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Diversity

To be excellent, a university must be diverse. And to develop the skills that lead to active concerned citizenship and ethical leadership, a university must be diverse. You cannot be an active concerned citizen if your only concerns are for people you view as like yourself; you cannot be a true leader if you can only lead people like yourself. Most colleges and universities seek diversity in their student bodies and their faculty as well as staff. This is often one of two major goals for these institutions, the other of which is academic excellence. But whereas the importance of academic excellence to a college or university may be self-explanatory to the general public, it is not always obvious why colleges believe diversity to be important. Is concern for diversity merely a form of political correctness, or is there really some educational benefit to a diverse student body and faculty?

Why Diversity Is Important

There are several reasons why diversity is truly important in institutions of higher education and especially in ACCEL institutions. Consider each in turn.

Learning

First, students learn more from others if the others are different from themselves in significant ways. Imagine, in some strange world, that everyone in a university was a clone of everyone else. Students would learn almost nothing from each other, because they would all be identical. Diversity promotes learning by exposing students to different ways of seeing the world, different points of view, and different assumptions about how the world works. Much of learning is outside the classroom—it is in the informal curriculum of the university. One's learning from friends is as important as one's learning from books and lectures. And diverse friends expose one to different experiences. When I was a freshman, I had friends from Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Pennsylvania, Texas, Georgia, New York, Alberta (Canada), and other locales. I learned from them in a way that would not have been possible if all had been from my home state of New Jersey.

I have been a faculty member in institutions that cover the gamut in diversity, from very diverse to very uniform. My observations convince me that being a student in a relatively homogeneous environment reduces the quality of the learning. In a nondiverse environment—one in which all students are from a particular geographic area, or of a particular ethnic group, or of a particular socioeconomic level, for example—students see lots of other students (and, often, professors and staff) who think more or less the way they do. The lesson they learn is not "Oh, I'm in a homogeneous environment and I'm not learning to think about problems in diverse ways." Rather, the lesson they learn is that people whom they view as diverse, whether or not they are, tend to think the same way and believe the same things. The students may even come to believe that there

is something odd or even wrong with people who do not see things the way they do. The problem is that they do not realize how much diversity in viewpoints there is, or even that such diversity is healthy.

Promoting Interaction

Second, diversity helps promote understanding that can be lacking when different groups fail, or even refuse, to interact. In 1968, the Flemish- and French-speaking factions of the University of Leuven decided that they could not get along, and they split, leaving two universities, Leuven (Flemish-speaking) and Louvain (French-speaking). The repercussions of this and other, similar splits can be seen in contemporary Belgium, which has not had a functioning government since April 22, 2010. The country has been on the verge of splitting apart because people of different linguistic and cultural groups have failed to work together successfully. The split has negatively affected the economy and, obviously, the morale of people in the country. South Africa, for many years, had "black" universities and "white" universities, and never the twain did meet; the consequences were extremely negative for education and for the country as a whole. Bringing diverse people together creates bridges across cultural, linguistic, racial, and other divides.

In some respects, the division in Belgium represents a better case because at least the Flemish and Wallonian groups know and understand the differences that exist between them. It is harder to deal with situations in which people are uncomfortable with or even hostile toward each other without quite acknowledging it or understanding why. One sees this clearly in racism. The worst racism is often that which is under the surface—in which people openly act as if they have no prejudices or biases but underneath seethe with hostility and resentment.

Attracting Excellent Students, Faculty, and Staff

Third, diversity helps attract the best students, faculty, and staff. Suppose everyone at a particular university is a member of Group X, whatever group that may be. It is safe to say that no matter what the group, many of the people who could contribute most to the university will be members of other groups. But members of other groups will likely be reluctant to go

to a university where they will find no one like themselves at all. The result is that the university will scare away many of the most able potential constituents.

Of course, there will be some members of groups who are in minorities who go to institutions that are relatively homogeneous, sometimes lured by financial aid. The challenge in such situations is for them to be fully integrated into the university community, as opposed to forming their own social and other groups that fail to interact with the groups of people in the mainstream in that institution. I remember during my own undergraduate days an institution that was fully integrated on the surface but in which students of different socially defined racial groups often clustered together tightly within their own group and only very loosely and occasionally outside it.

In one university with which I am familiar, when I suggested to people at the highest level of governance that it might make sense to have a vice president for diversity, some of them stared at me with disbelief. They just could not understand why one would want to spend money on such a thing. This particular university, unfortunately, was notably unconcerned about diversity and did not even recognize it as an issue.

Those who view appeals for diversity as thinly disguised appeals to political correctness (PC) can, under some circumstances, have a point. Many of us have seen situations in which the powers that be seem more concerned about their diversity statistics (we need some of these, some of those, and some of still others) than about the importance of diversity for quality education. Moreover, an oft-heard complaint is that people of a certain kind are admitted under a lower standard in order to ensure that there are "enough" of them.

Messaging

When I grew up in the 1950s, diversity was not particularly prized. Opportunities for women were severely restricted. African Americans were overtly discriminated against, in the North as well as the South. Jews were looked at askance—a local country club where I grew up did not admit them. Gays were, for the most part, in the closet, and with good reason given the way they were treated. Immigrants were expected to assimilate fully and, to the extent possible, put any customs from their countries of origin behind them. One could argue about what things are like today, but

certainly, with respect to diversity, they are better than they were then. Yet I doubt that anyone with her or his eyes open would claim that problems of diversity have been fully solved. As I write, a major immigration debate is occurring in the United States, with many prominent politicians now, as then, taking a loud and principled stand to restrict it as much as possible. (What else is new?)

If a university wants to take a position in favor of opportunity for all, then it needs to actively promote diversity. Diversity brings together people with different backgrounds, different ideas, different ways of seeing things. It thus promotes intellectual excellence and broad-mindedness. If universities do not publicly take a stand in favor of these goals, what institutions will?

Actually, universities have not always taken such a position. Even into the middle of the twentieth century, universities quietly discriminated against a variety of groups—women, Jews, Catholics, African Americans, and others. But such discrimination is at odds with the intellectual goals of the university and so puts the university at odds with itself.

There are universities today that continue to discriminate, some covertly but others openly. For example, some religious institutions admit or hire only individuals with approved points of view. That is their prerogative. But under such policies, they will never be ACCEL universities, because they cut off the very diversity that is needed to reach the top rungs of excellence.

How Multicultural Backgrounds Develop Different Knowledge and Skills

Campus diversity is sometimes mistakenly taken to be about the number of faculty or students who look like this or that. That is not the issue. Rather, the issue is different kinds of enculturation, socialization, and world views. World views may differ between people in North America and Africa, but they may also vary within continents, such as, say, between Appalachia and the Hamptons in New York.

The standards problem is a tricky one because when diversity is sought, some groups may have lower means on certain indices, such as standardized test scores or GPAs. In this regard, it is useful to understand just how great cultural differences can be. I cite some of my own research in order to illustrate this point.

A Study in Rural Kenya

Consider a young person in a small Kenyan village. I first learned something of these children in a discussion with a parasitologist, then at Oxford University. The parasitologist, Catherine Nokes, mentioned that young people in rural villages in Kenya would know the names of eighty, ninety, or even one hundred natural herbal medicines that could be used to combat parasitic illnesses. Such knowledge is extremely relevant for adaptation by these children because parasitic illnesses are endemic in the regions in which they live and interfere greatly with their ability to function, to the point that they may have to stay home from school or work because they are too ill to be effective.

If knowledge of natural herbal medicines was just a proxy for general intelligence (*g*) or academic knowledge, then a teacher might predict the young people's knowledge from conventional tests, standardized or otherwise. But suppose that such knowledge was not predictable from conventional tests. Then knowing something of children's ability to learn, as evidenced by their knowledge of natural herbal medicines, might be useful information for a teacher to have in assessing which children could be more successful in learning tasks than perhaps they appeared to be on the basis of their schoolwork. Oddly, it might even be relevant to admissions officers in universities because it would show how well young people adapted to their own environments, not the environments that are relevant to people living in circumstances very unlike their own.

The young people's prospects in some of these Kenyan villages are rather limited. Schooling beyond the early years is largely considered a waste of time because there is little need for academic skills. But there is a need for a knowledge of natural herbal medicines that can be used to treat the various parasitic illnesses prevalent in the region, such as malaria, schistosomiasis, hookworm, whipworm, and the like. Consider one of a number of problems we posed to such young people (Sternberg et al. 2001):

> A small child in your family has homa. She has a sore throat, headache, and fever. She has been sick for 3 days. Which of the following five Yadh nyaluo (Luo herbal medicines) can treat homa?
>
> 1. Chamama. Take the leaf and fito (sniff medicine up the nose to sneeze out illness).*
> 2. Kaladali. Take the leaves, drink, and fito.*

3. Obuo. Take the leaves and fito.*
4. Ogaka. Take the roots, pound, and drink.
5. Ahundo. Take the leaves and fito.

There are multiple correct answers, which are asterisked here. Once again, no one would expect a typical US college professor or student to be able to answer such questions at better than a chance level. Why should they? The knowledge probably has no real adaptive value for them (unless they are studying cultural psychology or anthropology). But for young people growing up in an environment where the major threat to adaptive success is parasitic illness, such knowledge is extremely important. And imagine what such young people might have to teach students for whom parasitic illnesses and the threats they pose are as far from their experience as is life on Mars (were there to be any)!

Some of us may tend to assume that the knowledge and skills we often value—such as those measured by standardized tests—are important anywhere. On this view, if a group of students score more poorly on standardized tests, they simply are intellectually inferior. Perhaps they are not. Perhaps they have knowledge and skills that are important elsewhere that would be hidden if one were to rely exclusively on conventional standardized tests. Teachers and admissions officers alike would do well to know of the practical knowledge and adaptive competencies that students from diverse environments have acquired, because such knowledge and skills may tell us more about their learning abilities than do scores on conventional tests.

We also tested the rural Kenyan children for their vocabulary levels in Dholuo, their home language, and in English. Such measures assess so-called crystallized intelligence. We also used geometric matrix problems to measure their so-called fluid intelligence, or ability to think in novel and flexible ways. Our expectation, based on work we had done on what we have called "practical intelligence," was that the knowledge of the natural herbal medicines would show at most a weak positive correlation with scores on the standardized ability tests.

To our surprise, there were significant correlations, but they were negative. This left us, at first, puzzled, and might leave other psychologists puzzled as well because tests of fluid and crystallized abilities typically show a positive manifold, that is, a pattern of positive correlations throughout that

yields a general factor, signifying what is known as general intelligence (*g*), when the tests are factor-analyzed. But we came to see a logic to the negative pattern of correlations. What the correlations showed is the extent to which patterns of relationships among assessments may be influenced by characteristics internal not only to individuals but also to the environmental contexts in which they live. Young people who were learning the knowledge that was most relevant for adaptation in their environments were not the best at learning school knowledge, and those who were most adept at picking up school knowledge were not learning what was most adaptive in their home environments.

The question, of course, is whether one should admit into universities those who are not as finely tuned academically but have shown a great mastery of practical knowledge. Are these individuals any less likely to become active concerned citizens and ethical leaders? The answer depends on what one is trying to maximize. If one's goal is to admit that student group whose academic achievement will be maximized, by all means one should go with the standardized tests. But if one's goal is to admit students who will be adaptive to, and even shape, whatever world they live in (and many students from abroad go back home after college), one might choose to go with the students who are higher in practical knowledge. At the very least, a case could be made either way. If we want to admit students who will impact the world as active concerned citizens and ethical leaders in ways that go beyond high academic performance, we need to think outside the box of standardized test scores.

One might be inclined to think that the phenomenon we observed in Kenya is limited to cultures remote from ours, but that is not the case. In our culture as well, gaining more education can lead to reduced societally valued outcomes, such as money. For example, students with a two-year MBA will generally earn substantially more money than students with a PhD earned over four, five, six, or more years. In Silicon Valley, the entrepreneurs who run start-up companies are often individuals who have nothing more than a bachelor's degree, if that; they hire PhDs to work for them, at salaries considerably lower than their own. The grade level at which additional formal schooling leads to certain reduced societally valued outcomes is different, but the principle is the same: at some point, additional schooling and acquisition of associated academic knowledge and skills may lead to a reduction rather than an increase in certain societally

valued outcomes. This is even more the case in most other countries of the world, where college and university professors are paid far less than they are in the United States. German universities, for example, generally pay less than American universities, and the national pay scale for professors there was recently reduced.

A Study among the Alaskan Yup'ik

One might think that the phenomena we observed in Kenya would be found only in developing countries. Such is not the case. In my colleagues' and my work with Native American Alaskan Yup'ik youth, for example, we discovered Native American young people who were able to navigate on a dog sled from one distant village to another across what to us (and probably you) would have seemed to be a perceptually uniform field of vision (Grigorenko et al. 2004). If you or we or the young people's non–Native American teachers attempted to go from one village to another on such a dog sled, all of us would probably get lost in the wilderness and die. Signals for navigation are there; we just would not see them. Similarly, the Puluwat people of Micronesia can navigate across long distances in the sea under circumstances in which meaningful signals also would elude us.

The importance of context is shown by the kinds of practical knowledge that children develop in order to adapt to their environments. Consider two examples.

Imagine living in a hunting-gathering society. Many Yup'ik Eskimos in Alaska live in such a society, where hunting and gathering are joined by fishing as means of putting food on the table. The knowledge and skills you need to survive in such an environmental context are rather different from those of, say, an individual who has spent his life as a professor. The professor (or college student, for that matter) might do well on an SAT question or on a question about what or how to order in a restaurant. He or she might not fare as well on a question we developed for assessing Yup'ik young people:

> When Eddie runs to collect the ptarmigan that he's just shot, he notices that its front pouch (balloon) is full of ptarmigan food. This is a sign that:
>
> - there's a storm on the way.*
> - winter is almost over.

- it's hard to find food this season.
- it hasn't snowed in a long time. (Grigorenko et al. 2004)

The correct answer is asterisked. Of course, there is no reason why the typical college student or professor would need to know the answer to the question about the ptarmigan. But similarly, it is unclear that the Alaskan Yup'ik student would need to do well on the SAT or restaurant question if he or she plans to live in a coastal Yup'ik village. The knowledge that is useful depends on the context. One could argue, of course, that it is not the mission of universities to educate those young people, but do we really want higher education to be only for those students who come from, or plan to live, in more urban settings?

We found that urban students (from Dillingham, a city in Alaska that, although small by the standards of most states, would count as fairly large in Alaska) outperformed rural students on conventional tests of fluid and crystallized abilities, but that the Yup'ik Eskimo young people outperformed the urban children on tests of knowledge of adaptive competencies relevant to the Yup'ik environment. Moreover, tests of practical knowledge predicted hunting skills whereas conventional standardized tests did not.

When we in the United States create tests of intelligence, which is what college-admissions tests are, we inadvertently rely on culturally bound implicit theories, or folk conceptions, of what intelligence is. We may think we know what intelligence is—for example, general ability or fluid/crystallized abilities—but we nevertheless rely on implicit theories that are not widely shared across cultures around the world. In particular, in the university world, we may be tempted to equate being smart with having high scores on standardized tests. And if our goal is to admit the brightest students, we may default to high standardized test scores. That's a shame, because we may admit students who are culturally attuned to mainstream US culture, but we are not necessarily admitting the students with the greatest potential for active concerned citizenry and ethical leadership.

Folk Conceptions of What It Means to Be Smart

To understand what people around the world mean by "smart," we need to study folk conceptions, or implicit theories of intelligence across cultures,

not just in our own culture. Implicit theories do not tell us what intelligence is, to the extent that the question is even answerable; rather, they inform us about folk conceptions of what people believe intelligence is. Folk theories drive many psychological phenomena, including even what we know and remember about ourselves.

One might ask why implicit theories are important. After all, why should we care what laypeople think intelligence is? Shouldn't we be more concerned about the opinions of experts? The main reason folk theories matter so much is that 99+ percent of the judgments that are made about people's intelligence are based on people's implicit theories, not on IQ tests or SATs or ACTs or related tests. These judgments are made on dates, in job interviews, after listening to someone talk at a party, during a business negotiation, or when we read an article about someone in the newspaper. Implicit theories, not explicit theories of experts, are what makes the "world go 'round."

My colleagues and I have studied implicit theories across cultures and have found that, indeed, our implicit theories are not all that widely shared. In a set of studies we did in the United States (Sternberg et al. 1981), we found that people's implicit theories were well characterized by three factors: practical problem solving, verbal ability, and social competence. Note that only one of these factors—verbal ability—is seriously measured by conventional tests of intelligence.

In a study Shih Ying-Yang and I did in Taiwan, four factors emerged from people's implicit theories of intelligence: traditional cognitive abilities, but also interpersonal competence (understanding others), intrapersonal competence (understanding oneself), knowing when to show you are smart, and knowing when not to show you are smart (i.e., have a "poker face") (Yang and Sternberg 1997). Again, only one of these factors is measured by conventional tests of intelligence, namely, traditional cognitive abilities.

In studies in a very different part of the world—rural Kenya—we found that cultural conceptions of the nature of intelligence were quite different from those in either Taiwan or the United States. Four qualities seemed to underlie people's implicit theories of intelligence: *rieko* (knowledge, abilities, skills), *luoro* (respect), *paro* (initiative), and *winjo* (comprehension of the complexities of a social problem-solving situation (Grigorenko et al. 2001).

One view of all this would be that these implicit theories cannot all be right. According to this view, the results show the futility of relying on implicit theories, since they vary so widely. But an alternative view is that the results show precisely the opposite—namely, the need to take implicit theories seriously. If implicit theories differ so widely, it is clear how attributes that are valued highly in one culture might not be so highly valued, or might even be devalued, in another culture. Note also that unless one does implicit-theory studies in a variety of cultures, one is likely to make the mistake of thinking that the implicit theories of one's own culture typify other cultures as well. But even the small sampling of cultures described here reveals large differences in implicit theories across cultures. Standardized tests scores, in sum, reflect a relatively narrow implicit theory of what intelligence is. We will not admit truly diverse classes to the extent we rely on standardized tests to tell us who will be the students with the most potential to add value to, and receive value from, our universities.

How Implicit Theories Affect Teacher Behavior

I claimed above that implicit theories affect people's behavior. An important example is that of teachers. Teachers, like everyone else, have implicit theories of intelligence. They use these implicit theories to evaluate their students. If the students look smart according to the teachers' implicit theories, the teachers are likely to treat the children differently from, and perhaps better than, the students who do not look so smart.

In one set of studies Lynn Okagaki and I conducted in San Jose, California, we looked at how the match between teachers' and parents' implicit theories of intelligence would affect the teachers' views of young people from different ethnic groups (Okagaki and Sternberg 1993). We queried parents of Anglo American, Latino American, and Asian American young people regarding their implicit theories of intelligence. We also queried the children's teachers. We found that parents of Anglo American and Asian American young people emphasized cognitive skills more than social skills in their conceptions of intelligence, whereas Latino American parents placed more emphasis on social skills. The young people's teachers, however, like the Anglo American and Asian American parents, emphasized cognitive skills. Perhaps partially as a result, the teachers viewed the

Anglo American and Asian American students as generally more academically able. But which skills will be more important in life after college—or even, arguably, life in college—cognitive or social skills? Who will make the successful businesspeople, social workers, salespeople, or whatever? Do we really want to limit our conceptions of who the most able students are to those who do the best on standardized tests?

If one reflects on these various studies of diverse children from diverse backgrounds, one must question whether standardized tests are telling us all, or even most, of what we would want to know about the students whom we consider for admission to our universities. Students may have tremendous potential in terms of the ways in which they were enculturated and socialized, but because these ways do not correspond to the rather narrow skills measured on standardized tests, the students may come out of the experience looking far less able than they really are. We overemphasize tests and then wonder why it is so hard to achieve a diverse student body. In effect, the tests knock out the diversity we prize.

Objections to the Seeking of Diversity

I value diversity in the student body. Perhaps you do too. But not everyone does. I would like to review the three main concerns I have heard from individuals who do not particularly value it, at least as it pertains to university admissions and hiring.

The Political-Correctness Objection

One objection is that the seeking of diversity is nothing more than political correctness run amok. I hope I have dealt with this issue in the discussion above. The seeking of diversity can become a form of political correctness when it is done for the sake of appeasement of certain groups or without due regard to the quality of the applicants being selected for positions as students, staff, or faculty members. But if one considers the advantages of diversity discussed above, as well as the range of skills that diverse people can bring to the table, one at least needs to reconsider what one means by "quality." Diversity may or may not be politically correct: it is important in a university setting, nevertheless.

The "It's Not Important" Objection

An ACCEL university takes the position that diversity is necessary for quality. If everyone thinks and sees problems the same way you do, then you are not likely to learn much from them and, on the contrary, you are likely to come to the false conclusion that anyone in his or her right mind will think the same way you do.

In one of my administrative positions, I had a discussion with a member of the university board of trustees. He (and some of his colleagues) did not particularly value diversity, and when, as mentioned above, I mentioned the idea of creating a position of vice president for diversity, some of the people looked at me as if I were from another planet. An issue for people who grow up in nondiverse settings is that they may come to believe that others should think as they do, and if others don't, then they should just be in another place where people think the way they do. In other words, people who are not exposed to diversity may not think it has value and instead may judge others not by the quality of their ideas but rather by the extent to which the others' ideas correspond quite precisely to their own.

A state politician in one of the states in which I worked commented on the importance of a particular industry to the state, and suggested that people who see things another way just find another state in which to live. I expected widespread condemnation of the politician. Instead, within the state, there was widespread praise. With that attitude, it is challenging to see why people from diverse backgrounds would want to live in the state or study in a public university within the state. Homogeneity breeds more of the same and the view that one's own culture and mores are superior to those of others.

The "It's Unfair" Objection

The toughest objection, I believe, is the feeling that when one admits or hires an individual in order to increase diversity, there is someone else who may be more qualified who is not getting that slot. And that objection may have some justification to it in some instances. I personally do not believe in hiring a less qualified person simply to increase diversity. As an administrator, I always argued for admitting and hiring the most qualified individuals. But too often, as I noted above, our notions about what constitutes

a "qualified" person are excessively narrow. Although we think our view of qualifications is that we seek the best person for a particular slot, often we end up seeking the person who is most like us. As I discuss later in the book, we tend to be attracted to people who are like us. In effect, we confound similarity with quality.

In a study I did with some colleagues years ago, we asked people to rate their own intelligence. The mean rating, on a 9-point scale, where 5 was average, was between 7 and 8. So people very much think they are above average, even though, by definition, half of people need to be below average (assuming a so-called normal, or bell-shaped, distribution). Most people, thinking they are above average, want to associate with others like themselves. They figure that they've reached the heights, and hence others who reach the heights presumably are much like them. Unfortunately, they are wrong. But if they are used to nondiverse environments, they may never have been exposed to the diversity of people who would show them the folly of their own narrowness.

When Diversity Turns on Itself

I am writing this book at a time (late 2015) when, in some institutions, diversity has turned on itself. By this, I mean that some members of campus communities—students, faculty, and staff alike—have decided that they do not want to tolerate or even hear diverse points of view or ways of approaching the world. In some universities, they have decided—in the name of protection of diversity—that those who disagree with their views on matters cannot be tolerated. Some of these students want "protection" or "safety" against points of view they find offensive.

Regrettably, in an era in which campus leadership often is more oriented toward job preservation than toward doing the right thing, some administrators have capitulated to demands that individuals with points of view different from those of a vocal group on campus not be allowed on their campuses. Some of those on campuses with different points of view already on campus have been shouted down and sometimes targeted by obscenities and worse. Oddly, diversity is being stifled—in the name of diversity.

The benefit of diversity is to open up a university to varying lifestyles, points of view, and ways of looking at the world. When students, faculty,

or others shout down perspectives different from their own in the name of safety, diversity, or whatever, they are destroying exactly the benefits that diversity of campus is intended to achieve. Students should feel safe, but not from worldviews or opinions that differ from their own. On the contrary, exposure to differing worldviews is exactly what diversity is supposed to produce. This irony is lost on some of the most vocal protesters and, unfortunately, on some administrators as well.

The issue of diversity brings us to the question of how one creates an able and at the same time diverse student body. I deal with that question in the next chapter.