

“Capitalizing on student diversity to promote deeper learning and greater appreciation of individual differences: Research-based teaching strategies for college faculty”

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Neil’s Note: Of all the single articles that have helped me understand the choices available and the related research that informs the decisions that I make regarding the internationalization of instruction, I think that this is the best bang for the buck. Cuseo is particularly clear about to the potential of carefully conceived collaborative groups to enable internationalization in our classes.

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DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY

This learning process can be defined as a form of interpersonal interaction between human beings who are different with respect to life experiences or personal perspectives that enrich the learning process. Diversity in higher education embraces such educationally significant differences among students as (1) gender, (2) racial, ethnic, or cultural background (e.g., under-represented minority students and majority students), (3) socioeconomic status (e.g., parents' level of education, family income), (4) chronological age (e.g., traditional and returning students), (5) residential status (e.g., commuters and campus residents), (6) national citizenship (i.e., domestic and international students), (7) learning style, (8) personality profile, (9) religious preference, and (10) sexual orientation.

Both the depth and breadth of student learning are enhanced by exposure to others from diverse experiential backgrounds who bring multiple perspectives and varied predilections or approaches to the learning process.

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORTING THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY

Discussions of multicultural education at the postsecondary level have almost exclusively focused on course and curricular content, such as whether the general-education curriculum should be "politically correct," and include third-world, racial/ethnic, and women's studies, or whether it should remain focused on the "canon" of Western tradition. In contrast, comparatively little attention has been paid to classroom pedagogy and the learning process as they relate to multicultural and general education (Gaff, 1989). Reflecting on his survey of over 300 colleges and universities which have attempted to strengthen their general education programs, Jerry Gaff reached the following conclusion: "Multicultural general education courses cry out for more personal, experiential, interactive, and collaborative kinds of instruction. Pedagogical 'business as usual' in any general education program . . . will not allow students to learn what even the most fervently argued courses have to teach" (1992, p. 35).

The demographic diversity among college students today is richer than at any other time in the history of American higher education (Hodgkinson, 1992; Levine & Associates, 1989). College instructors are now presented with a golden opportunity to draw from this rich social resource in ways that promote appreciation of multiple perspectives. As the German philosopher, Nietzsche, posited over 100 years ago: "The more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our concept of this thing, our objectivity, be" (cited in Hill, 1991, p. 41). Nietzsche's philosophical position is supported by contemporary research. In a major review of the higher education literature on critical thinking, Joanne Kurfiss concluded that, in educational programs which effectively increase students' critical thinking skills, "divergent views are aggressively sought" (1988, p. 2).

Exposing students to others with diverse backgrounds and experiences also serves to

heighten students' self-awareness by providing them with reference points or comparative perspectives which sharpen assessment of their own attitudes, values, and behaviors. The development of self-awareness or self-insight has been a time-honored goal of liberal education. As Pat Cross notes: "'Know thyself' is a 'constant' in general education that appears in every age" (1982, p. 16).

Preparation of students for their role as responsible citizens is another long-held and oft-cited goal of general education (Albert, 1997). In *Renewing Civic Capacity: Preparing College Students for Service and Citizenship*, Suzanne Morse attempts to translate this general-education goal into specific civic competencies, among which she identifies one competency that has strong implications for instructional strategies that capitalize on diversity: "The capacity to imagine situations or problems from all perspectives and to appreciate all aspects of diversity" (1989, p. 96). Furthermore, she argues: "The classroom can provide more than just theory impacted by the lecture method. It is in fact a 'public place' where community can be practiced" (p. 88).

Gary Miller makes a similar point in his book, *The Meaning of General Education*:

General education is intimately concerned with democratic processes and with the needs of a democratic society and always has been . . . [It] is designed to enable individuals to perform the basic democratic function within their communities. An education for and by democracy is, by definition, student-centered (1988, pp. 188, 189).

The multicultural and general-education implications of diversity for our nation's future political leadership has been underscored by Supreme Court Justice, William J. Brennan "The classroom is peculiarly the 'marketplace of ideas.' The nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth out of a multitude of tongues, rather than through any kind of authoritative selection" (cited in Weimer, 1991, p. 6).

The opportunity to gain access to the perspectives of peers and to learn from other students, rather than the instructor only, may be especially important for promoting the cognitive development of college freshmen. Longitudinal research conducted by Perry (1970) on college students' developmental stages indicates that recent high school graduates enter college at an initial stage of cognitive development that is characterized by two general dispositions: (a) Seeing the world in polar terms (right or wrong), with right answers as absolute and known by an authority (e.g., the teacher--whose job is to teach students these absolute truths), and (b) Seeing multiple viewpoints and diversity of opinion (e.g., differing theoretical or epistemological positions) as bothersome and reflecting unnecessary confusion generated by inept or unqualified authorities.

The need to incorporate diversity into the classroom teaching and learning process as a vehicle for promoting harmonious race relations is highlighted by the fact that higher education efforts in this area have focused almost exclusively on access, i.e., effective recruitment of under- represented students to increase campus diversity. A tacit objective

and assumption of this strategy is that the increased presence of minority students on campus should result in more contact between minority- and majority-group members, thereby reducing racial prejudice and promoting interracial harmony.

However, judging from the sizable and reportedly increased number of "racial incidents" on American college campuses (Thomas, 1991), it appears that simply increasing minority students' access to college and increasing their exposure to majority students is not a sufficient condition for promoting interracial harmony. This should not come as a surprise when viewed in light of school-integration research at the precollege level which strongly indicates that mere exposure to, or incidental contact with, minority students does not improve interracial relations (Stephan, 1978), nor does it even promote interracial interaction--minority and majority students still manage to segregate themselves within the school setting (Gerard & Miller, 1975; Rogers, et al., 1984). In fact, one comprehensive review of all school-desegregation research, covering a span of 30 years, revealed that racial prejudice in some desegregated schools actually increased rather than decreased (Stephan, 1986).

Such findings suggest that something more than mere exposure to minority-group members must occur in order to enhance interracial and multicultural appreciation. As Hill (1991) trenchantly expresses it: "Meaningful multi-culturalism transforms the curriculum. While the presence of persons of other cultures and subcultures is a virtual prerequisite to that transformation, their 'mere presence' is primarily a political achievement, not an intellectual or educational achievement. Real educational progress will be made when multi-culturalism becomes interculturalism" (p. 45).

This "inter-culturalism" can be realized in college classrooms by the use of student-centered pedagogical practices which enable diverse students to interact with each other, and collaborate with each other, on learning tasks that emphasize unity of effort while capitalizing on their diversity of backgrounds.

Neil's Note: Analogous is international experience, where traveling alongside people of another nation lacks the dimensions of cultural learning and understanding that results from WORKING alongside people whose history, language, worldview varies from one's own. Similar is class experience; being in the midst of another culture can generate superficial connection.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING DIVERSITY

The strategies recommended in this section are designed to promote the success of students who come to college with diverse personal characteristics and background experiences, such as:

- (a) socioeconomic status
- (b) race/ethnicity
- (c) national citizenship
- (d) culture (multicultural and cross-cultural differences)
- (e) gender
- (f) chronological age
- (g) learning style

- (h) academic preparedness
- (i) family history of college experience
- (j) residential status (commuting or living on campus)
- (k) risk for attrition.

The position taken here is that instructor awareness of these differences, and instructional decisions made intentionally with these differences in mind, serve to promote the success of students who comprise these diverse subgroups and, moreover, contribute to the success of all students by exposing them to multiple perspectives. Exposure to such diversity of perspectives benefits all students by (a) expanding the breadth or comprehensiveness of the learning experience and (b) reducing egocentrism, ethnocentrism, and parochialism. The strategies recommended in this section are offered with cognizance of the fact that the growing student diversity in college classrooms poses an instructional challenge; however it should not be viewed as a liability, but as an unprecedented instructional opportunity which can be capitalized on and converted into an educational asset. The following recommended practices for promoting diversity may be used within the context of a particular course unit devoted exclusively to the topic of student diversity, or they may be diffused throughout the course and used in different topical areas.

*** Allow students an opportunity to share their personal histories.**

Having students share their individual histories and their personal struggles, in particular, can serve to reassure first-generation, under-prepared and other at-risk students that they are not alone in their struggle to succeed, and conveys the message to them that college is not just a place for those who with a long history of academic and personal success. Phyllis Barnes-McConnell eloquently expresses the advantage of this personal history-sharing practice for minority students:

Many students who do not identify with the dominant culture in the class are likely to need the reassurance that these kinds of anecdotes provide. The university world looks so strange and omnipotent to them that they welcome this glimpse of a fellow human being. Even when their instructors provide them with highly successful female, minority, and other role models, they assimilate the social stereotype that these instructors are "special" or unusual" but that they themselves are ordinary and could never be that successful (1978, pp. 70-71)

In a college-orientation course conducted at California State University-Fullerton, freshmen from diverse populations write personal stories about their educational journeys, focusing on such topics as turning points, key decisions that continue to affect them, and sources of inspiration in their lives. Students then share their written histories with the class or in small groups. Those course instructors who have used this approach report that it has the following advantage:

Using personal stories from a variety of students who have struggled and found their own way can be a source of inspiration to new students who so often claim to be lost on an impersonal campus. If students see that others like them have been able to overcome major obstacles and have been successful at turning these blocks into stepping stones, their motivational level increases and provides a direction for them to pursue (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 1997, p. 1).

*** Incorporate learning experiences into the course which promote students' multicultural and cross-cultural awareness.**

The following strategies are suggested for raising student awareness of diversity within the United States (multicultural or domestic diversity), and their awareness of diversity across the world (cross-cultural or international diversity).

- Give students required or extra-credit assignments which involve them in co-curricular experiences that are devoted to promoting diversity awareness. These assignments could be constructed to coincide with already-scheduled national weeks or months which are designated for appreciation of diverse groups, such as Black History Month, Women's History Week, Latin Heritage Month, and Asian American Month.

- Construct assignments in which students interview other students on campus who are from diverse backgrounds (e.g., international students or students from under-represented ethnic/racial groups). This practice can ensure contact among students who may otherwise never come in contact with each other.

- Using Internet discussion groups or e-mail, have students "visit" foreign countries and "talk" to natives of those countries (Batson & Bass, 1996).

- Ask students if they have ever been the personal target of prejudice or discrimination, and have them share these experiences with other members of the class.

- Use instructional strategies that promote cognitive dissonance or disequilibrium as a vehicle for increasing multicultural awareness and appreciation. Two good illustrations of this practice are cited by Erickson and Strommer (1991). One history professor asks students to examine primary materials on slave life and to compare them with the text's treatment of the subject. The discrepancy between these two sources of information serves to trigger cognitive dissonance in students and alerts them to the fact that minority experiences may be misrepresented or given insufficient attention in secondary sources written by non-minority authors.

Similarly, a sociology instructor attempts to induce cognitive dissonance and promote diversity awareness by asking students on the first day of class to break into small groups and list the 10 most important events and 10 most important people in history. Almost always, the events and people named by students are disproportionately American, occasionally European, but almost never African, Hispanic, or Asian. Erickson and

Strommer report that, "The instructor uses these lists, not to scold students for what they do not know, but rather as an entree to reflections on what Americans do know, how they came to know it [and] what the limits of their world views might be" (1991, p. 91).

Both of the foregoing activities illustrate how diversity-awareness can be promoted via cognitive dissonance and they may be readily adopted or adapted for use in almost any course.

Research suggests that instructional practices which create cognitive dissonance can also promote critical thinking by inducing cognitive disequilibrium in students and prodding them to attend to different perspectives or multiple viewpoints (Brookfield, 1987; Kurfiss, 1988). The following practices are recommended as strategies for inducing this state of cognitive disequilibrium and promoting both critical thinking and appreciation of diversity.

- Select readings which present alternative viewpoints to those presented in the textbook. For example, have students compare certain information presented in the textbook with a primary source which reflects a different theoretical position or an alternative practical approach to a particular student-success issue. This strategy should help combat the "dualistic" thinking of first-year students which often leads them to believe that there are only right and wrong answers to problems or issues, and renders them intolerant of ambiguity generated by equally viable alternatives (Perry, 1970).

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- Deliberately invite guest speakers to visit class who espouse differing perspectives or strategies with respect to course topics and issues.

- When deciding on the sequence of course topics or concepts, consider arranging their order in a way that juxtaposes and highlights incompatible viewpoints or perspectives. Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, is a strong advocate of this strategy. In his words:

It's hard to stimulate critical thinking monologically. . . . I work very hard at trying to represent multiple perspectives. I try to build my course materials so that as soon as an idea has been offered persuasively, another idea that challenges it comes next . . . it's a dialectical view of what it means to teach something to somebody else, which is to force them to confront contradictions and counterpoints (quoted in Miller, 1997, p. 5).

- Incorporate comparison-and-contrast questions into lectures, tests, and assignments.

- During class discussions, raise questions that call for multiple student perspectives. (For example, "Who doesn't agree with what's being said?" "Would someone else like to express an opposing viewpoint?")

- Assign a minute paper or reaction paper at the end of class which asks students if there was any point made or position taken during the day's session which they strongly question or challenge, and then use their responses as springboards for discussion in the next class session.
- Use student-centered instructional methods which take you "off stage," exposing students to the perspectives of other students and reducing their perception of you as the absolute authority. For example, have students who hold diverse viewpoints on a certain issue join together to form (a) small discussion groups, (b) student debate teams, or (c) panel discussions.
- Play the role of "devil's advocate," using the Socratic method to prod students to see the pros and cons of their position on an issue. For example, persuade students to buy into a certain position, then proceed to expose its flaws.
- Have students engage in "reverse thinking" by requiring them to switch their original position on an issue being discussed in class. This can serve to combat "either-or"/"black-and-white" thinking and help students adopt a more balanced position on controversial issues.
- Have students research and prepare to defend both sides of an issue, then randomly assign them to argue for one of the positions in class or on an exam. For instance, two students might be given the assignment of researching both sides of a college-life issue, such as whether the legal age for use of alcohol should be lowered or remain the same. Before the debate begins, a flip of the coin could determine which side of the issue each student will take. As Bergquist and Phillips point out, this type of activity encourages students to "appreciate the complexity of intellectual issues and the inherent danger of simplistic thinking" (1981, p. 116).
- Have students role play a personage with whom they disagree strongly.

*** In addition to highlighting diversity, identify patterns of unity that transcend group differences.**

Clyde Kluckhohn, an early American anthropologist who spent a lifetime studying human diversity across different cultures, concluded from his extensive research that, "Every human is, at the same time, like all other humans, like some humans, and like no other human" (cited in Wong, 1991). His observation suggests a paradox in the human experience, namely: We are all the same in different ways.

It may be important to point out to students the biological reality that human beings share approximately 95% of their genes in common, and that less than 5% of our genes account for the physical differences that exist among us (Molnar, 1991). Moreover, it is a behavioral reality that the range of individual differences in human behavior within groups

is typically greater than the average differences between groups (Caplan & Caplan, 1994).

When focusing on human differences, these commonalities should not be overlooked, otherwise, our repeated attempts to promote student diversity may inadvertently promote student divisiveness. One way to minimize this risk, and promote unity along with diversity, is to "universalize" the human experience by raising students' consciousness of common themes that bind all groups of people--in addition to highlighting the variations on those themes.

The following practices are recommended for realizing these dual objectives.

- Create heterogeneous discussion groups comprised of students with different demographic characteristics, and at the conclusion of these discussions, provide students with some "pause time" to reflect on the process of interacting with others from varied backgrounds. Students could be equipped with questions designed specifically to promote reflection on both the diversity and unity of experiences that emerged during the discussion, such as: (a) What major differences did you detect among group members during your discussion? (b) What major similarities in viewpoints or background experiences did all group members share? (c) Did the discussion cause you to reconsider, or change any ideas you previously held?

- Periodically place students in homogeneous groups on the basis of shared demographic characteristics (e.g., same-gender groups or same-race/ethnicity groups), and have them share their personal views or experiences with respect to course issues. Then form a panel comprised of representatives from each group who report their group's ideas. You can serve as moderator and identify the key differences and recurrent themes that emerge across different groups, or students who are not on the panel can be assigned this task.

- Try to form groups of students who are different with respect to one demographic characteristic but similar with respect to another (e.g., similar gender but different with respect to race/ ethnicity, or similar in age but different gender). This practice can serve to increase student awareness that humans who are members of different groups can, at the same time, be members of the same group--and share similar experiences, needs, or concerns.

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- After students have completed self-assessment instruments (e.g., learning style inventories or personality profiles), have them line up or move to a corner of the room according to their individual scores or overall profile. This practice can visibly demonstrate to students how members of different student populations can be quite similar with respect to their learning styles or personality profiles, i.e., students can see how individual similarities can often overshadow group differences.

*** Convey high expectations to students from all subgroups.**

There is evidence that female students and students from minority racial or ethnic groups tend to receive different treatment in college classrooms than do males and non-minority students. In particular, females and students from under-represented racial/ethnic groups have been found to (a) receive less eye contact from college instructors, (b) be called on less frequently in class, (c) be given less time to respond to instructor-posed questions, and (d) have less out-of-class contact with faculty (Hall & Sandler, 1982, 1984; Sedlacek, 1987; Wright, 1987). In many cases, this differential treatment is subtle, unconscious, and often does not reflect deliberate prejudice or discrimination (Green, 1989). Nevertheless, such messages do communicate to those students who receive them that less is expected of them, or that they are not as capable as other students (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Wilson, 1981).

The following recommendations are offered as instructional strategies for reducing the likelihood that such messages are unwittingly conveyed to female and minority students in particular, and for increasing the probability that high expectations are signalled to students in general.

- Observe a videotape of your classroom teaching behavior, or have a colleague visit your class, to assess if you are acting differently toward students of different gender, race or ethnicity.

- Make a conscious attempt call on, or draw in students from diverse groups by using effective questioning techniques that reliably elicit student involvement. In addition to consciously calling on them in class, other strategies for "drawing in" and involving female and minority students include: (a) assigning them the role of reporter in small-group discussions, i.e., the one who report backs the group's ideas to the class, and (b) having them engage in paired discussions with another classmate with the stipulation that each partner must take turns assuming the role of both listener and speaker, and (c) scheduling instructor-student conferences with them outside the classroom.

- Learn the names of under-represented students as quickly as possible. This will enable you to establish early, personal rapport with them which can later serve as a social/emotional foundation or springboard for enlisting their involvement. As Forsyth and McMillan point out, "High expectations are communicated as instructors learn students' names and call on them by name" (1991, p. 58).

Research indicates that students from under-represented groups feel less comfortable initiating interaction with instructors (Border & Chism, 1992; Smith, 1989), and that women are more likely than men to withhold their views during class discussions because of greater concern that expressing differing opinions may jeopardize or undermine their "connectedness" with others (Belenky et al., 1986). Erickson and Strommer point out the instructional implications of this latter finding for first-year female students: "The tendency to keep their thoughts to themselves may prevent some freshmen women from profiting from classroom activities unless they are specifically drawn in" (1991, p. 51).

Knowing students' names, and calling on them by name, may be one way to draw them

in and promote the involvement of women in the classroom.

- In your syllabus or course outline, include a statement which explicitly indicates that you value input from all students, and that you especially encourage contributions from students of different gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds because it diversifies and enriches the learning experience for everyone. You might also state, in print, that students should feel free to approach you if they perceive you engaging in any behavior that may be discouraging their own involvement in the course or the involvement of any of their classmates.

A printed statement in the course syllabus, coupled with a reinforcing verbal statement on the first day of class, should ensure that all students receive the message clearly and receive it early-- so that it may work proactively to "short-circuit" reticence or passivity among certain student populations.

*** Diversify your instructional methods to accommodate student diversity in learning styles.**

- Diversify the sensory/perceptual modalities through which you deliver and present information (e.g., orally, in print, diagrammatic and pictorial representations, or "hands on" experiences).

- Diversify the instructional formats or procedures you use in class:

(a) Use formats that are student-centered (e.g., class discussions, small group work) and teacher-centered (e.g., lectures, demonstrations).

(b) Use formats that are unstructured (e.g., trial-and-error discovery learning) and structured (e.g., step-by-step instructions).

(c) Use procedures that involve both independent learning (e.g., independently completed projects; individual presentations) and interdependent learning (e.g., collaborative learning in pairs or small groups).

*** Diversify the examples you use to illustrate course concepts in order to provide multiple contexts that are relevant to students from diverse backgrounds.**

The significance of this recommendation is well articulated by a prominent faculty development scholar, the late Kenneth Eble:

The diversity of students in undergraduate courses argues for the teacher who can provide most in the way of relevant contexts. [With] the increasing pluralism and decreasing professionalism of colleges and universities in the next decades, the master teacher is likely to be the one who can provide contexts for many kinds of

students (1976, p. 146).

Specific strategies for providing multiple examples and varied contexts that are relevant to their varied backgrounds include the following:

- Have students complete personal information cards during the first week of class and use this information to select examples or illustrations that are relevant to their personal interests and life experiences.
- Use ideas, comments, and questions that students raise in class, or which they elect to write about in papers and journals, to help guide your selection of course examples and illustrations.
- Ask students to provide their own examples of course concepts, based on experiences drawn from their personal lives.
- Have students apply course concepts by placing them in a situation or context that is relevant to their lives (e.g., "How would you apply these stress-management strategies to a stressful situation that you are currently experiencing in your own life?").

*** Accommodate students' diverse backgrounds and learning styles by allowing them personal choice and decision-making opportunities concerning what they will learn and how they will learn it.**

Such choices and decisions will enable individual students to pursue course concepts and engage in learning processes that most closely match their personal interests and aptitudes. Experimental and applied research has consistently affirmed the psychological and educational value of allowing individuals some degree of personal choice or individual control over issues that affect them. For instance, freedom of choice, learner control, and decision-making opportunities have been found to increase students' intrinsic motivation for a learning task (Zuckerman, et al., 1978) because they enhance an individual's sense of self-determination or "agency" (Thomas, 1980).

It has also been found that increasing students' decision-making opportunity with respect to course content and learning tasks (a) promotes positive student attitudes toward the subject matter, (b) fosters more positive interactions among students, and (c) results in students working more consistently without instructor supervision (Grasha, 1972; Richter and Tjosvold 1980).

Lastly, research findings indicate that, when individuals are allowed to exert some control over a task, they tend to experience less anxiety or stress while performing that task (Thompson, 1981).

The following instructional strategies are designed to accommodate student diversity by increasing student options and decision-making opportunities in your course.

1. Solicit student preferences for course content and course goals via course-topic menus or learning-needs assessments. This practice should be especially appreciated by adult (re-entry) learners. As Malcom

Knowles, a founding father of adult learning theory, points out: "If one thing stands out about adult learning, it is that a self-diagnosed need for learning produces a much greater motivation to learn than an externally diagnosed need" (1980, p. 284). This recommendation has been implemented in a course for adult learners at Metropolitan State University (Minnesota). The instructor of this course uses a "course goal outline" procedure in which students review the course objectives and intended outcomes as stated in the syllabus. Students rank-order the stated course goals according to their own priorities and they are also given the option of writing their own goals, in addition to those already cited in the syllabus (Richardson, 1994).

2. Allow students the option of selecting their own topics for out-of-class assignments, or provide them with a menu of acceptable topics from which they make the final choice.

This practice serves to diversify your course content and accommodate the varied background experiences and interests of students in class. Selecting their own topics also allows students some choice which should increase the personal relevance of the assignment and their motivation to complete it.

3. Provide optional reading assignments to accommodate diversity in student interests and background preparation. One instructor, identified as "outstanding" by both students and colleagues at his college, uses this strategy by giving students two sets of optional reading references for each course topic for optional reading. The first list recommends readings which would be helpful to students whose background skills may be weak, while the second list includes readings of interest to students who wish to pursue the topic in greater depth (Davis, Wood, & Wilson, 1983).

4. Have students anonymously submit college-adjustment issues of their choosing for open- forum discussion in class.

5. Have students design their own questions to be answered by guest speakers. Inviting guest speakers to class is a useful teaching strategy in its own right. The only added feature recommended here is that student questions be used as specific agenda items for the guest speaker's presentation, thus ensuring that students' diverse interests and concerns are addressed.

*** Diversify your methods of assessing and evaluating student learning.**

You can accommodate student diversity not only by varying what you do with your teaching, but also by varying what you ask students to do to demonstrate learning. In addition to

the traditional paper-and-pencil tests and written assignments, students can demonstrate their learning in a variety of other of performance formats, such as: (a) individually-delivered oral reports, (b) panel presentations, (c) group projects, (d) visual presentations (e.g., concept maps, slide presentations, power-point presentations, collages, exhibits), or (d) dramatic vignettes-- presented live or on videotape.

It may also be possible to allow students to make some determination of the relative weights assigned to the measures used to assesses their course performance (e.g., the relative weights assigned to written assignments, group projects, oral presentations, short quizzes, and major exams).

One English professor requires every student in class to write two essays on assigned topics. His third assignment, however, allows five or six options from which students choose the one that most interests them or the one on which they feel they will perform the best. Examples of the options he offers include a creative writing piece, a dramatic presentation to be performed in front of class (alone or as part of a team project), an original videotape to be shown to the class (developed individually or in teams), or a third written essay. Also, students can create and submit additional options for instructor approval (Wilson, 1987).

One potential benefit of allowing students to choose how they demonstrate their learning is that the variety of options exercised may be a powerful way to promote student awareness of the diversity of human learning styles.

*** Intentionally form small-discussion groups of students from diverse backgrounds.**

Small peer-learning groups may be effective for promoting student progress to a more advanced stage of cognitive development that is characterized by appreciation of contextual relativism and tolerance for multiplicity. Peer-learning groups may promote this cognitive advancement because: (a) the instructor is removed from center stage, thereby reducing the likelihood that the teacher is perceived as the ultimate or absolute authority; and (b) students are exposed to the perspectives of other students, thus increasing their appreciation of multiple viewpoints and different approaches to learning.

In particular, heterogeneous discussion groups, formed on the basis of students' differing demographic characteristics, or on the basis of differing learning styles, could effectively implement two common recommendations in the literature on teaching for critical thinking: (a) Have students "collaborate to `stretch' their understanding by encountering divergent views (Kurfiss, 1988, p. 2), and (b) Intentionally create an "atmosphere of disequilibrium so that students can change, rework, or reconstruct their thinking processes (Meyers, 1986, p. 14).

The value of heterogeneous discussion groups for promoting higher-level thinking is also supported by the epistemological theory of social constructivism which has fueled national interest in collaborative student writing (Bruffee, 1981, 1993). According to this theory, human thinking is shaped by social interaction and conversation; an individual's thought process is largely an internalization of these external dialogues (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, conversing and thinking are held to be causally related, with thought being an

artifact or product of verbal interaction. Consequently, to think well is to converse well and conversation characterized by a diversity of perspectives leads to thinking that is richer, deeper, more comprehensive and more complex. Conversely, to restrict the diversity of perspectives an individual experiences is to restrict the complexity and quality of thought—by restricting the range of conceptual angles, lenses, or frameworks from which the individual can think.

Heterogeneously-formed discussion groups of students is one way to convert social constructivist theory into pedagogical practice. For instance, individual students could be exposed to diverse perspectives when placed in **heterogeneous groups** of students who differ in terms of such demographic characteristics as (a) **race/ethnicity** (e.g., Anglo-American and under-represented students), (b) **national citizenship** (e.g., domestic and international students), and (c) **age** (e.g., traditionally-aged and adult re-entry students). Heterogeneous groups could also be formed with respect to students' learning styles. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (**MBTI**) may be used to identify students with four different learning styles: concrete-active, concrete-reflective, abstract-active, and abstract-reflective (Schroeder, 1993). Students with different styles could then be placed in heterogeneous groups to engage in discussion.

Using **gender** as a criterion for heterogeneous group formation may also be an effective vehicle for exposing students to different learning styles because males and females have been found to bring very different epistemological approaches to the learning task. Some empirical evidence suggests that males are more likely to be "separate knowers," personally distancing themselves from a concept or issue so they can analyze it, whereas females are more likely to be "connected knowers" who attempt to relate to concepts or relate concepts to themselves. For instance, when confronting a poem, separate knowers may ask, 'What techniques can I use to analyze it?' In contrast, connected knowers ask, 'What is the poet trying to say to me.'" (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 101). It has also been found that the more interpersonal style of females renders them more likely to collect ideas of others in a group-learning situation, whereas the more impersonal style of males renders them more likely to debate the ideas of others (Magolda, 1992).

Research conducted by Fiechtner and Davis (1992) suggests that college students may be quite receptive to learning in heterogeneous groups because their survey findings reveal that they prefer small-discussion groups that are diverse in composition. However, one caveat should be heeded when forming small discussion groups of diverse composition: Do not spread out individual students from under-represented populations across groups in a way that isolates them from one another. For instance, if there are four African-American students in your class, it may be tempting to distribute them so that each one of them is a member of a different group in order to maximize the racial diversity of the groups. However, it may be more advisable to place them in only two groups, one pair per group, because they may feel more at ease having another African American in their group. In subsequent group discussions, new groups can be formed in such a fashion that those majority students who were not initially exposed to the minority students'

perspective may now be grouped with one pair of African-American students.

*** Intentionally form writing groups of students from diverse backgrounds.**

Feedback designed to improve student writing is more effective if it comes from multiple and diverse sources. As Gebhardt notes in an article on teamwork and feedback for collaborative writing: "Since any group of four or five participants will probably have quite a range of knowledge, attitudes, and assumptions on a given subject, such a discussion can provide a writer with a cross-section of possible audience diversity" (1980, p. 74). Moreover, Moffett (1968) argues that, "multiple responses to a piece of writing make feedback more impersonal and easier to heed. Group reactions establish a consensus about some objective aspects of the writing" (p. 194).

Research in the area of peer tutoring also indicates that interaction between students with different levels of academic ability or skill development often results in cognitive and emotional benefits for both the more-advanced and less-advanced students. These positive outcomes have been reported for students at the pre-college level (Slavin et al., 1985), at the college level (Whitman, 1988), and for the development of college students' writing skills in particular (Bruffee, 1993). These results suggest that the formation of diverse writing groups, comprised of students from different cultural backgrounds and differing levels of skill development, should be given serious consideration by instructors who are interested in promoting both the quality of students' writing and their appreciation of diversity.

*** Intentionally form collaborative-learning groups of students from diverse backgrounds.**

Though there is not an extensive body of definitive evidence indicating that specific learning styles are favored by specific ethnic or gender groups, there is some higher education research which suggests that, relative to learning individually via the traditional instructional method, the following student populations display a greater preference for collaboration and may demonstrate greater gains in retention or academic achievement via collaborative learning:

- (a) members of under-represented racial and ethnic groups (Treisman, 1985; Nieves-Squires, 1991),
- (b) adult (re-entry) students (Eison & Moore, 1980),
- (c) commuter students (Chickering 1974),
- (d) female students (Belenky, et al., 1986), and
- (e) international students (Cuseo, 1992).

Collaborative learning advances group work to a higher level that is characterized by positive interdependence and collective responsibility among group members--who work together as a team—in pursuit of a common goal.

By creating positive interdependence among culturally-diverse learning teams, collaborative learning has the potential to capitalize on the contemporary wave of student diversity by harnessing the plethora of perspectives provided by students from diverse backgrounds.

The relevance of collaborative learning for promoting multicultural appreciation and reducing racial prejudice, in particular, is suggested by experimental research in social psychology, which indicates that continued exposure to an initially-disliked person under conditions of competition and conflict will intensify the dislike of that person (Burgess & Sales, 1977; Swap, 1977). In contrast, there is empirical evidence that intergroup contact in the context of collaborative learning activities tends to decrease racial prejudice and increase interracial friendships among (a) elementary and secondary school students (Aronson, 1978; Slavin, 1980), (b) college students (Worchel, 1979), and (c) workers in industrial organizations (Blake & Mouton, 1979).

In particular, the most dramatic gains in promoting positive race relations have been achieved when each of the following conditions stipulated by the "contact hypothesis" (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969) is met: (a) Participants have equal status (e.g., having each student assigned an equally important role in the completion of a collaborative learning task). (b) There is cooperation that produces a successful outcome (e.g., assigning complementary roles to group members that culminate in a unified final product). (c) Social norms and authorities promote positive relationships and friendship formation (e.g., via team-building exercises and monitoring of the group process by a roving instructor). (d) The situation encourages participants to generalize changed attitudes to other people and situations (e.g., by occasional changes in the membership of collaborative learning groups, and by the assignment of a number of different collaborative learning tasks to be completed during the semester, thus enabling students to interact with a variety of peers from diverse backgrounds in different learning situations).

Key point: placing diverse groups members together in unstructured formats may have neutral or negative effects.

When these conditions of the contact hypothesis are met, the empirical evidence supporting its positive impact on race relations is extremely impressive. As the author of one comprehensive review of the research literature on race relations in schools concluded:

The concept of interracial work groups as a means for reducing prejudice and improving race relations has a great deal of empirical support. It is rare in social science to find such robust results across a wide range of techniques, empirical evaluation methodologies, grade levels, [and] regions of the country. The importance of contact under the conditions specified by the contact hypothesis is truly impressive (McConahay, 1981, pp. 50-51).

Well-constructed and well-conducted collaborative learning groups comprised of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds is one instructional strategy that has the potential for meeting all the conditions stipulated by this contact hypothesis and, in so doing, has the potential for reducing racial prejudice and improving the quality of race relations in higher education.

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