

Editor's Introduction

Interdisciplinary and Teaching Perspectives on Multiculturalism and Diversity

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Demographic changes in the United States, increased student interest, and creative research and scholarship have led many colleges and universities to introduce multiculturalism and diversity into curricular requirements and course content. The significance and complexity of such issues require that research, scholarship, and teaching be interdisciplinary. Teaching multiculturalism and diversity courses requires consideration of five factors: course content and readings, the students and what they believe and value, the strengths and weaknesses of the faculty, the intellectual tools that will enable students to grasp issues at a sophisticated level, and the classroom dynamics within which these factors are woven together in the creation of an effective course.

Cultural diversity in the United States increased more in the 1980s than in any other decade. In the lifetimes of many of today's students, non-Hispanic whites will become less than half the population of the United States. In the 1990s, people of color, women, and immigrants will constitute 85% of the entrants into the workforce. By the year 2020, one out of every three Americans will be a person of color; students of color will make up almost 50% of the student population. Frequent articles in the *Wall Street Journal* reveal that our nation's businesses have begun responding to these demographic changes with new programs for recruitment, training, and retention of a diverse workforce and with new products, services, and marketing strategies for an increasingly diverse population ("Diversity," 1996). Many students now understand that to be competitive, in terms of entry-level employment as well as advancement into positions of responsibility and leadership, they must acquire the understandings and the skills that are necessary for working productively and harmoniously with fellow workers and citizens who bring widely differing backgrounds and experiences to the workplace and to their communities.

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Similarly, colleges and universities nationwide have been responding to these demographic changes with programs for recruitment and retention of underrepresented students and faculty and through the introduction of issues of multiculturalism and diversity into curricular requirements and course content. These programmatic changes have been supported and driven by an explosion of creative research and scholarship, as well as the introduction of improved teaching techniques, initially in women's studies and ethnic studies but now widespread throughout the humanities and the social sciences. The term *multiculturalism* refers to the fact that our society is composed of numerous cultures, that this is a strength of our society, and that each of these cultures deserves to be fully valued; the term *diversity* refers to all of those dimensions of difference that provide the foundation for the construction of meaning in our lives. This special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* focuses primarily on race and ethnicity, although many of the articles are also relevant to issues of gender, social class, religious sectarianism, sexual orientation, and language.

This special issue examines *teaching* multiculturalism and diversity in higher education. The main question before us as educators is no longer, as it was in the 1980s, whether issues of multiculturalism and diversity should be taught on college and university campuses. These have now become prominent themes in our national public discussions and debates; our students will bring them into the classroom even if the faculty do not. For many in higher education, not to engage students in a critical examination of these issues would be an abdication of our responsibilities as college and university faculty. What more appropriate place could there be for a reflective analysis of issues of multiculturalism and diversity than in the classroom? So the main question is now how to teach these issues in a way that maximizes critical thinking and productive learning on the part of our students.

The approach adopted here moves beyond the controversies that have been highlighted in the media and concentrates on some of the issues that arise in real classrooms at the college and university level. To teach about multiculturalism and diversity continues to be challenging for many faculty, both intellectually and pedagogically. Thus a first goal for this special issue is to provide some foundational knowledge that is essential for teaching in an informed and effective manner. A second goal is to provide a discussion of classroom teaching problems that arise for faculty who are now seriously engaged in teaching about multiculturalism and diversity.

This special issue differs from many previous publications. First, during the 1980s, the leadership in the campus and public debates as well as the best examples of good practice in teaching about multiculturalism and diversity often came from faculty based in the humanities disciplines. Yet the content at the heart of many current ethnic, racial, and gender issues is largely within the province of the social sciences. What better venue than *American Behavioral Scientist* to explore some of the conceptual and pedagogical dimensions of multicultural and diversity education? Second, in previous publications, the general tone has sometimes been confrontational, forcing readers to become

entrenched in their positions either for or against multiculturalism and diversity; in contrast, here the aim is to encourage readers to move forward in their teaching about multiculturalism and diversity from the starting point of what is intellectually sound within their academic disciplines and what is pedagogically sound within the practice and profession of teaching.

MULTICULTURAL RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND TEACHING SHOULD BE INTERDISCIPLINARY

Multiculturalism and diversity are too significant and too complex to be the exclusive domain of any one academic discipline. For example, an intelligent discussion of affirmative action ought to be grounded in at least biology, economics, history, law, political science, psychology, and sociology. Thus, to move forward in our understanding of these issues as well as in teaching effectively and responsibly, we have to cast our nets more broadly. We must become more interdisciplinary in the resources we draw on, in the perspectives that we construct on the issues, and in the information and understandings that we share with our students. Yet to do this can be problematic, and indeed there are many parallels between the challenges and rewards of multiculturalism and diversity within the context of American society and those of cooperative, interdisciplinary endeavors in higher education. In American society we are continually reviewing and renewing our common vision of what it means to be citizens in a democracy. In higher education, we are continually reviewing and renewing our vision of what it means to be educated persons and to have a community of learners and teachers. Yet likely each of us constructs our understanding of that common vision from the perspective of our disciplinary subcultures, reflecting our previous training and socialization, our specialized methods and languages, our connections to our colleagues, and our investments in and commitments to what we have learned and accomplished.

To become more interdisciplinary can arouse concerns similar to those raised by multiculturalism and diversity for American society as a whole: on one hand, the potential loss of our disciplinary, subcultural identities through assimilation into more dominant disciplines and ways of thinking; on the other hand, the Balkanization of significant practical and intellectual issues and of the education of our students as we remain entrenched within our separatist, disciplinary enclaves. Narrow backgrounds and limited experiences within our disciplinary subcultures lead us to believe that our own field is on the cutting edge, our own discipline has insights and truths from which others could benefit, so that the effort of becoming more interdisciplinary ought to fall primarily on others and not on ourselves. Of course, if we all feel that way, then truly interdisciplinary research, scholarship, and education will not come about. The infrequency of mutual, interdisciplinary exchanges can be painfully obvious to our students, who struggle to construct an integrated and coherent understanding from the disconnected perspectives that they encounter as they move from course to course.

This special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* features authors from anthropology, biology, English, higher education administration, history, human services, modern languages, philosophy, psychology, sociology, teacher education, and women's studies. Each contributor has endeavored to communicate to readers in disciplines other than the author's own. This can be a difficult and challenging task: Assumptions taken for granted within one's own discipline need to be reflected on and spelled out for strangers from other disciplinary subcultures; arcane complexities as well as significant aspects within one's own discipline need to be passed over or simplified for presentation to novices, even if one's disciplinary peers might find the presentation simplistic. All the authors have done remarkably well in meeting this challenge, particularly as they found themselves torn between the multiple requests of reviewers that they expand and elaborate on their ideas and my insistence as editor that the number of manuscript pages could not be increased.

The short articles included here cannot be read as summative and definitive statements on the intellectual and pedagogical matters associated with teaching multiculturalism and diversity nor on their resolution. Instead, these articles are intended as merely one more turn in a conversation about multiculturalism and diversity that other speakers and listeners will, of necessity, take up in other contexts. Toward this end, each of the articles concludes with a short annotated list of recommended resources for additional information and discussion.

It is my hope that these articles will be read in a spirit of interdisciplinary respect and understanding that parallels the enlarging and connecting spirit that is embodied by the movement for multiculturalism and diversity. Multiculturalism is both about caring for the American community as a whole and about striving to understand and respect the diversity of experiences and perspectives that exists within that community. When one encounters a perspective different from one's own, the critical task is not to decide whether or not one agrees but to strive to understand that if one were in the situation of the other, then one might believe and feel similarly. The critical task is to recognize, to accept, and to value—and, let us hope, learn from—the richness and the integrity of the other's life experiences and perspective.

COURSE CONTENT, STUDENTS, TEACHERS, INTELLECTUAL TOOLS, AND CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

Most college and university faculty know that it is not possible to understand, much less to evaluate, the worth and the effectiveness of any teaching efforts through a consideration of the course content alone (Meacham, 1993; Meacham & Ludwig, in press). Responsible and effective teaching calls for a consideration of at least five interdependent factors:

1. The selection of course content and readings is central to the design of a course, but even this should follow from a statement of goals for student learning.

2. The goals for student learning must follow from who the students are, including their backgrounds, experiences, and identities, what they already know and what they hope to do with their education, and the prior perspectives they will bring to the course content and to the classroom.
3. The faculty will bring not only their own backgrounds, experiences, identities, prior beliefs, and values but also their unique vantage point as members of an older generation.
4. Appropriate intellectual tools—conceptual frameworks, methods of research and evaluation, and precision in the use of language—will enable the students to grasp the course content and issues at a sophisticated level.
5. Careful attention to the classroom dynamics makes it possible for the course content, the students' characteristics and needs, the teacher's strengths and weaknesses, and the intellectual tools to be woven together in the creation of an effective course.

Most of the articles in this special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* focus on one of these five factors yet have implications for several of the factors.

Course content. The selection of course content and readings depends on which of the dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender, language, race, religion, and sexual orientation are intended to be the focal point. It will also depend on the place of the course itself within the students' overall curriculum and on whether the faculty member prefers to give brief attention to many issues or cover a few issues in depth. Faculty members from different disciplines will likely prefer to select those multiculturalism and diversity topics, texts, and issues for examination that are particularly revealing and instructive given the intellectual tools that each discipline has to offer. Fortunately, in contrast to the situation only a few years ago, a great range of splendid texts (e.g., Rothenberg, 1995; Takaki, 1993) and resources (e.g., Banks & Banks, 1995; Friedman, Kolmar, Flint, & Rothenberg, 1996; Schmitz, 1992; Schoem, Frankel, Zuniga, & Lewis, 1993) now exists for teaching about multiculturalism and diversity.

An essential lesson for students in any multiculturalism and diversity course is that the classification of humans into races has no validity within the discipline of biology, as Jonathan Marks makes clear in the first article in this special issue. But does this mean that race should not be a central dimension of the curriculum on multiculturalism and diversity? The answer must be no, for if race is not a biological concept, it is certainly a cultural and a political concept. To ignore race would be to neglect a significant dimension of identity for both black and white Americans as well as to neglect the significance of race in shaping 350 years of American history. Students should understand how the concept of race was socially and legally constructed in the 17th century and how it has continued to play a major role in American economics, politics, and social life. In her article Paula Rothenberg discusses how to incorporate into multiculturalism and diversity courses key legal documents in American history that have served to define the status of people of color and of women. In addition, she provides helpful suggestions for encouraging students to understand themselves and others within the context of historical events and historically determined meanings

such as race. (Jonathan Marks, Paula Rothenberg, and I have declined to capitalize white in our articles. To do so might be taken as support for dichotomizing into distinct groups a dimension of difference that is in fact a continuous gradient, as Jonathan Marks makes clear in his article.) John A. Williams argues in his article that an effective education in issues of American multiculturalism and diversity ought to be grounded not merely in American history but also more broadly in an understanding of interethnic conflict around the world.

Students. Knowing about the backgrounds, experiences, and identities of the students in our classes as well as on the campus at large is essential in order to teach effectively about multiculturalism and diversity. Faculty members should expect the topics and readings in the course to be perceived, discussed, and understood differently as a function of the mix of students in the classroom. For example, the impact of an assigned reading by an African American writer can be far more forceful if African American students affirm that their experiences have been either similar or different; an account of a woman's experiences can be perceived differently by women and men in the course; and a description of being laid off from work can be understood differently by students of differing social class backgrounds. Reading materials and classroom activities that work well on another campus may not work on one's own campus if the makeup of the student populations differs. Similarly, teaching techniques that work for a colleague teaching in a women's studies course, or to a relatively homogeneous group of students in an ethnic studies course, may not transfer well to a classroom with students of more diverse backgrounds and viewpoints.

Our students, both students of color and white students, will also be at differing levels of ethnic or racial identity development. Jean S. Phinney illustrates how the particular level of development—unexamined ethnic identity, moratorium or exploration, and achieved ethnic identity—can influence how students respond to learning about others who are different from themselves. Patricia M. King and Bettina C. Shuford alert us to yet another dimension along which students will differ, namely, their different assumptions about knowledge and how it is gained. Their examples of how students reason about multiculturalism and diversity at different levels of reflective judgment—prereflective, quasi-reflective, and reflective—will help faculty members to better understand students' contributions in their courses. Their work can also help facilitate student reasoning at more advanced levels. Moreover, it has implications for the levels of course materials and readings selected. Craig E. Nelson draws our attention to the differences among our students in the extent of their preparation for college-type work, particularly disciplinary-specific standards for reading, writing, and evaluation and expectations regarding cooperative efforts and meeting deadlines.

Faculty. An important step in planning a multiculturalism or diversity course is to consider who one is as a teacher and, in light of this, what course content and materials might present lesser or greater challenges in teaching. Who the

faculty member is, for example, in terms of gender and ethnicity, is inseparable from how students will respond to, and understand, course materials that address issues of gender and ethnicity (Ludwig & Meacham, in press). Course materials and classroom activities that work well for a faculty member of another gender or ethnicity might not transfer well to one's own classroom, as one might expect in mathematics or French or economics. Because every faculty member necessarily belongs to several of the categories of difference typically addressed in multiculturalism and diversity courses, no teacher can legitimately claim to have a neutral or value-free perspective in teaching on issues of multiculturalism and diversity.

Although none of the articles in this special issue concentrate on the teacher's status and role in teaching about multiculturalism and diversity, several of the articles point to its importance. For example, Connie T. Wolfe and Steven J. Spencer note that teachers can make greater efforts to overcome their own stereotypes about students who come from different cultural backgrounds and take steps to minimize the impact of stereotypes on the academic performance of their students. Craig E. Nelson points to the need for teachers to be alert to social-class-based differences between themselves and their students in their expectations for appropriate academic behaviors and performance. Similarly, Elizabeth Higginbotham cautions us to reflect on our own status as faculty members and how our race, gender, social class background, and sexual identity can influence the interactions between ourselves and our students.

Intellectual Tools. Multicultural and diversity courses should provide students with intellectual tools—conceptual frameworks, methods of research and evaluation, vocabulary and definitions—that will enable them to grasp the course content and issues at a more sophisticated level than is commonly found in casual conversation and in the media. What are regarded as useful intellectual tools will vary considerably as a function of the level of the students and the particular course content. These intellectual tools should be of sufficient generality and power that they can be applied to many issues as the course progresses from topic to topic, and students should learn to use these tools in an increasingly sophisticated manner. For example, it should be possible for students to acquire an understanding of processes involved in racial discrimination and then extend and apply this understanding in analyzing case studies that portray gender discrimination. Student discussions are likely to be more informed and productive after they have acquired intellectual tools that can be useful in examining evidence and evaluating alternative perspectives. By the end of the course, the students' facility with these intellectual tools should permit them to construct integrative principles and unifying themes at a higher level.

Four authors provide examples in this special issue of intellectual tools that could be employed with profit across a variety of topics in a course. First, Connie T. Wolfe and Steven J. Spencer provide a review of sources of prejudice and effects of stereotypes on individuals, differentiating among theories of realistic group conflict, social identity, aversive racism, attributional ambiguity, and

stereotype threat. Each of these theories can be a conceptual tool for analyzing prejudice, stereotypes, and behaviors in various social contexts including the classroom. Second, Fred L. Pincus calls our attention to three different types of discrimination—individual and institutional (both intentional) and structural—and presents examples of each as well as suggestions for using these distinctions to structure classroom discussions. Third, John A. Williams criticizes the presentation and comparison of other cultures by means of a relativized “way of life” approach. He argues instead that focusing on conflict and context can be a more effective intellectual tool in fostering intergroup understanding among students. Jean S. Phinney provides yet a fourth intellectual tool in setting forth models of minority ethnic identity and white identity development. These models can guide students in thinking not only about their own identities but also about others’ ethnic identities as revealed in class discussions and portrayed in literature. Fifth, I have introduced a conceptual framework based on distinctions in how we define ourselves and our relationships to others and on contrasting perspectives in our intentions with respect to others. This framework is illustrated with examples drawn from issues of ethnic, religious, gender, and racial conflict as well as environmental issues (Meacham, 1994).

Classroom Dynamics. Faculty should be alert to the particular classroom dynamics within which the course content, the students’ characteristics and needs, the teacher’s own strengths and weaknesses, and the intellectual tools are woven together in the creation of an effective course of instruction. In many of the best multiculturalism and diversity courses, rather than merely transmitting information to the students, the teacher encourages students to construct their own, better understanding of the issues. The faculty member’s role is to make certain that the discussion stays on the issues, that it does not degenerate into mere expression of opinions without supporting evidence, and that no student or group of students is hurt in the discussion (Meacham, 1995). One reason for this is that the classroom itself should become a model for living with diversity, so that both the students and the teacher need to strive to listen with respect and to understand, even if they do not agree with, what others have to say on controversial issues. A second reason is that many issues of multiculturalism and diversity in our society are in flux or remain problematic; often there is no authoritative or single, correct answer. Teachers who attempt to set forth an authoritative or “correct” position on issues of diversity will likely be perceived by students as politicizing the course, as attempting to indoctrinate the students. A third, important reason is that actively constructed knowledge, as opposed to passively accepted information, is far more likely to be retained by students beyond the end of the course and thus to serve as a basis for the roles they will be assuming as workers and as informed citizens in our society. Indeed, Craig E. Nelson argues in his article that the evidence in support of active learning techniques is so strong that the burden of proof is now on faculty members offering straight lecture courses to show that these are at least as effective in producing learning among the students.

Three of the authors in this special issue have addressed the question of how faculty can structure the classroom dynamics so that as many of the students as possible, if not all of them, engage in stimulating and productive classroom interactions. Elizabeth Higginbotham points to the need for faculty to consider the dimensions of power and privilege as they select course materials that address issues of inequality in American society, as they reflect on interactions between themselves and students and among students in the classroom, and as they strive to establish a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to the exploration of multiculturalism and diversity. Indeed, not only is Higginbotham's article relevant to the first three factors of course content, students, and faculty but also the concepts of power and privilege can serve as yet another example of intellectual tools for the analysis of issues and case studies. Thus her article illustrates nicely how attention to classroom dynamics can serve as the structure within which the other four factors in effective and responsible teaching can be woven together. Connie S. Chan and Mary Jane Treacy extend this theme of how to involve all the students in the classroom and provide many positive suggestions for how faculty can avoid student resistance to the materials and can use resistance as an opportunity to make the course more relevant to the students' own experiences and lives. Caryn McTighe Musil concludes her article with a useful checklist of characteristics of class dynamics that are likely to be successful in facilitating the learning goals for students.

This special issue concludes with two contributions by persons who have adopted a national perspective on issues of multiculturalism and diversity in higher education. Caryn McTighe Musil reviews the history of efforts in higher education to respond to diversity in American society and then describes several different curricular models and goals for student learning that are among the outcomes of the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (1995a, 1995b) multi-year, multicampus "American Commitments" initiative. Donna M. Gollnick, whose concern is with the training of the next generation of teachers and administrators for our elementary and secondary schools, challenges arts and sciences faculty members to do a better job of preparing students to work in educational settings that are increasingly diverse. She calls for a greater integration of multicultural and diversity issues into the core, general education, or general studies arts and sciences curriculum and into the specific academic or disciplinary content curriculum. Furthermore, she argues that there should be an expanded effort by arts and sciences faculty to provide models of good practice in culturally responsive teaching and heightened attention to policies and practices within colleges and universities that show respect for diversity and equality.

CONCLUSION

Multiculturalism and diversity—particularly concerns of race, gender, and ethnicity—have become pervasive in American society as well as within our

research and scholarship. In response, faculty members in many disciplines have revised their curricula and their courses to include topics and readings that reflect the most recent research and scholarship on these contemporary societal issues. Their motivations vary, including visions for a more democratic and inclusive society; concerns for human dignity and social justice; broad interests in the welfare of younger generations and the future of our society; professional needs to remain current with, and to inform students about, advanced scholarship in the disciplines; and desires that their teaching deliver on the promises of college and university mission statements. There are substantial intellectual and personal rewards for teachers and students as well as intellectual and pedagogical challenges in transforming curricula and courses to address multiculturalism and diversity. It is hoped that the articles brought together in this special issue can serve to move forward our interdisciplinary conversation on teaching about multiculturalism and diversity in higher education.

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APPENDIX

For Further Information

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (1995a). *American pluralism and the college curriculum*. Curricular recommendations on multiculturalism and diversity for colleges and universities.

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (1995b). *The drama of diversity and democracy*. How can colleges and universities contribute to the effectiveness of dialogue, communities, and democracy within a diverse society?

- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C.A.M. (1995). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. Forty-seven chapters on history, knowledge construction, ethnic groups, immigration, education, language, academic achievement, intergroup education, higher education, and international perspectives.
- Friedman, E. G., Kolmar, W. K., Flint, C. B., & Rothenberg, P. (Eds.). (1996). *Creating an inclusive college curriculum*. Forty-seven chapters with suggestions for how to teach about ethnicity, class, gender, race, and sexuality, including readings to assign, discussion topics, activities for students, and course outlines in many disciplines.

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