

1

Introduction

Ann M. Johns and Maureen Kelley Sipp

All across the United States, college and university classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. Students are more varied ethnically and linguistically; they are often older than the traditional student; they may have disabilities or be in need of special assistance. As Venable (in this volume) notes, “only about one-sixth of undergraduate students meet the traditional characterization of being full-time students between ages 18 and 22 living on campus.” These changes in postsecondary demographics, occurring, in many cases, without comparable changes in the demographics of college and university faculty, have led to a variety of concerns on the part of campus administrations and to faculty discussions of diversity in the classroom. San Diego State University (SDSU), like many public (and private) institutions, is exploring pedagogical approaches that must, by necessity, vary considerably from those that were in place when many of its faculty were undergraduates, initiatives that are designed to enhance the experience and increase the retention of all currently enrolled students regardless of ethnicity, age, gender preference, or disability.

Funded by a grant from the campus Office of Diversity and Equity, SDSU’s Center for Teaching and Learning commissioned chapters on diversity and pedagogy from a faculty that is itself quite diverse, individuals whose own campus experiences have led them to make creative decisions about pedagogy. The result was this volume, in which research and theory—and their applications to culturally responsible pedagogies—are discussed.

Though all of the chapter authors are from the same campus, they focus on issues that are being discussed throughout North America. This volume can be described as follows:

2 • Diversity in College Classrooms

- **Inclusive:** “Diversity” is discussed in terms of ethnicity, culture, dialect and second language variation, sexual preference, age, and disability.
- **Written by faculty who are themselves diverse, about their own work in the classroom**
- **Varied in terms of approach:** Chapters focus on research (e.g., Hohm & Venable; Branch), explore assessment approaches across the curriculum (Jones; Zuniga; Venable), discuss diversity among faculty (Wang & Folger) and students (Fielden; Johns), address pedagogy in low-paradigm disciplines (e.g., education, social work) as well as in the high-paradigm disciplines of mathematics and sciences (Yerrick; Mukhopadhyay & Greer), and provide guidance in assigning out-of-classroom experiences, including service learning, experiential learning, and community action (Washington; Young; Weber).
- **Varied in terms of chapter purpose:** Some of the chapters are organized as research studies; some integrate research, theory, and pedagogy; and others combine narratives, pedagogical experiences, and advice to colleagues.

Thus, diversity is here broadly defined and variously constructed—as it should be, considering our current student and faculty populations.

Following the introduction (chap. 1) are two chapters in which “diversity” is described and assessed. In chapter 2, Hohm and Venable present their (replicable) survey of student responses to cultural diversity requirements on this large campus, a study that has been used as evidence for the importance of these classes to the students’ liberal education. In chapter 3, Branch explains at some length a framework for measuring the intensity and type of multicultural education practices; then he applies that framework to classrooms across the curriculum.

In chapter 4, Jones synthesizes two theoretical perspectives on culturally responsive teaching, applies one to her own classroom, and presents four general pedagogical goals for all teachers. In chapter 5, Zuniga advocates the use of portfolios in diverse classrooms, an approach to curriculum and assessment that has had positive effects in many classrooms. Venable (chap. 6) then takes up the issue of cooperative learning, an approach that emphasizes process and group dynamics. She walks the reader through a collaborative learning assignment, from objectives to assessment. Since diversity also refers to disability, Fielden (chap. 7) provides instructors with specific examples of law and accommodation that are important to our understanding and teaching of students with disabilities. In chapter 8, Johns turns to linguistic

diversity among students, discussing both who our students are and how we might approach students' prior knowledge, errors, plagiarism, and literacy. In chapter 9, Wang and Folger turn to faculty diversity and the ways in which diversity, expertise, student expectations, and technology can influence the classroom atmosphere.

The next two chapters focus on what some have termed as high-paradigm disciplines, mathematics and science, which do not attract a significant number of diverse students. In chapter 10, Yerrick takes a constructivist approach, explaining how science can be made accessible to diverse postsecondary students. Mukhopadhyay and Greer (chap. 11) address accessibility in terms of mathematics, and like Yerrick, they provide practical advice for developing accessible curricula and pedagogical practices.

The final section of the volume turns to the students' involvement in the community, presenting classroom-related experiences for diverse (and all) students through tested pedagogies. In chapter 12, Washington provides an overview of community-based service learning and then discusses how she relates her pedagogical objectives to student involvement in their local communities. Young (chap. 13) describes community activities based upon experiential learning. Finally, Weber (chap. 14) advocates community action—how students can become change agents within their own ethnic communities and within the community at large.

What we have here, then, is a volume that combines theory and research, presenting the work of *practitioners*, a diverse group of faculty who speak not only from theory and research but also from classroom practice. We hope that faculty readers of this text will share in our enthusiasm for creating new classroom strategies that adapt to the changing nature of college campuses across the United States.