The Cultural Plunge: Cultural Immersion as a Means of Self-Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity among Students Teachers. Presented By William Foley
The number of K-12 students from culturally and linguistically diverse background continues to increase exponentially.

Most students entering the field of teaching continue to be white, monolingual, middle-class women.
Several authors have urged the utilization of experiential learning in teacher education, often as a means of increasing cultural sensitivity.

Mio (1989) describes a program at a Southern California university where graduate students were matched with immigrant and refugee students in a cultural exchange.
“Cultural plunge”

* Simply put, a cultural plunge is individual exposure to persons or groups markedly different in culture (ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and/or physical exceptionality) from that of the “plunger”.
While the number and type of plunges required have varied over the years, the most recently required are:

- Attend a service at the largest African American church in the city.
- Attend a religious ceremony in a language which you do not understand.
- Interact with homeless people.
- Interact with people with disabilities.
Cultural plunges have four major objectives which are stated in the course syllabus:
a) To have direct contact with people who are culturally different from oneself in a real life setting which represents the target group’s “turf”

b) To gain insights into circumstances and characteristics of the focal community
c) To experience what it is to be very different from most of the people one is around.

d) To gain insight into one’s values, biases, and affective responses.
Cultural Plunge Papers

Because people who engage in cultural immersion activities heighten their learning when they reflect upon their experience, students write a 3-page reaction paper for each plunge.

On paper one, students list 10 popular stereotypes about the focal group and indicate what prior contact they’ve had with it.
On paper two, students describe their emotional response to the experience and any insights on why they reacted emotionally the way they did.

On paper three they begin with discussion of whether the plunge experience reinforced or challenged the popular stereotypes of the focal group. The cultural plunge paper is concluded with exploration of “implications for my career” This last section is particularly significant because students often overlook the implication of the plunge experience for the classroom or other career setting.
The author surveyed 93 students enrolled in his spring and summer 2004 multicultural education classes.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Cultural Plunges on Students</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American cultural plunge</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Language</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeless Plunge</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>Disabled Plunge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gay/Lesbian Plunge</td>
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<td>93</td>
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<td>Cultural Plunge Overall</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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Ratings Code: 1=None 2=Some 3= Moderate 4=Great 5=Very Great
Excerpts Are Organized Around Stated Plunge Objectives:

To Learn About the Target Community

“Many of my friends view Hispanics as lazy people. Nothing could be further from the truth. I saw many people, man and women, young and old, working their hearts out. Their community was a place of pride. As for family, when Paco told us about his family, I could see the pride and respect in his eyes.”
To Experience Being an Outsider

I can now understand more thoroughly what it is like to be in the minority, rather than the majority. The sense of isolation and loneliness is horrible, and it makes me sick to think some people live with that feeling everyday.
To Become More Aware of One’s Values And Biases

I sat quietly in my chair listening to the conversation of the African American ladies around me. I really don’t know what I was expecting, but these women did the same things in their lives that I did and they talked about the same things I do. It’s amazing how because someone else may look different than you do you think that they act differently too.
I don’t think I will ever be able to not think about what I saw on this day. No, as a matter of fact, I believe I will think about it often and I’m glad, because that means I will have to do something about it to be able to live with the images.
The plunges that we were sent on helped me face my fears, biases and most of all the truth. It is amazing what first hand experience can do to a person. The Plunges that I experienced have changed the way I think and look at thing forever.
As these quotes indicate, cultural plunges are often the first experiences that many European American students have had of not being in the majority.
Given the myriad challenges that confront teacher education in terms of preparing future teachers for the increasingly diverse students they will serve, the cultural plunge provides one means of helping to sensitize students teachers to social and cultural realities, to their own values and biases, and to the student of today’s and tomorrow’s classrooms.
In the face of these results, it is important to remember that there are limits to any teaching method, and the cultural plunge is no exception.
Prepared by William A. Foley

“The Cultural Plunge: Cultural Immersion as a Means of Self-Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity Among Students Teachers”

By Jesus Nieto

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