



PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

Valuing people who think and act in ways that are consistent with the traditional culture of the institution often leads to inadvertent or deliberate exclusion of those who are different. Most of us are unaware that we are operating within a cultural perspective, because the dominant culture is taken for granted. As Adams (1992) describes, whereas this culture is natural and invisible to some, it is uncomfortable for many students from socially diverse groups because in its most extreme form it is "narrow in that it rules out nonverbal, empathic, visual, symbolic, or nuanced communication; it neglects the social processes by which interpersonal communication, influence, consensus, and commitment are included in problem solving; it overlooks the social environment as a source of information . . . ; it ignores the values and emotions that nonacademics attach to reasons and facts" (p. 6).

The gap between the dominant classroom culture and the culture of other students can be large. For students who have not had a great deal of mainstream culture experience and whose native language is not English, the differences are enormous (Collett & Serrano, 1992; Jones & Young, 1997). Many scholars have enumerated differences between particular cultures and academic culture. Hofstede (1986), for example, talks about differences in whether the individual or the group is valued, whether there are large or small power distances between people, whether the culture seeks certainty or tolerates ambiguity, and whether the culture stresses the "masculine" characteristics of material success and assertiveness or the "feminine" characteristics of quality of life and interpersonal relationships. He describes the classroom culture as very different from the cultural expectations of many groups. Much has been written about the differences between an Afrocentric and a Eurocentric worldview (Asante, 1987, 1988; Karenga, 1995). These studies portray the Afrocentric worldview as stressing harmony, egalitarian social relations, a fluid notion of time and space, the social world,

nonverbal communication, holistic thinking, intuitive reasoning, and approximation; the eurocentric worldview as stressing competition, power, numerical precision, abstract thinking, verbal communication, analytical thinking, logic, and quantitative accuracy. This literature portrays American classrooms as placing an almost exclusive emphasis on the eurocentric worldview.

Learning Style Dimensions of Full Participation

There is not a clear consensus on whether one can draw implications on learning styles from cultural styles or whether particular learning styles are associated with particular groups. In the case of some of the populations being discussed, such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, there is no present evidence to indicate that there are clear patterns. For some other groups, such as students with learning disabilities, there are clear differences (by definition) connected with the disability. In some of the remaining categories of students, such as nontraditional-age students, women, and students of color, several studies suggest that there are patterns. These descriptions must be viewed with caution, because talking about broad patterns across groups of people who have many intragroup differences can lead to stereotyping and overgeneralization. On the other hand, if descriptions of styles are considered as tools to illustrate differences rather than as applicable to every individual in the categories described, they can be helpful. Irvine and York (1995) provide an excellent overview of this topic.

When scholars talk about major differences in cognitive and social-interactive styles across various cultures, they often use the work of learning style theorists and apply their constructs, which are usually polar opposites, such as abstract versus concrete thinking, to a particular cultural group. Anderson and Adams (1992), for example, use Anderson's categories of relational and analytical, and Witkin and Moore's (1975) categories of field independence and field dependence (also termed "field sensitivity") to illustrate differences in style. They argue that women from the European-American culture and men and women from

American Indian, Hispanic-American, and African-American cultures often exhibit a style that is relational and field dependent. They suggest that many people from these groups are more improvisational and intuitive than sequential and structured; more interested in material with social or concrete content than abstract material; more holistic than analytical; and more cooperative than competitive. Most European-American males (most faculty members) and Asian-American males would tend to fall into opposite categories. They have been socialized through their culture and the academic tradition to value analytic, structured, abstract approaches. The danger that this research warns against is that we might view differences from the traditional norm as deficits, devaluing the work of some students and preventing them from learning well. An additional danger is that overreliance on the mainstream style leads to stale scholarship.

Similarly, a body of literature on cognitive development discusses patterns in the way in which women take in and process information (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986). These studies have looked closely at epistemological development, resisting the strict association of one pattern with male students and one with females, while at the same time identifying contrasting styles that are gender related. They find that development in the women they studied culminates in levels of thinking that are as complex as those described in studies of men, but qualitatively different at each stage in gender-related ways. Baxter Magolda, for example, describes four levels of epistemological reflection: absolute, transitional, independent, and contextual knowing. Within each of the first three levels, however, students demonstrate contrasting approaches, generally termed "relational" and "abstract." For example, transitional knowers, the most prevalent type of knowers among traditional-age college students, demonstrate two patterns: the interpersonal pattern, found more frequently in women, and the impersonal, found more frequently in men. Although both genders are transitional knowers in that they view knowledge as uncertain, at least in some areas, and understanding as more important than acquiring and remembering information, they demonstrate the different gender-related patterns shown in Table 10.2.

Interpersonal	Impersonal
Want to exchange ideas with others	Want to debate ideas
Seek rapport with the instructor	Want to be challenged by the instructor
Want evaluation to take individual differences into account	Want fair and practical evaluation
Resolve uncertainty by personal judgment	Resolve uncertainty by logic, judgment, and research

Source: Baxter Magolda, 1992.

TABLE 10.2 Gender-related Patterns of Thinking in Traditional-Age College Students

One area of research that documents how different ways of knowing affect classroom learning is the literature on classroom participation. Several researchers have found in empirical studies that in classroom discussion white males speak more frequently and for longer periods than white females and males and females of color, and that they are treated deferentially by teachers (Allen & Niss, 1990; Knoedler & Shea, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1992; Trujillo, 1986). Clearly, the style associated with European-American males is dominant in many American college classrooms, making it difficult for others to participate.

Physical and Learning Disabilities

Students with mobility impairments, problems with vision or hearing, and learning differences because of attention issues, dyslexia, or a host of other characteristics must also be allowed full participation. Although such students are encouraged to speak with instructors about their needs, teachers can pave the way for this interaction by opening each course with a general statement on caring about students' individual needs and inviting students to speak with them about these, as well as inserting statements

about alternative formats and practices in the syllabus for each course. Rojewski and Schell (1994), Prenger (1999), and the Center for Teaching and Learning (1998) suggest specific ways in which instructors can adapt or modify their teaching to serve students with disabilities. Instructors who cultivate a good relationship with the campus units that serve students with disabilities can make good recommendations and provisions for full participation.

Age Differences

Full participation for students older than the traditional 17 to 22-year-old college student can be fostered by attending to students' need for relevance to their life experiences and by being flexible when the personal responsibilities of students with child care issues or workplace pressures call for different learning arrangements. When the age of the student entails some physical limitations, such as hearing loss or diminished memory, provisions similar to those extended to students with physical disabilities, such as alternative formats, permission to audiotape class, or extended time for tests, can be offered. Excellent advice for teaching nontraditional-age students is contained in Siebert and colleagues (2000).

Increasing Opportunities for Full Participation

There are several ways that we can increase opportunities for participation. First, we can be aware that different cultural and learning styles exist. We can reflect on our own styles and on the extent to which our preferences for a style or grounding in a culture leads to teaching practices that exclude others. Similarly, we can be alert to these differences among our students.

Second, we can use varied instructional approaches. Moving between lecture, discussion, small-group work, experiential learning, simulations, and other strategies allows more possibilities for students to find learning opportunities and for all to expand their own stylistic repertoires. Similarly, we can use redundancy in teaching modalities and provide for options in assignments.

Third, we can evaluate work from multiple perspectives. For example, rather than viewing a personal narrative by a nontraditional-age student as "subjective, emotional, and unscholarly," we can see it as an alternative kind of contribution to the traditional footnoted and impersonal paper, each valuable in a different way.

Increasing Motivation

In addition to attending to differences in style, culture, and physical ability, a very powerful way that we can enable full participation in learning is to attend to the motivational aspects of learning. Refer to the previous chapter for an extended discussion of motivation theory. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) enumerate ways in which this can be done:

- *Establishing inclusion* focuses on conveying a sense of respect for the student and working to connect students through communicating a sense of confidence in the student and encouraging collaboration and ownership. Practices that foster inclusion include collaborative and cooperative learning, peer teaching, writing groups, and exercises that create opportunities for reframing knowledge from different perspectives.
- *Developing attitude* speaks to the importance of students' need for personal relevance and self-determination. Strategies that attend to attitude include engaging students in goal setting, allowing choices in learning, and encouraging experiential learning.
- *Enhancing meaning* stresses the need for engagement and challenge through promoting higher-order thinking in real-world applications. Meaning can be enhanced through the use of critical questioning, decision-making exercises, research on student-generated questions, and creative activity.
- *Engendering competence* addresses a central finding of motivation theory research, the need for the learner to feel that success is possible. Here the focus is on multiple ways to represent knowledge and on effective assessment methods, including frequent feedback, self-assessment on the part of the learner, and alternatives to pencil-and-paper tests—alternatives grounded in the context of the skills or knowledge being assessed.

BEING TREATED FAIRLY

Egalitarian treatment of students is a very valued norm in American higher education. Grading anonymously, giving all students the same amount of time to complete a test or assignment, and requiring the same number and type of assignments by each student are common practices. We often say, "I treat all students the same." Yet a closer look reveals that we do not treat all students the same, nor should we. Students with disabilities are often allowed more time for exams, the help of a reader, or a special setting for taking the test. Nonnative speakers may be allowed to use dictionaries during test taking, and their work may be graded more for content than for expression of ideas. Some students may be excused from class for religious holidays that other students do not observe. Equal treatment involves not necessarily same treatment, then, but treatment that respects the individual circumstances of particular learners.

Although we may readily accept different treatment for students who are disabled or are nonnative speakers or are older students who have hearing impairments or work slowly, we might find it much more difficult to justify different treatment based on gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural characteristics. Once again, however, beginning with the individual student is important. It is important to have expectations that are appropriate to the student. Some disjuncture between the student's point of entry and the dominant culture may occur, and balance should be sought. For example, students coming from cultures where time is viewed fluidly may have difficulty understanding that due dates will be interpreted literally or that class begins promptly on the hour. Most students have learned to be bicultural and to operate under different sets of assumptions based on the cultural context. Others, however, may need help. It may be necessary to have individual conversations with such students, emphasizing the expectations or giving reminders about due dates. It may be important to tolerate a few mistakes before penalizing students or to rethink the cultural embeddedness of the rule. A discussion—at the start of the course—on expectations and standards, coupled with a clear syllabus, can help communication immeasurably.

We can also consider cultural or gender-related issues that may affect class discussion. Many female students or students of both genders from American Indian or Asian-American backgrounds have been socialized to value listening more than speaking. For them, a class participation grading scheme based on number of contributions in class may be problematic. Fair treatment might be based on quality of comment rather than on quantity or on performance in dyad or small-group, rather than whole-class, conversation. The teacher can help students who are from cultures more reflective than spontaneous by giving the class time for silent thought before responses are solicited. They may need to learn the culture. Conversely, students from the dominant culture may learn from them, incorporating the strengths of silent reflection into class routines. Myra and David Sadker (1992) recommend that teachers ask an observer to record participation levels in their classes, to give them a sense of the patterns that are occurring so that they may avoid the pitfall of unequal discussion.

Inherent in all discussions about fairness is mutuality. The need for order and routine must be balanced by appreciation for variation and richness of perspective. Strongly forcing students from nontraditional backgrounds to acculturate to the institution in order to succeed prevents the institution from learning and expanding its potential. Pervading considerations of social diversity are issues involved in the ongoing revitalization of colleges as places of learning.

IN CONCLUSION

As faculty, we play a crucial role in the success of students from socially diverse groups. To help these students get the most from their education and to help the institution benefit from the talents and perspectives the students bring, we can

1. Help to make the students feel welcome by displaying genuine interest, personalizing our interactions with them, and honoring and including their perspectives and experiences.
2. Treat students as individuals, rather than as representatives of social groups.

3. Ensure that students from diverse social groups have ample opportunity to participate fully through providing options for different learning styles and modes of expression.
4. Strive for fair treatment by communicating appropriate expectations and making instructional decisions with inclusion in mind.

Supplementary Reading

- L. B. Border and N. V. N. Chism (eds.), *Teaching for Diversity* [Special issue]. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*, 1992, 49. This collection of essays treats the following topics: the culture of the classroom, learning styles of diverse learners, gender equity in the classroom, feminist pedagogy, and developing programs to promote inclusive teaching. Descriptions of successful programs and a resource guide are included.
- A. I. Morey and M. K. Kitano (eds.), *Multicultural Course Transformation in Higher Education: A Broader Truth* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1997). This collection contains a very comprehensive set of chapters that deals not only with curricular transformation but also with pedagogy and assessment issues.
- D. Schoem, L. Frankel, X. Zufiiga, and E. A. Lewis (eds.), *Multicultural Teaching in the University* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993). This collection of thoughtful essays explores the meaning and function of multicultural teaching in higher education, through conceptual pieces as well as reports of the actual experiences of instructors from various disciplines and perspectives working to enact new curricula and teaching practices.
- R. Wlodkowski and M. Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995). The authors approach multicultural teaching from the perspective of motivation, identifying norms and structural conditions that will help students feel included, establish a productive attitude toward learning, derive meaning from their learning, and feel competent as learners.
- Several teaching and learning centers have wonderful handbooks on inclusive teaching. Many of these are on the World Wide Web. Particularly comprehensive treatments have been done by the Universities of Michigan, Nebraska at Lincoln, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Virginia.

*My
Freshman Year*

What a Professor Learned
by Becoming a Student

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Limiting Workload: Doing What's Necessary

A common way to regulate workload is simply to restrict the amount of time and effort one spends on a course by doing no more than is necessary. On several levels, students assess what is needed to get by. Depending on the course and the instructor, they decide whether to buy the book, whether to go to class, whether to do the readings in a given week, and how much effort to put into assignments.

Attendance. The advice given by administrators, teachers, and students alike is that "you have to be there." The first rule for college success is "go to class." The reason this bromide appeared so frequently on dorm bulletin boards and elsewhere is that many students don't. Even though seasoned students recommend against it, cutting or "ditching" class is a strategy adopted by a number of students to free up more time in their lives.

Most successful students do not undertake this strategy too frequently or without regard to the class. Classes that require attendance as part of the course grade, and in which the instructor takes attendance, are rarely cut. By contrast, in classes where attendance is expected but not required, the frequency of absenteeism rises with each of the following characteristics: the class is large; the class is boring; tests are based on readings rather than lectures; grades depend on papers rather than tests; the class is early in the morning; the class is on Friday.

One of the more ditchable classes I attended was a large lecture course in which the professor presented what I considered to be interesting, beautifully organized, and up-to-date lecture material. An outline of lecture notes was organized into

a booklet, which one could buy, so, as the teacher explained, it would not be necessary to scribble hurriedly all the concentrated information we received during each class period. The same professor taught multiple sections of the course, totaling 675 students, and had students sign in for each class, even though there was no attendance requirement. At the end of the term, I was able to get access to the attendance data for the course.

Fifty-six percent of students over the span of a semester came to class. To put it more accurately, classes were, on the average, 56 percent full. By no means was such a figure unusual, and this was an excellent class. I attended *many* classes in which substantial numbers of students were absent. On days before holidays, or days where there was great weather or bad weather, the empty seats were even more noticeable. In one period of the surveyed class, the teacher announced that, although testable material would not be covered in the next class period, she would be conducting an interactive experiential lesson that "would be very engaging." Eleven percent of the class showed up.

I found it particularly amusing that during the semester in this same class we received a university survey asking us to "self-report" on our attendance in that class in four categories:

How often do you come to class?

1. Less than 50% of the classes
2. 51-74% of the classes
3. 75-94% of the classes
4. 95-100% of the classes

Of the seventy-seven people in my section who responded anonymously, 90 percent, I found out later, reported that they came to 95-100 percent of the classes; only one person claimed to attend 51-74 percent of the classes, and none admitted attending fewer than 50 percent. Perhaps these self-reports were true, given that the survey was administered *in* class, but even

so, I suspect that students either misperceived or misreported their actual behavior. In national surveys, one-third of students report skipping classes occasionally or more, a figure that my experience suggests is far too low, and almost two-thirds of students indicated that they sometimes came late to class.⁸

On the occasions when I, too, "ditched" a class, the reactions I received from other students were noticeably positive, including a "thumbs up" and an understanding "we all need a break" from hall mates, and "way to go, girl," from a classmate. Moderate cutting was part of college culture, and it marked me as one of them, as someone who understood the value of self-determination combined with a touch of rebellion. Still, the operative word is moderate. Ditching class was a minor time-saving (or week-shaping) strategy compared with limiting preparation.

Preparation. According to the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a survey of 437 colleges and universities in the United States, "only about 13% of full-time students spent more than 25 hours a week preparing for class, the approximate number that faculty members say is needed to do well in college. More than two fifths (41%) spent 10 or fewer hours a week."⁹ The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey of more than thirty thousand freshmen found that fewer than one-third of students spend even *one* hour studying or doing homework for every hour they spend in class.¹⁰

Given their work input, college students' grade performance nationwide is remarkable. According to national data, "more than three-quarters (77%) of all students who study 10 or fewer hours per week get a B or better."¹¹

So, how do students do it? How do they manage to get by with less than half of the recommended preparation for class?

My answer is that good students have learned a kind of spartan efficiency. I learned it too. In the beginning of my first semester, I did all my readings when they were assigned. By the end of my first semester, I picked and chose, often relegating

textbook reading to cram sessions during exam time, sometimes skipping readings altogether. On papers, I cut my normal multiple revision process to just one draft and then a final paper. Even so, by peer standards I was practically a drudge.

Some of the biggest blocks of student leisure time are carved out of course preparation. Most commonly, students simply don't do the required readings for class. I'm not kidding. In certain classes the professor would be lucky if one-third of the students read the materials at a level of basic comprehension.

National surveys support my personal observations. The NSSE found that 21 percent of college freshmen reported never having come to class without completing the readings or assignments, which means that almost four-fifths of freshmen had. More telling, though, is the survey's comparison of freshmen and senior self-reports. More seniors than freshmen report coming to class without completing assigned work: 82 percent of seniors said that they sometimes, often, or very often came to class without completing readings or assignments, up 2 percent or nearly two thousand students in the sample, from freshmen. This finding suggests something that I experienced more anecdotally: that this kind of strategic corner-cutting is part of what students learn in college.

Students also skimp in other ways. Take Harry. He's a bright guy who works fifteen hours a week and plays an intramural club sport. His five classes include two in his major, one physical education elective, and two liberal studies classes, including social science, in which the instructor assigns biweekly "thought" papers.

He usually does his social science homework, which is due on Thursdays, on Wednesday nights. But his team won this Wednesday, and they went out for dinner, and then beers, and then more beers. He came home after 2 AM and set his alarm for 7:30 but didn't wake until 8. It took him twenty minutes to compose and print out the one- or two-page reflective essay due for class on his "experiences with and thoughts about race in America" (his was closer to one page) and ten minutes to wash and dress; he even had time to catch a quick breakfast before his 9:10 class.

Well over one-third of students in a national sample said that they had turned in course assignments that did not reflect their best work. Another 15 percent reported handing in course assignments late.¹² Low preparation time, as we have seen, is clearly a factor in producing less than high-quality work, but the reverse is true as well: low-quality work creates time, making room for other activities in one's schedule that have priority. It is this trade-off that I observed among fellow undergraduates: massive shortcuts—particularly in courses that a student considers "busywork" or irrelevant to his or her career—enabling students to shape their lives and their time more fully.