

Running head: LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Eric Winter

Learning Experience

Azusa Pacific University

Biracial: What are you?

The purpose of this program is to:

- Provide an educational opportunity on a diverse topic, encouraging interracial contact.
- Help *all* attendees become aware of the biracial population in their campus community and beyond.
- Inspire the creation of a distinct biracial student organization, if one is nonexistent.
- Help *all* attendees perceive the campus racial climate in a more positive light.
- Begin assisting biracial students in understanding their own racial/ethnic identity.
- Help biracial students realize that they are not alone in the racial problems they face.
- Commence a campus wide effort to increase the retention of biracial students.
- Help biracial students feel a psychological sense of community and belonging on the college campus.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to dialogue with someone different than themselves, interacting with honesty, sincerity, curiosity, and respect.
- Students will assess their past interactions with and around biracial persons and strategize ways in which they can co-create a mutual healthy relationship with them.
- Students will be able to identify aspects of the biracial background, lifestyle, worldview, and experience that are similar to and different from their own life.
- Biracial students will begin to understand and give language to their own racial/ethnic identity development.
- Non-biracial students will be inspired to understand their respective race/ethnicity.
- Students will be able to identify social and historical factors that make up the context in which biracial students now reside.

Collaboration:

- Multicultural Center and the Sociology Department

Directions:

- The proposed biracial program is open to all students of all races/ethnicities. When students enter the auditorium of the event, a gallery of headshots of biracial students will be displayed on the walls. A banner will reside at the front of the auditorium saying: “What are you?” Underneath each picture, the student who it is a picture of will have a sentence or two in handwriting answering the front banner’s question. A professor of Sociology will then speak and introduce race as a social construction as well as provide an overview of the biracial experience in the last 50 years (interracial couples/marriage laws, census data, and “passing”). Then the director of the multicultural center will speak and introduce Wijeyesinghe’s theory of 8 factors that influence choosing a racial identity as well as Bronfenbrenner’s ecology model of human development and the corresponding contextual system chart (blank charts will be passed out as students enter). Lastly, the sociology professor and the multicultural center director will interview a panel. The panel will consist of biracial students, faculty, staff, and administration that are confident and competent in their biracial identity. They will be asked the questions listed below as well as any spontaneous questions from the audience. Students will then eat in small groups and reflect on their past experiences with biracial people and what they just learned, while strategizing what they can do in the future. On their way out they will receive handouts on resources available to them (the multicultural center, the “Hapa Project,” books, club flyers, the writing center, the math center, tutoring, academic advising, and the counseling center).

Questions for the panel:

- What is your racial ancestry?
- What were your early experiences and socialization?
- How politically aware are you?
- How spiritual are you?
- What other social identities do you have?
- What is your social and historical context?
- What does your micro, meso, exo, and macro system chart look like?
- How would you describe your physical appearance?
- What identity did society assign you? Did you accept it?
- What is your choice of ethnic/racial group categorization?
- When did you become aware of differences and dissonance of being biracial?
- Did you ever identify with a single racial group?
- Did you ever identify with both racial groups?
- Did you ever hold multiple monoracial identities that shifted according to the situation?
- Did you ever identify with a new racial group?
- Do you accept and assert an interracial identity?
- Did you ever hold an extraracial identity, opting out of a racial category?

“Educators interested in fostering the positive growth and development of all students need to include in their consideration those who define themselves as biracial.” – Beverly Tatum

Why biracial/multiracial college students?

Renn (2000) informs that 2% of college students identify as multiracial (United States citizens were not given the option of checking off “more than one race” until the 2000 census) and they are a growing population. The researcher pointed out one existing paradox for multiracial students. On one hand, they desire to acknowledge and not partake in the social construction of race. But, on the other hand, they desire to identify as a multiracial community in order to have an identity *on* a racialized campus and *in* a racialized society. Caught in such a paradox, this growing student population needs “space” on campus to explore their identity, according to Renn. Space means colleges need “fluid” monoracial organizations, allowing multiracial students to move freely from one racial group to another in search of identity. But space also means establishing a distinct biracial/multiracial student group. The proposed biracial program seeks to meet the latter, breaking ground on a college campus for the creation of a biracial/multiracial community.

Why cocurricular programming?

Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas (2004) researched the relationship between college student participation in racial/ethnic organizations and clubs and whether or not such participation increased students’ “racial/ethnic awareness and understanding.” The researcher understood the context of higher education as attempting to be accessible to *all* people, because they know diversity aides in intellectual stimulation. Such a strive at colleges and universities has led to what some see as blossoming racial segregation though, in which racial/ethnic clubs and organizations only perpetuate division among the diverse student body. Kurotsuchi Inkelas posed the question, “Does...participation in these clubs facilitate any long-term outcomes, instead of only a temporary state of safety and ethnocentrism?” She found that college students’

involvement in racial/ethnic clubs and organizations influenced their understanding and awareness of their own ethnicity and inspired them to be involved in their specific ethnic community throughout the future. The researcher argued that some racial/ethnic clubs and organizations do seem to increase segregation, however, the effect such cocurricular activities have on participants' identity development makes them worthwhile. The proposed biracial program is open to all races and ethnicities; however, the purpose of the event is to help biracial students begin to and understand and become aware of their own race/ethnicity. All non-biracial students are encouraged to seek understanding and awareness of their respective race/ethnicity along the way. Each participant in the event will walk away knowing more about the biracial background, lifestyle, worldview, experience, etc.

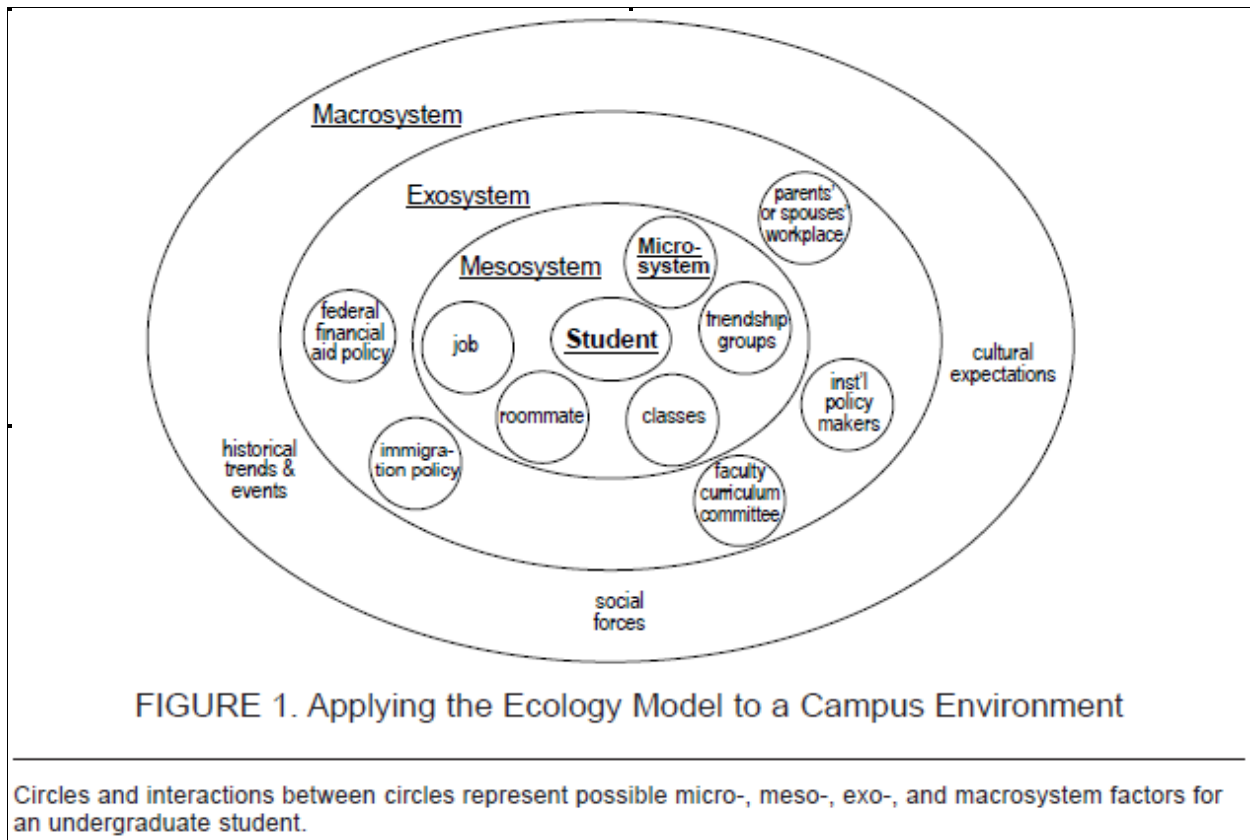
What theories will guide the program?

Cooper, Howard-Hamilton, & Torres (2003) provide an overview of multiracial identity development. First, they inform that *biracial* and *multiracial* are used interchangeably. Biracial, with its prefix "bi" means two races/ethnicities, an example being a college student who is White/Caucasian and Asian Pacific American. Multiracial can be used to represent someone with two or more races/ethnicities, an example being a college student who is White/Caucasian and Asian Pacific American and Hispanic/Latino. In the proposed program, biracial will be the primary term used, encapsulating multiracial. This choice was made because many college students may confuse the term multiracial in advertising and discussion as meaning "all races," or think of "multiracial" as a synonym to "multicultural." Cooper et al. present three theories for multiracial identity development: Poston, Kish, and Wijeyesinghe. Poston (1990) had 5 stages: "personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration." Kish (1995) had 3 stages: "awareness of differences and dissonance, struggle for

acceptance, and self-acceptance and assertion of an interracial identity.” The authors noted a criticism of Poston and Kish is that they are optimistic in assuming students will identify with and value a biracial identity considering the historical pressure in the United States to choose one race. In this biracial program, the theories of Poston and Kish will be used, but only on a surface level, as the theories will play a larger role in future “deeper” biracial programming. Instead, Wijeyesinghe’s theory will be used as a main introduction to students considering a biracial identity. This theory proposes 8 factors that influence choosing a racial identity: “racial ancestry, cultural attachment, early experience and socialization, political awareness and orientation, spirituality, other social identities, social and historical context, and physical appearance.” This biracial program will present these factors for students reflect on.

Renn (2003) states multiracial identity as a complex development that must not be explored using monoracial identity development theory. The researcher suggests Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) ecology model of human development as a viable theory for biracial identity development. The ecology model contains 3 factors: person and process, context (microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems), and time. The appeal of this theory, claims Renn, is the incorporation of “multiperson systems of interaction” in various settings beyond the subject. For the proposed biracial program, the four systems (micro, meso, exo, and macro, as seen in Figure 1 below) will be presented to the students for them to consider the context of their own identity development, while also complementing Wijeyesinghe’s theory. Microsystems are the settings in which the individual has “face-to-face” interactions with their surroundings. Mesosystems are the encounters microsystems have with other microsystems. This is where a student interacts with friends, roommates, etc. Exosystems are settings that do

not contain the individual, such as policies. Lastly, macrosystems are the distant overarching setting (history, society, culture) that influences each of the other systems.



Renn (2008) sifts out two more theories for biracial and multiracial identity development. The researcher cited Root's (1990) 4 positive solutions to the tension of the biracial student: "acceptance of the identity society assigns, identification with both racial groups, identification with a single racial group, and identification as a new racial group." The researcher also cited her own theory, Renn (2000, 2004), and 5 patterns of biracial/multiracial identity development: "student holds a monoracial identity, student holds multiple monoracial identities: shifting according to the situation, student holds a multiracial identity, student holds an extraracial identity by deconstructing race or opting out of identification with U. S. racial categories, and student holds a situational identity, identifying differently in different contexts." In this biracial program, the theories of Root and Renn will be used, but only on a surface level, as the theories

will play a larger role in future “deeper” biracial programming. These theories, along with Poston and Kish will act as guides for thought provoking questions.

Social and historical factors

Shang (2008) presents the social and historical factors that affect today’s biracial college students. The researcher states that the U. S. is in the post-affirmative action era, however, there are still more African American men in prison than in college, racial hate crimes are on the rise, and widespread, blatant racism abounds in American society. Shang teaches, “Of the 6.8 million people who indicated more than one racial category on the 2000 U.S. Census, 40 percent were under eighteen years old...” and “In 2008, mixed-race public figures abound: Tiger Woods, Vin Diesel, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, Halle Berry, Soledad O’Brien, Derek Jeter, and Barack Obama.” It has only been a little over 40 years since laws banning interracial marriage have been repealed (*Loving v. Virginia*), the last state to do so was Alabama in 2000. Biracial and multiracial college student populations are on the rise, interracial marriages are more common and accepted than 50 years in the past, and “mixed-race public figures” appear more often in the media. For this biracial program, students will be informed of these social and historical factors, revealing the racial context of the past and the context in which biracial students now reside.

Retention, belonging, community, coping, and counseling

Sands and Schuh (2003-2004) examined the retention of biracial college students citing Tinto’s (1998) theory of institutional departure. This theory claims that the more a student engages socially with their peers and academically with their faculty, the more likely they are to graduate. In accordance with this theory, the researchers proposed there be more biracial initiatives to include biracial students in the institutional life. They suggested a mentoring program as well as a specific biracial and multiracial student organization, both of which could

spring off this initial biracial program. This biracial program could begin a campus wide effort amongst administration, faculty, and staff to increase the retention of biracial students. A cocurricular activity could influence the academic curriculum and even institutional policy.

Alvarez et al. (2007) examined the sense of *belonging* first-year college students felt. Specifically the researchers wanted to know if there were any significant differences between the senses of belonging between various racial and ethnic groups. For multiracial and multiethnic students, Alvarez et al. found that interactions with diverse peers and a positive perception of the campus racial climate significantly influenced the students' sense of belonging. In this biracial program, interaction with diverse peers will be promoted, that is why all students are invited. Students will also be encouraged to see the diversity amongst biracial and multiracial students and interact with everyone at the program, therefore increasing the biracial student's sense of belonging. As for perceptions of the campus racial climate, one goal of the program is that students will perceive the campus racial climate in a more positive light after the event. Positive, in the way it is used here, is not a glossing over of racial issues on campus, but a view that the institution is attempting to confront these issues, particularly that of biracial and multiracial students. When biracial students experience the effort of the cocurricular program, they may feel they belong more.

Bee & Berryhill (2007) examined the psychological sense of *community* felt among ethnically diverse college students. The two researchers discovered, similar to Alvarez et al., that perceptions of the campus racial climate significantly influenced the psychological sense of community for students of color (perceptions were less influential for white students, but still factored slightly). To increase a psychological sense of community, Bee & Berryhill suggested educational opportunities take place on campus with the topic of diversity and an allowance of

“cross-race contact.” This biracial program seeks to be an educational opportunity, both for students of color and white students, where appreciation of diversity is taught and interracial contact is encouraged in order to help all students, especially biracial and multiracial ones, feel a psychological sense of community on the college campus.

Pizzolato (2004) identified multiracial and biracial students as “high-risk,” meaning students who are likely to withdraw from the institution or fail some or all of their classes. The researcher identified biracial students as such because of the marginalization and discrimination the students may face because of the way they look on a predominantly white college campus. Along with these struggles, multiracial students face the inner conflict of searching for an identity, which can be a lonely battle without the appropriate help, challenge, and support. To assist these particular “high-risk” students, Pizzolato suggests faculty and staff “empower” the student to shape plans to be academically successful, instead of suggesting to the student they may not be ready for college academic life. Another objective of this biracial program is to not neglect the academic side of students. Resource handouts for academic student services (the writing center, the math center, the tutoring center, academic advising) will be passed out to point students in the right direction to maintain a healthy academic path.

Berkel & Lucas (2005) pointed out the need to be aware of the unique challenges students of color face on a college campus. The researcher, in their examination of a university counseling center, found that students of color need to be empowered. Empowerment here means pointing out the dominant culture in society and the ways this dominance has stolen power from the student. A goal of counseling and advising should be to assist the student in regaining control over aspects of their lives step by step. This restores some power to the student. One must reveal the context in which a student resides, the “socialization and

discrimination,” and the “political, social, and economic contexts.” One must help the student realize that they are not alone in the problems they face. This biracial program seeks to empower all students, particularly students of color, and particularly in that group, biracial and multiracial students.

Works Cited

- Alvarez, P., Brown Leonard, J., Johnson, D. R., Kurotsuchi Inkelas, K., Longerbeam, S., Rowan-Kenyon, H., & Soldner, M. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development, (48)5*, 525-542.
- Bee, E. K. & Berryhill, J. C. (2007). Ethnically diverse college students' psychological sense of community: Do their perceptions of campus racial climate influence it? *College Student Affairs Journal, 27(1)*, 76-93.
- Berkel, L. A. & Lucas, M. S. (2005). Counseling needs of students who seek help at a university counseling center: A closer look at gender and multicultural issues. *Journal of College Student Development, 46(3)*, 251-266.
- Cooper, D. L., Howard-Hamilton, M. F., & Torres, V. (2003). Identity development of diverse populations: Implications for teaching and administration in higher education. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report 29(6)*, 64-66.
- Kurotsuchi Inkelas, K. (2004). Does participation in ethnic cocurricular activities facilitate a sense of ethnic awareness and understanding? A study asian pacific american undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development, 45(3)*, 285-302.
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2004). Coping with conflict: Self-authorship, coping, and adaptation to college in first-year, high-risk students. *Journal of College Student Development, 45(4)*, 425-442.
- Renn, K. A. (2000). Patterns of situational identity among biracial and multiracial college students. *The Review of Higher Education, 23(4)*, 399-420.
- Renn, K. A. (2003). Understanding the identities of mixed-race college students through a developmental ecology lens. *Journal of College Student Development, 44(3)*, 383-403.
- Renn, K. A. (2008). Research on biracial and multiracial identity development: Overview and synthesis. *New Directions for Student Services, 123*, 13-21.
- Sands, N. & Schuh, J. H. (2003-2004). Identifying interventions to improve the retention of biracial students: A case study. *Journal of College Student Retention, 5(4)*, 349-363.
- Shang, P. (2008). An introduction to social and historical factors affecting multiracial college students. *New Directions for Student Services, 123*, 5-12.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *"Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" And other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.