

# Self-Reflections, Teaching, and Learning in a Graduate Cultural Pluralism Course

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Using symbolic interaction as an interpretive framework, our participatory action research (PAR) project challenged students in Cultural Pluralism, a 2009 graduate level summer course, to wrestle with identity issues pertinent to teaching in a pluralistic society. Specifically, we wanted to know: What, if any, personal and cultural identity evolutions evidenced an appreciation for the “other;” types of diverse curricula emerged from group collaborations; and re-planning strategies surfaced for the course and its successor the following summer? Our *plans, observations, reflections, and actions* during the course revolved around monitoring fledgling relationships between various students who were having difficulties communicating with each other, working more effectively with those who had the most trouble with introspection, altering a class lecture midstream when we sensed it fell on deaf ears, supporting students whose written and oral autobiographies caused them angst, and seeking out potential for social change through a breaking down of rigid, judgemental beliefs. Our end-of-class analysis (*reflection*) indicated that to varying degrees students came to understand and appreciate that their personal soul searching was inevitably culturally entangled. They also showed a keen ability to craft culturally diverse lessons and interact thoughtfully with course curricula. Yet, the class critiques and written autobiographies indicated that a few students required more one-on-one help with self-reflection, and remained unclear concerning the symbolic interactionist framework and other identity theories. Our successes and failures led to revamping (*planning*) parts of the ensuing summer course.

**Key words:** personal/cultural identity, cultural pluralism in education, symbolic interactionism, self-reflection, participatory action research