor did anyone offer to type up the syllabus. Realizing this, Aliya, took on the work, putting together a color coded calendar and trying to hammer out a syllabus before the TA’s left for spring break. Unable to do it in time, she stayed in Philadelphia for half of her spring break to do it. This is in addition to the ethnography that she is writing on the class. Her reason for taking on the extra work? “I want this project to be good and I want the students to enjoy it.”

These weren’t the only issues that came up with the TA’s. With the exception of Gella and Dinah, the others would be absent on the days they were expected to come without any prior notice. Furthermore, they did only what was required of them as students in the Penn course. There can be many reasons for this. Like the University City High School students, they too are swamped with work, graduate school exams, extracurriculars, as well as their other classes and life. However, so is Aliya and myself. Yet, another issue brought up by one of the TA’s was the fact that they weren’t sure what they were supposed to be doing or what was require of them:

One Friday, after Gella and Aliya explained the new project to the students as well as what was expected of them, Dewitt came up to me and asked what I thought of the discussion. Fishing for the right words to say without offending anyone, I gave up and said, “I mean, I don’t really have much to say about it. How do you think it went?” The look on his face conveyed that he thought it didn’t go too well. Then he said, “I don’t even know what we’re supposed to do for this project.” I was confused. Dr. Sandy met with them numerous times to discuss the project and what was required of them. She even came to the class and explained it to the
University City High School students. Eventhough I wasn’t developing
the project, I knew what they had to do. It took all my might not to say
“What do you mean you don’t know? Where have you been?” Luckily, at
this time, Aliya came to the back of the classroom and sat in the desk right
next to me. The other TA’s soon followed. With all the TA’s gathered,
with the exception of Mary who unbeknownst to us, began her spring
break early, they wanted to know my honest opinion and if I had any
suggestions. After some thought, I said, “There are a couple of things.
First, it doesn’t help to discuss a project and the students not have a hard
opy of it sitting in front of them. They need to see what it is that is
pected of them. When you give them a project you need to give an
outline, dates, and questions to help guide them and to help them
understand the project. Other than that, they’re not going to have anything
to ask you because they don’t know what they’re asking you about.” The
TA’s nodded their head in agreement and affirmed that that was
something that needed to happen. Then I continued, “Also, Aliya
shouldn’t be doing this work. This is your project. You have to put it
together. Aliya shouldn’t have to do this by herself. Matter of fact, we are
here to help your project not run it. Aliya and myself are doing other work
for this class. For this to be successful, it’s going to need the cooperation
and effort of all of you. If you do not put effort into the project then why
should the students?” Again they nodded their head in agreement and
promised to email Aliya with the events.
Although I feel that not knowing what was required of them was not a valid excuse for why they haven't been doing their share of the work, I do give them the benefit of the doubt that as the project goes on they will be more involved with the class and the discourse taking place within the classroom. I believe this because that's how my involvement grew with the class.

I began working with the World Culture Initiative project since the spring of 2003. At that time I was at the place where the TA's were; I was new to the class and I came in the middle of the semester. I wasn't quite sure what was going on and what I was to do. As my involvement grew, I began to see how I could contribute to the discourse and the class. That experience led me to participate in the project a lot more this school year; before I would only come twice a week. Now I come everyday. Before I would be absent and not notify the students ahead of time. Now I drag my butt there even when I'm sick and if not, I call so that adjustments can be made to the agenda for the day. Before I participated minimally with the students. Now I teach some chapters and lead the students in their weekly Newsweek and class discussions. Before I helped with their projects. Now I help to format and develop the projects. My involvement grew with time and the knowledge gained from my past experience with the project. My hope is that the present TA's involvement will grow as they get to know the students and themselves through this initiative.

Not everyone chose to participate in the public discourse. Some are just outright resistant to the whole situation. For instance, Henry, hasn't handed in any Newsweeks or an ethnic autobiography. Furthermore, he hasn't taken any exams nor does he show up for the majority of classes. When he does show up, he either goes to sleep, talks to other
students, is disruptive or tries to fluster me in front of the class and faculty, both Penn and University City High School alike. For instance, one day when Dr. Sanday came to observe the class he decided to try to challenge me:

The class drew their desks into one big circle to wrap up the discussion their small groups were having on class. When everyone found a place in the circle I asked the question, “Is class important in U.S. society?” Immediately, Henry and Kachina’s hand goes up. Sincere Kachina is one of the more outspoken students, I gave Henry the go ahead to speak first. He then said, “I think it’s unfair to talk about class distinctions and make us read this article because it is dividing us along upper and lower classes, instead of bringing us together.” Sensing a challenge, the students looked at me, some smiling, waiting to see how I was going to respond to the accusation with my Advisor watching. I could see that he was proud of his comment and, being that this is an open dialogue, I gathered myself to give a constructive response without going on the defensive. So I looked him squarely in the eye and with an even tone I asked him, “Did you read the article?” He slumped back in his chair and looked away, thus letting me know that he hadn’t. I continued on, explaining the article, the reason why it was handed out and how we can use our knowledge and experiences to change the current situation. He didn’t say anything for the rest of the class time and left as soon as class was over.

Henry is an exception. He is the only student who has handed in no work at all.

Furthermore, he’s the only student who is steadfastly resistant to the class and myself.
On the other hand, other students engagement are limited. These students tend to be the ones who have severe medical issues or are immigrants. For instance, two of our students, Akuji and McKale have serious health problems. At the time that I'm writing this paper, Akuji is in intensive care on life support. He is waiting for a heart transplant, but until that time comes, he is on a pacemaker. Matter of fact, he is on his second pacemaker after the first one failed and caused an infection that landed him in the hospital during October of this school year. Yet even though he is facing death, he still managed to and wanted to partake in the discourse:

After the class we [Karl and myself] went back to Karl’s office. The phone rings. It’s the social worker for Akuji. Akuji is in the hospital because his pacemaker was acting up. It hasn’t gotten better and they have him seeing a psychologist for patients with heart failure or who are up for a heart transplant. Akuji asked the social worker to let Karl now to bring him his school work so he doesn’t fall behind. Karl wants to visit Akuji tomorrow at 3 pm. He asks me “Janel, would you like to go after 3pn? I said sure. Out of all the people in the school to call, Akuji wanted Karl because he wanted his work and he likes Karl’s class out of all of his classes. This is his second year in the class. He also feels he can depend on Karl because Karl always keeps his word.

McKale also has a serious health problem. As he states:

I have a disability that has something to do with my kidneys, it is called nephrology syndrome. This has affected my life because soon I will need new kidneys; also this keeps me out of school a lot. I watch what I eat
because if I don’t I will blow up like a balloon, the reason this will happen is because I can’t eat salt.

His health problems are so serious that from the beginning of the year till now, he’s lost so much weight that, according to McKale, his doctors at the community clinic thought he was anorexic. Furthermore, he is in the Make-A-Wish Foundation. For his wish, he and his family went to Disney World. Despite all of this, he makes it to school as much as possible even when it looks like he’s about to fall out. Many a times, I’ve had to tell him to just put his head down and rest instead of pushing himself too hard. Yet he rarely listens to me, especially when there’s a discussion in class that has piqued his interest.

The international students have limited engagement in the discourse as well. For one thing, the international students in my class are all male and for most of them, they are not used to speaking on certain issues that we talk about in class. There are many reasons for this. One is language. They don’t feel that they have a good grip on the English language. However, that is only true for one of them. Doyle, had just immigrated to the U.S. in November. Eventhough he was born in Philadelphia, he grew up his whole life in Germany. Now he’s a junior in high school and he’s had to adjust to a new school, a new culture, and a new language. To help ease the transition, he hands in most of his work and does his exams in German since Karl is fluent in it. Yet his new home was such a culture shock that he didn’t show up for school for a month. Nevertheless, as time goes on, he opens up more and more. Although he’s not participating in class discussions, we talk before class about Germany and how it’s similar or different from the U.S. Also, as a sign of his adjustment, he’s started to pass notes to Ajani and talk in class (at the inappropriate times). His notes and discussions
are in Swahili (that's the common language he share's with Ajani) yet I can understand them since I'm proficient in Swahili. Thankfully, Karl and I studied languages that have enabled us to draw Doyle into the classroom and the discourse.

Another reason why they don't talk about certain issues in class is because of what their culture may deem as appropriate or worthy of public discourse. For instance, up until just recently, Ajani and Hamal, who are both Muslim, only wrote about the war in Iraq and articles that dealt with religious themes. However, Ajani surprised me when last week, he handed in two response articles, one discussing the end of the TV show Sex and the City and the other commenting on gay marriages:

I think the show [Sex and the City] teaches a lot of things, like how sex affected people life when you think that it is fun. What we see in the show is what know happening in most of rich countries.

In my opinion, gay marriage should not be allowed because if they allowed it will be like a culture of American, so that means it will affected children mind that, like, they will take it as man and female marriage. In the other hand, it is ok if they allowed because every man is different as their body and face different. Let them decide what they want to be that is their choose. In My Religion, when we came to my religion about gay marriage, it is very unexceptable thing to do. The thing that I want to ask is why is a lot of time unusual thing happens in America. When I was in my country Ethiopia, I never see or heard about gay people. I don't even think that there is one. Even when I was in Kenya, I never heard about
gay. I think all this thing happen because the people of America are mostly rich they don’t know what to do with that except do thing that unusual.

This class was the first time that he’d even discussed many of these issues. For him these issues seemed to be an issue for powerful and rich nations like the U.S. What is interesting is that even though there are homosexuals all over the world, even in Ethiopia and Kenya, they do not have a subaltern counterpublic in which to bring their issues to the public discourse. What Ajani is pointing out, is that this is a luxury that can only be afforded in economically affluent nations such as ours. Yet he also shows us something more important. The fact that through discourse, even though his religion and he believes that it is wrong, he still came to a metatopical common mind, along with the rest of the students, that it is the choice of every individual in the United States to choose whom they wanted to marry and be intimate with.

Student Consciousness: Race, Gender, Ethnicity and Religion

What we saw with Ajani was a transformation in his consciousness. Whereas before, he didn’t even know of or heard of homosexuals, now he was commenting on the debate on gay marriages, even saying that it is their right to get married. Although religiously he doesn’t support it, constitutionally he does. This is a radical departure from the young man who only chose to discuss the differences between his religion and others. But, generally, was there a transformation in the students’ consciousness?

Overall, I’d say yes. While on most issues and topics of discussion, students were set in their opinions, for most students there were times when their consciousness was
transformed by thinking critically on such topics. No place is this seen more, than in their ethnic autobiographies. Take for instance, Minjia and her change of heart on whether or not a woman was qualified to be president:

One thing I questioned about politics was how come a woman was never president? At one point I even considered that perhaps that women didn’t qualify to be in that position. Then I also wondered, has a woman even attempted to run for president? As a female, I have come to the realization that males just think that they’re able to conduct things better; especially things which involve physical and leadership characteristics. I more and more notice that women have it harder. We have to go through what men never will. Even in marriages/family, a majority of the time, it is the woman that takes on most of the responsibilities. When I get older, I won’t allow gender, race or any form of anything stop me from doing what I want—especially something I can’t help.

Most of the students’ consciousness were transformed in that they found their voice and the words to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. For many, this was the first time they spoke explicitly about race, gender, class, etc. Where each student had the most growth and placed the most emphasis depended on where they were coming from. For instance, for those who identified themselves as African American, their race and gender was most salient in their lives. They felt the pressure of overcoming the obstacle of racism, yet until recently, hadn’t expressed the stress and burden it caused them. As Khalon puts it:
My ethnicity and race is African-American my ethnic background has a lot to do with my life. It affects me in a way with my future, because people look at you and think that you will live up to what they think about you the negative. I feel as though I need to get smarter and carry myself in a way that people look pass who I am and where I'm from. They'll see the potential and what I can be in the future. My grand mom and mom always say to me to go to school and get a job where you can support your family and you don't have to struggle and stay out of jail. My grand mom would say to me she can't get me out of trouble and she can't save when if I go to jail or hell. She said she didn't want to see me in a jail cell like my father. She always stress education because my father didn't go to school and he got his money illegal by braking up families selling drugs to them and she says she doesn't want me to be like him....She wants me to be a role model to my little nephews but I don't feel as though I'm fit for some one to walk in my footsteps. I don't really want people to be like me. They should do what works for them not what worked for me. I think people should do what they can do instead of being like someone else. Find your own identity. I feel that you get somewhere in life by being you no the next person.

Their concerns are about the inherent racism in a society in which they must survive. Furthermore, what would be perceived as a gender advantage for African American males was instead understood to be a disadvantage. For Khalon, being an African
American male meant that incarceration was an all too real fact of life. Hakim extrapolates on the issues facing African American males stating:

Being Black is one thing, but being male is something that only Black men relate to. If I make it to age 25 I will be knocking down one wall that stands in my way. It is said that I will not make it to 25 and the only thing that I know how to do is sell drugs and sit on my butt. Black males have to do ten times the amount of work than anyone else in the world to get by. Black males encounter hard times when it comes to dealing with the legal system. People say we are deadbeat fathers and don’t know how to pay child support and could careless about the world. With me being a male let alone black, people fear me for some odd reason that I cannot figure out yet.

For Audrey, she was able to express why African Americans were viewed negatively. Taking her understanding of race from the textbooks, experience, as well as the experiences of others, Audrey writes:

I would declare my race as an African American because I am predominantly black and in the United States we practice hypodescent. Hypodescent is the policy in which although you may not only be one race but two or three you are categorized as the less privileged group. So wherever I go in this life I will be perceived as an African American. I identify myself as an African American because my ancestors were slaves that were brought from Africa and made to suffer 400 years of slavery. In addition, some of the experiences that I have and will encounter in my
life are a direct effect of my race. For instance, I attend a school where my race is the majority and as a result of this I am forced to walk through metal detectors and I am searched for weapons nearly everyday. In addition, when I attend college I may choose to attend a college in which I will be the minority and by speaking to others of my race who have chosen to do this have many stories of how they were discriminated against whether it was by a fellow student or professor. Therefore I know that I must be prepared for such discrimination if I opt to attend a school in which I am the minority. After attending college, I will continue to face discrimination in the work force when I am paid twenty thousand less than a white male or when the white male or female that I trained is promoted before me because I am African American. Furthermore, I identify myself as an African American and thus as an African American I have to work twice as hard as a white person in order to succeed in life because I have more obstacles in my way.

What she shows is that race will determine her experiences throughout her life and in effect, is inescapable. Yet that doesn’t mean she’s resigned to accepting that this is how the U.S. should be. For instance, she points to the injustice at the fact that multiracial people are forced to reject one of their identities:

I feel as though it is unjust that there are parts of the world that practice hypodescent because why anyone should be subjected to having to be classified as one race when they have a multicultural background. In my case, although I am part Black Foot Native American I am not personally
affected by the rule of hypodescent because I feel as though either way I am a minority in the United States therefore I will still be a victim to institutional and attitudinal discrimination. In addition to this I feel as though although I am subjected to attitudinal discrimination and racial profiling based on my appearance not by what it says on my birth certificate. Thus race, plays a major role in my life because it affects my rights as a human being and an American.

In that passage she also recognizes that there are different forms of racial discrimination, both institutional (de jure and de facto) as well as attitudinal (stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations). Also, she sees that the racism that she faces isn’t because it’s something biological but because of her phenotype. Furthermore, She also recognizes racism not to be a black and white thing but something that affects all people in the United States.

For all the women in the class (who all happened to be African American) they saw their gender as affecting their life experiences and the experiences of all women. Kachina writes:

In the past we have discriminated on certain genders because of the rules of superiority (rules that distinguishes one person being superior to someone else). Examples include: a law prevent women from voting; men not being able to cook; women not being the head of the household. I can have this list go on infinitely...I am a female and I know that is a huge strike against me in my society...when I say being a female is a strike against me in my society I mean that I am thought of as not being equal to
a male holistically. When I enter the workforce I might not get paid as much as the male doing the same exact job as me and putting the same exact effort as me. Maybe even less effort than me. To some males and females in my society, they believe that women are second best to males and maybe even less to males.

What is interesting is that for the women in the class, they felt that their gender was a more important issue than their race. Matter of fact, when asked to write about different issues in their ethnic autobiography, they all discussed gender. However, most of them felt they have not experience gender discrimination as much as they faced racism. So why the emphasis on gender discrimination? For the African American girls, the gender discrimination that they face were in their racially segregated communities. For instance, most of the girls cited their parents and their community for sanctioning what kind of behavior that was appropriate for girls as opposed to boys so that they wouldn’t be labeled as Audrey puts it, “FAST.”

Eventhough the African American students saw their race and gender as denying them opportunities as well as being prevalent within their society, they are not content to just let it be. As Kachina puts it:

    Gender is an important issue to me. My main focus is equality among the opposite genders. I realize that we will never be completely equal, but we can try to be as close to it as possible. We as humankind have done a poor job of making this reality come true.

Furthermore, they didn’t feel their race or gender made them any less human than anyone else. Nor, as Hakim stated, did they want to be anything other than who they were:
Being Black only affects me in a bad way if I want it to be. Never have I felt bad about being Black, because I am proud to be Black. Being Black only made me a strong person on the inside and the outside. When it comes to my race I am held down in this place we call America. The home of the not so free. In America I am considered the lowest class because I am African American. Being in the lowerst class hurts you mentally and makes some people want to change the color of their skin. Instead I laugh, because I love to face adversity. To me, it only makes me a better person...Black is beautiful. Black is strong. Black is the color of dirt in which flowers grows in. Black is the color of coffee that keeps you going when you are tired. Black is me and a little bit of Black is in everyone.

I find it interesting that out for most of the African American students, myself included, that race and gender took precedence over class. When asked to discuss class, most of the students saw it as unimportant. Why is that? As Bonita puts it:

I am middle class and I don’t feel that it means anything. This is because I have experienced things that lower class people have been through and also upper class people. So being in a particular class doesn’t have an effect on me because I know I can change it.

For the African-American students, their race and gender couldn’t be changed, yet their class could. Furthermore, they would point out that people can’t see your class. So eventhough, they saw class as determining some of their life experiences up to that point, the fact that you couldn’t see it or that it could change made it a insignificant point.
Students who immigrated to the U.S. and who identified themselves as Muslim, had a different focus all together. For them, the most common concern was ethnicity and religion. This was because they experienced life changing events due to their ethnicity and race. For instance, Ajani describes in graphic detail his journey from Ethiopia to the United States:

The day was April the first, when I was 13 in 1998. I still see the fog on the sky on the muggy morning. My father was caught and taken to jail by the special forces of the Ethiopian government called The Ethiopian People--Democratic Liberation Front (EPRDF). On that morning my uncle get shot and killed right in front of my face. This was the day that I was forced to leave my country just because my family supported the opposition party of the Ethiopian government and just because they were from that tribe. It wasn’t my will to go to the neighboring country of Kenya. My tribe is known as the OROMO Tribe, half the number of the population of Ethiopia. The Oromic language is one of the most spoken languages out of thousands spoken in Africa. From the point of supporting the opposition party on that April morning, all my family members started running to save their lives to anywhere they could find. My way was to the bust station to go far away from life’s troubles. Those times were not easy for me. I had to just get up and go somewhere I had never been before. All of those sudden happenings. Innocent people like myself were punished for others mistakes, they were blamed and punished
for it. It could have been the end of my life if I had been strong enough to commit suicide during the first couple of months of my migration.

Yet even with his unique experience Ajani, is able to connect his experience to the experiences of others, even redefining what is meant by the word "slavery":

For me to be here in America make me to analyze the things that I miss back in Africa. Even though my people (blacks) are still having a different look by white people here in America. Slavery is not only kidnapped and sold to work for free in a plantation. Slavery can happen anywhere in the world and it is still happening somewhere in the horn of Africa a place called Ethiopia. I am originally from Ethiopia, and I left my childhood when I was only 13 in 1998. My people are fight for freedom against the Ethiopian government. This tribe has a longtime history and a fertile land with much resources. But this people are still in slavery. I think when we say slavery we are talking about right, freedom and equality.

Religion was also a strong identity for the international students, with almost every single Newsweek that has been handed in to me by Hamal and Ajani having religion as it's subject. Even in response to an article on who killed Jesus, all Hamal could write about was the fact that He didn't believe in Jesus and that Allah was the true God. I've been facing great difficulty in trying to provide a safe space, especially in these times, for my Muslim students to feel safe and have a space in which to discuss many of their concerns with religious discrimination in this society all the while trying to get them to think beyond religious differences to discuss other issues that are going on in our society
and world. While Ajani has begun to branch out onto other topics and into issues that are the concerns of others, while still being able to discuss his religious beliefs freely, I've found it much more difficult for Hamal to do the same. Part of the reason I think is because Hamal hardly shows up for class, and when he does he's constantly trying to catch up. As a last resort, I think he falls back on his religion to discuss issues instead of critically analyzing the issues at hand, even when he picks the issue to discuss. Another reason, is Hamal is not only the one non-black person in the class, but he is also the only Pakistani in the whole school. While, University City High School has a sizable Asian population, the majority of them are from Bangladesh. This causes tension between Hamal and the other students because as he puts it, "My family is originally from India but when India and Bangladesh fought in 1947 the country became separated. After the war, my family moved to Pakistan." Since then there are has been a distrust between Bangladeshi and Pakistanis; a tension that is exacerbated for Hamal being the only Pakistani in University City High School. Because of this, I think he chooses to focus on his religion because it connects him with other students in the school including the Bangladeshi students. It's his safe space and his counterpublic.

Not every student's consciousness been transformed. It's very hard to transform the consciousness of students who don't come to class or do the work or participate in discussions. For the TA's, I'm not sure how much of their consciousness will be changed seeing as they just entered into the discourse. As for myself, much of the growth and the transformation of my consciousness took place outside of the classroom and on Penn's campus. However the course, along with my experiences at Penn, did transform my some key aspects of my views on race on gender:
As a freshman, I decided that I wanted to do research and continue working on social justice. I felt that in order to do this most effectively, I should do my work with a Black professor. I felt that they were better equipped to help and guide me since they experienced forms of the racism that drives not only my passion but theirs as well. I fell into the thought pattern that since they were black then they had to understand where I was coming from and support me because I’m trying to contribute to the same pursuit of justice as them. However, that was not the case. When I presented my ideas to an African-American male professor at Penn, he flatly stated, “Your ideas are repulsive and no professor will ever work with you.” When I applied to fellowships for African-American students who wanted to gain research experience as well as conduct actual research, I would get rejected for “not having enough research experience.” This made no sense to me since these programs were meant to give students like myself the opportunity to do research in the first place. Furthermore, I found that the more I participated in the classes of my Black male professors the more they sought to alienate me. By the time I’d reached the end of my junior year I’d stop participating in classes overall. Not only that, but I became disappointed with my Africana studies major…While this treatment caused a lot of pain, it did push me to look not only within my race but also outside my race for people who would work for and help guide me in conducting research and in my activist work. It forced me to not be so closed minded and make sweeping
generalizations about races and their consciousness or lack there of...For the first time in my life I felt gender oppression. It made me seriously rethink how and why I identify myself and pursue what I feel is important. Although I still felt race to be primary, I also began to embrace Black feminism and their call to recognize and fight gender discrimination along side and within the struggle for racial equality. I was just beginning to realize the multiplicity and complexity of my identity and those of the people around me.

Beyond the Classroom

Of course, this is not to say that the course hasn’t impacted other aspects of my life as well as others. Personally, working with the World Culture Initiative has caused me to question my educational and career goals. Before I began the course, I was very sure that I would pursue a PhD in Anthropology upon graduation. However, while working with the students, I realized that I didn’t have a clue what I wanted to do. I found that I enjoyed teaching and expanding the minds of students and myself. Even though I would be depressed and struggle to go on with my day, I never had a problem waking up and going to University City High to teach every morning. I now spend more time at University City High School than I do at Penn.

The course totally turned my world upside down in a good way. I even took a Graduate School of Education course on Anthropology and Education to supplement my work at University City High. Not only that, but because of this course, I’ve decided to take some time off after I graduate to figure out whether I’m going to pursue a PhD in education or a PhD in anthropology. During that time off, I’ll be teaching elementary
school in New York. Never had I thought coming in to Penn, that when I graduated, I would teach. But I found that to be able to reach and inspire the hearts and minds of young people to is the most rewarding work and one of the best experiences I had while a student at the University of Pennsylvania.

The same holds true for Aliya. Before becoming a TA for the cultural anthropology course, she didn’t know what she wanted to do upon graduation. She vacillated between entering the work force after graduating or going to graduate school. After a few months in the class, she took her GRE’s and applied to graduate schools of education throughout the country. This course had such a deep impact that she changed her schedule so that she could be in the classroom everyday. Not only that, but now, her career plans are to work in educational policy, implementing World Culture Initiatives throughout the country.

The course not only changed my educational and career goals, but it also helped me to improve my people skills and personality. Working with high school students taught me patience and how to approach people without being overly aggressive or threatening. I learned this because by approaching students in an empathetic and respectful way, I was able to get better results than to demand things of them. I also learned how to discuss issues and controversial subjects with out being disrespectful or invalidating their views. Constantly facilitating dialogue and relationships between students, both Penn and University City High School alike, has taught me how to get to the bottom of the variety of views and beliefs that they hold and help to bring them to a common mind on a topic, while preserving their voice. Having this skill has taught me how to listen to people and to take their criticism not as an attack on my personally but as a means of bettering myself.
The course made the deepest impact on University City High School students by giving them more confidence; confidence to speak their mind and confidence in their intellectual capabilities. Because the course challenged them to write 10-20 page papers, study complex issues, keep up on current events, and master their debating skills, the students expressed more interest in top colleges and universities in which they thought they didn’t even have a chance of going to before. For instance, Hakim was the only student from University City High to apply to Penn. When I gave him an application, he looked at me as if I’d lost my mind and said while flipping through it’s pages, “This isn’t an application it’s a book!” Yet he completed the application and hopes to attend Penn in the fall. And he’s not the only one. Kachina also hopes to attend Penn when she graduates from University City High. Knowing her interests in the sciences and because she is of Igbo, a Nigerian tribe, descent, I put her in contact with the Penn Women’s Biomedical Society so that she could get tips and information on opportunities and the work that is necessary for pre-med students at Penn. Not only that, but because the President of the society is also Igbo (along with other members of the society) she has a connection not only along educational lines but cultural ones as well.

Even when students talk about colleges, the reasons they give for going are profoundly different from what most high school students would say. For instance, Audrey asked me if I’d ever heard of Dr. Carr at Howard University. Since I have friends who attended Howard that took his class and enjoyed it I told her what I knew. Apparently she already knew because she exclaimed with a huge smile, “I want to go to Howard so that I can take his classes!”
Towards an Engaged Identity

Although most of the students were engaged in the course, there were issues that both facilitated and hindered learning and discourse. The course materials helped were a springboard for discussing many issues. The textbook, “Cultural Anthropology” by Conrad Phillip Kottak is a college text. The layout, structure, terms and content are at a much more advanced level than most, if not all of the textbooks that the students were used to using. The exams were structured and based heavily on that text, asking students to match terms with definitions as well as to answer critical thinking essays in paragraph form (See Appendix). The textbook was integral to the student’s learning not only because it provided the information that you would get in any introductory anthropology course, but because it introduced new terms, ideas, theories and cultures to the students. This is important because it helped students to put words to experiences and thoughts that, prior to this course, they had difficulty with and didn’t have the academic language to express it. For instance, in discussing gangs, Audrey asks if it is an ascribed or achieved status, terms that she learned from the textbook:

Is being a member of a gang an ascribed or achieved status? An ascribed status is a status in which you are born with and can’t change. An achieved status is a status that you accomplish in your society. I asked this question because when I think of ascribed status in terms of a gang member. I think whether or not it was their choice to join the gang because I meet a girl who grew up in a bad area and the environment in which she grew up she was forced to join a gang because it was either join the gang or be terrorized by the gang. In addition to this, a family member
of hers was a head emember in the gang therefore she was considered an
unofficial member because of family ties. So they initiated her by beating
her until they saw blood. In my opinion I don't see how it was her choose
to join the gang because in that situation how many people would choose
to be terrorized every day versus joining the gang in order to survive. On
the other hand people may choose to become a gang because of one reason
or another and in that case it is an achieved status.

The textbook isn't the only way in which discussions are started. Our most
dynamic discourse takes place on days in which we discuss *Newsweek*. Because they
know it's something they have to do every week, they keep up on current events not only
at home but abroad. Through the articles in the *Newsweek* we jump into discussions on
topics ranging from the War in Iraq, the Martha Stewart Case, the gay marriage debate,
and even cloning. In response to an article about jobs going overseas, Hakim writes:

This is an example of the modern world and how it works. The ironic
thing about the whole situation is that I believe large companies run this
world. How you might ask? Well for all campaigns you need large
amounts of financial aid, in order to run a long and hard campaign. The
one people in place to help such a way, are only large companies. For
instance, a company like Microsoft will give a campaigner running for
president about a million dollars to help out in his or her campaign. Like
the elders of my time say, "Nothing in life is free." But on the backend of
things, the large company like Microsoft wants a favor in return. That's
why this whole situation is so ironic. The government won't burn bridges
with these companies, because they’re in it for their own good. If you tell one of you largest financial backing that they can’t go overseas, you run the risk of hurting a good relationship. So what things can we do to stop these companies from going overseas? I think they should impose an international tax, so these companies will stop going overseas. Also in the upcoming election, we should try to pick a candidate who will stop sending jobs overseas.

Just by one article, Hakim touches on issues such as the upcoming November presidential election, campaign financing, the modern world system, and jobs being sent overseas.

The ethnic autobiographies also helped to facilitate learning. They required intensive writing so the students worked on their ethnic autobiographies not only individually, but within small groups and with myself. It was a hard yet rewarding process in which the students looked within themselves to comment upon the world and their society. Through their ethnic autobiographies, students were able to cultivate their world view, even giving some insightful commentary on society. For example, in discussing race in the U.S. Abrianna writes:

I consider myself African American because of the bloodline that exists throughout the generation on both sides of my family. I also consider myself African American because this is the category that I am placed in the americansociety that I live and coexist with other races. In America, we are automatically placed into a racial category at birth through hypodescent. What exactly is my ethnicity I don’t know? Nationally, there is diversity among different groups of people even amongst those
who are the same race. To me a person's ethnicity can be divided into different categories based on where you live, your class, your religion, language and of course your race. For example, an African American from the western part of the United States may have different culture, dialect, customs, and religion as opposed to African American from the eastern part of the United States. Even though they have the same race and may share genetic similarities they are different in that they have different backgrounds.

Here she put her own twist on the idea of ethnicity, by applying it a group of people, African Americans, who are usually seen as one homogenized group within the United States, and not as a conglomerate of different cultures, beliefs, identities, and people.

Students also were able to increase their knowledge and understanding through discussing topics and issues brought up not only by the textbook and articles that they’ve read and the ethnic autobiographies, but through their class discussions. One discussion that definitely pushed the boundaries of our discourse as well as displayed the level of maturity and respect that students had for each other was the discussion on gay marriages. The students were giving their reasons for why it’s right and why it’s wrong. Yet the most telling moment was when McKale, who had been out for a while because of health issues said, “I wasn’t going to tell y’all this but my mom goes that way. The lady who I call my “aunt” is really her girlfriend. They love each other and I think that if they wanted to get married then they should. Although religious beliefs say that gay marriages aren’t right, I still think they should get married.” At that point no one said anything disrespectful or made a comment to ridicule him. This was very inspiring
because most of the students in the class are very religious, some born again, others just baptized. Yet they listened attentively and respectfully, voicing their opinions and drawing from McKale’s life experience to come to a general consensus that the U.S. should allow homosexuals the right to marry along with the rights associated with married couples.

What this showed was that our little counterculture was a safe space where students felt comfortable enough to share their life experiences while still critically thinking about the issues and topics of discussion. They respectfully challenge one another, posing questions, playing devil’s advocate, and supporting their opinions with facts and experiences. Many a times I’ve seen the students come to a common mind on many issues, then taking it further to discuss ways in which the situation can be improved or alleviated all together.

There are also little things that would seem unrelated to the whole goal of the course that helps to facilitate learning by helping things run smoothly and efficiently. The course and curriculum are organized in a way that is understandable and comprehensive for the students. For instance, at the beginning of each marking period, the students are given a syllabus in which they must have their parents sign, stating what is expected of them for the marking period as well as a breakdown of how the grades will be calculated. We also do the same thing whenever the students are starting a new major project such as the ethnic autobiographies or their map tests in which they had to learn the location of every country, continent and major body of water in the world (See Appendix). Furthermore, we give them a schedule so that they know in advanced when things are due and what we’ll be doing in class during each day of the week. All this
information is given to them in hardcopy form and we usually spend a class period explaining any new major projects.

I think most important to the success of the class are the Penn TA’s. Aliya and myself are there everyday, which gives some consistency to the class. If we’re not going to be in, we always call ahead or tell the students ahead of time. Not only that, but we come on time and we come prepared. This is important because when we take our work seriously, the students take their work seriously. Furthermore, it shows that we respect the time and effort they put into the class and they in turn show us the same. With the exception of Henry, we haven’t had any problems with any of the students nor, as far as I know, did they have any with us.

Regardless, there were things that impede learning as well. In terms of the course materials, while the *Newsweeks* serve as a starting point for many of our discussions, they tend to be inwardly focused. By this I mean they tend to focus on and recycle the same news over and over again. Every week there are articles on Iraq, the election and the candidates, gay marriage, some new movie that came out, something scientific, and articles on the economy. There wasn’t one article on any part of the world besides the U.S. and the Middle East. Week after week, the journalist talked about the same thing except from every angle imaginable. Take the Presidential candidates for instance.

Every week there’s another article on John Kerry; where did he grow up, what kind of student was he in school, was he in Agent Orange, what does his military service look like, how he recovered from cancer, he’s ahead in the polls, he’s behind in the polls, he’s neck and neck with President Bush, what about his wife, what about his daughter, what about he campaign finances, where was he today, what mistake did he make, what
brilliant move did he make, etc. After weeks of this, the students have begun to complain about the Newsweeks being boring. It's only so often I can turn that discussion from whether or not Newsweeks are boring to how the media in the United States is different from other countries. I guess a positive outgrowth of that is the students, hungry to know the world, have begun to watch the BBC to get their news. However, not all of the students have access to it.

One way I try to alleviate the problem is by bringing in academic articles that I have been assigned in my Penn courses on issues pertaining to whatever chapter we are on at the time. Now, the students have an option of doing a response paper on an article in the Newsweek or doing one on the handout. The handouts have become very popular and now more and more students are beginning to do those instead of the Newsweek.

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class to quiet down. This usually insights groans and protests from all the students.

Despite this, we still manage to conduct class and discussions.

There are many aspects about the school that make it inhospitable and difficult to carry on the class; so many that I don’t know where to begin. I guess the most logical place to start is to begin at the beginning of a normal school day.

Students, in order to enter the school, have to have on proper uniform, white or yellow shirts (for boys, the shirt has to have a collar) and black pants, as well as a student ID. If they do not have these things they would have to wait outside the building until security can confirm that that person is actually as student. This process can take hours, often causing students to miss their first and second period classes, which includes our class since it is held second period. On bad days, not having these particular items can cause them to not be allowed into the building thus missing a whole day of school. Not only that, but the school can then (and sometimes does) call the police, who will then take the students into custody for truancy. One day, this situation got so out of hand, that the new Penn TA’s weren’t even allowed into the building, having them wait over an hour to even enter the building. Since the security there know me, the let me through. However, I had to get Karl so that the other TA’s could be let in.

If the students get through the door, they then have to go through a number of security measures, such as a metal detector, putting their bags through an X-ray machine and scanning their ID’s into the computer. As they got to their respective classes, they are ushered along by the Philadelphia Police Department, who serve as hall monitors for University City High.
At this point, students attend classes, where very often, their teacher may be absent without prior warning or may have even retired at the spur of the moment. In these cases, the students in that class then have to have roster changes which bring on a whole slew of issues. For days, they can be with out a roster (class schedule). This happens so often that Karl spends much of his time on roster changes. In cases where class is canceled because of no teacher or for whatever reason, then a makeshift class is formed or students are placed in classes like lab technician or internship in which usually tends to be the equivalent of what would be considered a study hall. In one instance, Karl had to take on one of these classes, doing SAT prep in between the Algebra class and the Cultural anthropology class that he teaches.

Even if there is an established class, many students roam the halls all day without anyone noticing. How is this possible? Well, because the school is big and overcrowded, there are different bell schedules for each of the different learning communities. Thus, teachers and administrators don’t know which students are in class, who are in between classes, or who’s at lunch. For student’s like Hakim, after their first and second period class, they leave for the rest of the day, since usually, there are no more classes for them to take by the time they reach the last semester of their senior year.

And if you thought that was the end of scheduling issues then you are mistaken. Often, you do not know the schedule for the school day until the day before. This leads to a lot of confusion, sometimes causing TA’s to miss the class because they weren’t aware that classes were being held earlier. Also, every other week Friday is a half-day in order to allow for teachers to meet in their respective departments to have faculty
meetings. However, sometimes these weeks get switched around, again causing TA’s to miss the class.

There are many other things that exacerbate the situation. For one thing, there is a high turnover rate of administrators and teachers, with a new principle who started this school year. Secondly, with many changes to the Philadelphia school system, many of the learning communities, such as the mentally gifted program, have either been canceled or combined with others. Third, the library is full of empty shelves devoid of books that are age appropriate, many of which are at the elementary school level. I even had a senior student who was doing a book report on the *Three Little Pigs*.

For those teachers who are dedicated and cherished by the student body, they are stretched to the max. Karl is a prime example of this. Teaching at University City High for over 30 years, he not only teaches two classes, but also runs the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program, works with many of the homebound students, is in charge of hosting cultural events for University City High School students within the school and around Philadelphia, as well as running what is left of the mentally gifted program. On top of that he teaches a graduate level class in linguistics at Arcadia University as well as finds the time to serve as a mentor, source of support, and father figure for many of the students. In between all of this, he still finds the time to sit with the Penn TA’s to help us improve our teaching and facilitation skills as well as lend an empathetic ear to whatever issues we may have. It may sound unbelievable, but Karl is truly a strength not only to this class but for many of his students and the school community. So much so, that at any moment you enter his office it is full of students, watching a movie or listening to music or just talking amongst themselves.
Another issue that impedes the learning process is that without a standardized curriculum, many of the students do not know certain things that I had assumed every child learns in high school. Coming from New York public schools, I was used to such a strictly standardized curriculum that no matter what school you go to in the state, you’d know what they were studying and when they were studying it. This is not the case in Philadelphia. Therefore, many a times the cultural anthropology class turned into a biology, earth science, history, or English class. I’ve taught the gamut from theories on genetic inheritance to feudalism in Medieval Europe and Japan to economic theory. Sometimes, I’ve even had to go and study other subjects so that I could explain them to the students in order to even begin a chapter in the cultural anthropology textbook. I’ve had to get into the habit of not assuming that they knew certain things and asking the class explicitly if they knew anything about a particular subject, especially since they have a tendency to not speak up when they didn’t know something that they felt and I assumed they were supposed to know.

Not all of the issues blocking learning are the fault of University City High School. Some of the issues stem from the nature of the relationship between the University of Pennsylvania and the surrounding community, including University City High School. The University of Pennsylvania have many academic and community service partnerships with University City, however, these programs do not always work out. There are many reasons for this, the first being the scheduling. The academic schedule for the University of Pennsylvania is different from University City High. While we may start school at the same time, we have different breaks and the Penn students leave in April and May while University City High School students still have
school until the end of June. For instance, for winter break Penn students have about 3
weeks off, while University City High School have about 1 week off. Since Aliya and I
were going to be absent for that time, we worked a schedule out with Karl in which
during that time he taught the language chapter. Another scheduling conflict arises
between the time the class is held and the times in which the Penn TA’s have thier
classes. This prevented on of the TA’s from being able to work directly with the class,
thus restricting her to only going on trips with the students and working on the website.
Furthermore, for many of the TA’s, they have to leave right after the class is finished
because of other courses that they take or in order to go to work, often leaving little time
for the TA’s to meet and discuss the class and any issues that may arise concerning the
class.

Yet most of the tension in the relationship between Penn and University City
High are because of the fickle nature of many of the Penn funded programs. Often times
these programs lose funding; Professors who run the programs leave Penn for various
reasons, leaving no one to run the program; or either there are no students to work the
programs or they peter out by the beginning of April, leaving these programs floundering.
Also, most of the programs, while they expose University City High students to college
students and college life, usually don’t have a strong curriculum focus and tend to center
on journal writing and empty discussions that tend to be more like therapy sessions than
critical discourse.

Although this isn’t true for all of the Penn assisted programs, the World Culture
Initiative being one of them, this does leave teachers and students wary of Penn students
and Penn initiatives. I was truly made aware of this when, inquiring about another Penn
program that had been in operation at University City High some years ago, teachers were suspiscous of my intentions and pretty much unwilling to even discuss the matter. Only when I mentioned my affiliation with the World Culture Initiative as well as with my sorority (which many of the teachers at University City High are a part of) were they willing to talk to me about a possible program.

While there are these issues, there are also personal issues that tend to impede the progress of some of the students and the class. As mentioned before, one of those things are health issues. Often McKale and Akuji are absent from class due to serious issues with their health. Also, as previously mentioned, language barriers also impede the process for many of the international students including Doyle, Ajani, and Hamal. However, for most of the students it’s just the things they have to face daily that places a strain on their daily existence, myself included. Personal issues like boyfriends and girlfriends, parents divorcing and even raising children, takes time and focus away from the class. For instance, Hamal describes his current living situations in simple terms:

    Last month, my family went to Pakistan because my sister Shazia was getting married. I didn’t go because I had to stay up here and go to school.

    I hope they return to the U.S. early because I am living up here all alone.

This often manifests in missed homeworks and absences. To add to these issues, many students live in neighborhoods and communities that aren’t conducive to nurturing the student’s educational and life goals. Many of the students express this problem in their ethnic autobiographies. Hakim sees many of the issues facing his community stemming from the rise in crack usage in his neighborhood:
I never lived in a project or close to one, but I thought that Philly was just one big project. My thought of a project was a dark place where people are always shot and killed. The neighborhood I grew up in was like that, that’s why I thought Philly was an enormous project...Growing up during my lifetime was cool until I reached about the fifth grade. I guess that’s when the crack game really blew up and hit the streets hard. Once crack hit the streets, my whole hood changed. I got robbed for my first and only time, when I was in the fifth grade due to crack. When I got robbed I was not scared, because I don’t have any fee in my heart for any man. Now my hood is still victim to drugs, but I am on a different mission in life now. A lot of my childhood friends either use or sell drugs. Since I don’t use drugs, I still talk to them, because I don’t want the to rob me.

Audrey echoes his sentiments, also pointing out the fact that this type of environment fosters a negative lifestyle:

Thinking back to all these childhood memories makes me wonder what happened to all the people I grew up with on Frazier Street. I mean I see these people once in a while and think what happen to them? The reason I say this is because a few of them have begun to venture down the wrong path and I fear that if they continue down that path they may end up somewhere in their life that they do not want to be. The path that I am speaking of is a path full of drugs, sex, and alcohol. I think my peers head down the wrong path because they get caught up in the environment meaning that they are influenced by what is going on around them. The
neighborhood that we live in is full of people who are not motivated to do something with their lives.

Despite their environments, the students in the World culture initiative still strive. Abrianna puts it all in perspective:

I overcome obstacles with the intention to better my people and myself.

One can only imagine an ordinary day walking around my neighborhood. You may typically see drug-dealers selling illegal substances to who ever will buy them. Around the corner are drug-infested houses and abandoned houses where crime takes place, to the left there are homeless people that are covered in filth and smell of urine, reduced to begging and stealing. There is shattered glass everywhere covering the damaged sidewalks and roads like diamonds and rubies. Meanwhile, a community of people helplessly stands by while all the crime, hatred, and corruption in this environment consume their hopes and aspirations. How can a flower blossom while surrounded by all these weeds? These weeds inspire me and instill a moral obligation within me to uplift my community and my people. I have two options, I can lie back and allow myself to be consumed by these weeds or I can fight to flourish and grow strong. I can become part of the problem or part of the solution. I choose to be a part of the solution!
Conclusion

Abrianna's analysis of her present situation and her future aspirations were echoed by most of the students involved. Myself included, we came to the conclusion that we wanted to use our life experiences and the knowledge that we gained to better our community, whether that meant our careers, educational aspirations, or services rendered to our community in the future.

What the class did was provide the tools and encouragement for students, both Penn and University City High alike to participate in the global community. What began as a sense of alienation from the government and world affairs grew into a thirst and hunger to understand their world, why their world is the way it is, and how they could change it. Although the students recognized that their identities, as African Americans, as a member of a particular ethnic group, male or female, Muslim, international students and/or lower-class, led to the exclusion of their communities, concerns, and themselves from the public discourse, they saw and used their condition as an impetus for their involvement in and development of subaltern counterpublics and in entering the public sphere. Not only that, but as the course goes on, the more students express their desire to participate in and uplift their communities and the world.

Additionally, the students are using more and more terms learned from the anthropology class to discuss many of the issues that they face and that plagues the world. They have learned to look beyond themselves and see themselves as part of a global community, through cultural anthropology. What the students latched on to the most, was the idea of cultural relativism and the pursuit of human rights. In many of our
discussions, if a student is seen as being close-minded, other students would refer to this term to express the need to look beyond themselves and their culture.

Through the *Newsweek*, textbooks, discussions, videos, trips, and ethnic autobiographies, I would say most of the participants came to a common mind about the course and its objectives. Although not explicitly stated, most of the participants participated fully in the discourse and expressed a desire to know more and participate more not just in their communities but in others as well.

Furthermore, the University City High School students expressed a desire for college preparatory work, which the teaching assistants and Karl felt was also extremely important. We believed that if they didn’t have the necessary skills to enter into and succeed in the nation’s colleges and universities, then they would have difficulty, if they even received a chance at all, to enter into the public discourse that takes place in the dominant and national public spheres of society.

Yet, do the students involved see and value their development into engaged world citizens? For students like Henry, Hamal and Deidre I would say no. It’s not just because they do not show up for class, which obviously prevents their participation in the classroom discourse, but also because when they are there they do not participate in the discussion and most of the time do not hand in any work. For students like Kachina, Laqueta, and Abrianna, they value the knowledge gained from the class more so than the discourse that may take place. For a lot of students, concepts and theories that we discuss in the class are new to them and they wouldn’t get such information otherwise. For students like Hakim and Latoya, the class has increased their confidence in themselves and their capabilities so much so that they are already involved in other publics besides
the one that has been fostered through the course. The students I see and who I feel value their growth the most has been Khalten and Ajani. Whereas in the beginning of the year, Khalten would come to class, fall asleep and hand in insubstantial work, he knows participates fully in class discussions, hands in quality work, and speaks more about his goals and objectives, seeing them as more attainable. For Ajani, it has been an opportunity to better his language and writing skills as well as an opportunity to discuss issues that are considered taboo in his native culture.

I'm unable to comment on whether or not the Penn TA's experienced any growth since they've just entered into discourse. Yet for Aliya and myself it has been a breath of fresh air. As Aliya put it in an email to me,

Upon reading about your loneliness here at Penn, it was like reading my own story. Like you, I have been extremely depressed and lonely here—th at is why I am graduating a year early. Although our experiences have not all been the same, I wanted you to know that I have found Penn to be a cruel and cold place, and I actually long for the friendships I used to have.

This experience has allowed for those bonds to grow not only between Aliya and myself but with Karl and the students as well. It has helped us to cope with our current situation as well as to grow as students, teachers, women and world citizens. I value this class so much that I regret that I will be graduating this year and will not be returning to University City High to partake in this experience. It's been formative and life transforming. In my own ethnic autobiography I write about the encouragement a course such as this provided for me:
I’m still suffering from depression… The more I struggled against oppression the more I experienced it. It takes all my might not to give up fighting and join the crowd in trying to get whatever I can at the expense of another. Despite the obstacles thrown in my path, for some reason, I can’t seem to stop fighting. I can’t seem to stop pursuing racial, gender, and class equality. I find that I don’t want to stop.

Limitations

While I did get the chance to see the students everyday, I was unable to observe them outside of the classroom, University City High and class trips in order to see if and how the course impacted other aspects of their life. In addition, I am unable to gauge the long range effects of a course such as this on the lives of the participants and on the community in which they reside. Furthermore, I only have limited observations for most of the teaching assistants because with the exception of Aliya and myself, they just began working with the class in February 2004. I think most importantly, I was unable to observe other classes at University City High School in order to compare the experiences and knowledge received within the course as opposed to what they would normally receive within this setting.
Work Cited


Appendix

Ethnic Autobiography Project

To: Students in Cultural Anthropology Class
From: Dr. Janowitz, Janel and Stefanie
Date: January 30, 2004
Re: Ethnic Autobiography Project (3rd Report)

We’ve been working on our ethnic autobiographies for two months now. After the second marking period we are half way through the project. For the next few weeks we will continue to work on the ethnic autobiographies, culminating in a final paper that will includes your pictures.

You will have time to work on this project in school, on the following dates:

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Your third report grade will be based on the complete paper. The final paper must incorporate all 11 sections as well as your pictures. Weeks 5 and 6 will be spent answering any questions and working on the remaining sections to the report. Week 7, EVERYONE will bring in their papers (TYPED) on Tuesday, February 10, 2004 for REVIEW by Janel and Stephanie. After your paper has been reviewed, for grammar, spelling, and content, you will revise it and hand in a final draft of the paper, along with the photography project, **Friday, February 20, 2004**.

Everyone’s ethnic autobiography has been great thus far and we look forward to seeing the final product. Keep up the good work!

Friday, January 30, 2004
Ethnic Autobiography Assignment

The following are questions for you to answer regarding your ethnic autobiography. By no means are you required to answer all of these questions. If you feel uncomfortable about divulging certain aspects of your life it’s ok; you will not be penalized. However, do not limit yourself to these questions or topics. Ask yourself what are important things, people, and places in your life. **Remember: You may substitute additional sections for another section you choose not to answer (for example: sports, media, hobbies, etc.)**

1. What is your full name and why were you named it? (Maiden name for females)
2. Were you named after someone else?
3. Did you have a nickname as you were growing up
4. If you did what was it and why did they call you that?
5. Have you had any other nicknames as an adult?
6. What do your family members call you now?
7. What is your first memory?
8. When did you first become aware of yourself in this world?
9. When and where were you born?
10. Where did you grow up?
11. What was it like growing up during that time period?

Family
1. Who are the members of your family?
2. Where do they live?
3. Where is your family from?
4. Did your parents or grandparents come to this state from another state? If so, when did they come to this state?
5. What is your family like?
6. What does family mean to you?
7. Could you tell me a story or any memory of your brothers and sisters?

Ethnicity and Race
1. What is your ethnicity?
2. How has ethnicity affected your life?
3. What is your race?
4. What kind of racial classification system operates in the community where you grew up or now live?

Religion
1. What religion are your parents and your grandparents?
2. Describe your religious belief.
3. What church do you attend?
4. When and where were you baptized?

Language
1. If a language other than English is spoken in your home:
   a. Do you speak the language?
   b. How often do you speak it?
   c. When would you speak that language vs. when would you speak English?
2. How do you talk with peers as opposed to how you talk with adults?
3. Do you use a particular accent, slang or dialect of English?

Class
1. How does your parents make a living?
2. Do you work? If so, where, when, what do you do, and why?
3. What would you like to be when you grow up?
4. What does it meant to be a part of your particular class?

Gender
1. What is your gender?
2. What does it mean to be a member of your gender?
3. How has gender affected you?

Art
1. What music do you like? Why?
2. What films do you like? Why?
3. Are you an artist? What does it mean to you to be an artist?

Ablism
1. Do you have a disability?
2. How has it affected you?

Political systems
1. What are your political views and beliefs?
2. What impact does that have on your life?

Education
1. What do you think about school?
2. What do you think about the education you’ve received?
3. Who was your favorite teacher and why?
4. What was your favorite class and why?

Some other questions:
1. What are your ideas of beauty? What is your self-image or the image you try to project?
2. How has the media affected you?
3. How has technology affected you?
4. Think of a change you’d like to see happen.
   a. Who would you enlist in making that change?
   b. What would be their roles?
   c. How would you go about making this change?

*Please make sure to also include who you spoke with in order to construct your genealogy and how this person is related to you.
Cultural Anthropology
Test #3: Chapter 4 and 5

I. Match the definition with the letter of the term.

A. Descent B. Ethnic Group
C. Hypodescent D. Status
E. Phenotype F. Prejudice
G. Nation-state H. Race
I. Plural Society J. Assimilation
K. Nationalities L. Ethnicity
M. Discrimination N. Multiculturalism

____ Identification with, and feeling part of, an ethnic group, and exclusion from certain other groups because of this affiliation.

____ Ethnic groups that once had, or wish to have or regain, autonomous political status (their own country).

____ A society that combines ethnic contrasts and economic interdependence of the ethnic groups.

____ Devaluing (looking down on) a group because of its assumed behavior, values, abilities, or other attributes.

____ Group distinguished by cultural similarities (shared among members of that group) and differences (between that group and others); they share beliefs, customs, and norms, and, often, a common language religion, history, geography, and kinship.

____ Rule assigning social identity on the basis of some aspect of one’s ancestry.

____ A group assumed to have a biological basis but actually perceived and defined in a social context, by a particular culture rather than by scientific criteria.

____ Rule that automatically places the children of a union or mating between members of different socioeconomic groups in the less-privileged group.

____ An organism’s evident traits, its “manifest biology”—anatomy and physiology.

____ Any social position that someone occupies; may be ascribed or achieved.
II. Answer any three (3) of the following in essay (paragraph) form

1. How does multiculturalism differ from assimilation? Which process do you favor for your country? Why?

2. Compare and contrast ascribed and achieved status. Give three (3) examples of each type of status you occupy. Also, discuss situational negotiation of social identity.

3. How are races classified in the U.S. as opposed to Japan or Brazil? What are the main problems with these racial classification systems?

4. Define and describe discrimination and state the differences between:
   - Dejure vs. defacto discrimination
   - Attitudinal vs. institutional discrimination

5. Define and describe the difference between nation, state, and nation-state?