DIVERSE LEARNERS

in the Mainstream Classroom

DIVERSE LEARNERS in the Mainstream Classroom

Strategies for Supporting **ALL** Students Across Content Areas

- English Language Learners
- Students with Disabilities
- Gifted/Talented Students

Edited by

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We dedicate this book to Dr. Juliet V. García, president of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College. Dr. García's dynamic leadership and passion for making education accessible for all students in this border region have inspired faculty, community members, and the students themselves to achieve the highest possible levels of success. Dr. García's dreams for this rapidly changing region of the country have become reality, as is evidenced by the physical beauty and caring atmosphere of this growing campus and the accomplishments of all who are part of the university community. The faculty of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education view this book as a reflection of the positive atmosphere that has resulted from Dr. García's inspirational leadership.

In addition, we dedicate this book to future teachers who read this book and are influenced by its ideas, especially to future teachers of the Rio Grande Valley, who have shown the great promise Dr. García has always believed possible. They will need to meet the challenges confronting them, and it is on their shoulders that the future of this region rests.

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Introduction

> Our teacher education program prepares students very well. They know a lot about the subject or grade they will teach, they know about classroom management, they know how to write objectives and connect them to standards, and they know how to assess student progress. When they go out to do their student teaching, they are well prepared, and they are confident. Most have successful student teaching experiences. But after they are hired for their first teaching job and have their own classrooms, things change. After a few weeks, many are often somewhat discouraged. They were well prepared to teach their subjects; however, they weren't ready to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. They didn't realize that some were just learning to speak English, some were students with disabilities who had been mainstreamed, and some were gifted and talented students who already knew much of what they planned to teach. "How," they ask, "can I reach the diverse students in my classroom? There are so many different challenges that I am not sure where to begin."

This was the reflection from our department chair, Reynaldo Ramírez. It was these comments that planted the seed for the writing of this book. Faculty in the curriculum and instruction department at our university realized that although we were doing a good job of preparing teachers, one key element was missing. We thought that the students we were sending out were well prepared in every way, but listening to these new teachers' comments, we realized that there was an important gap in their preparation: they were not ready for the reality of today's classrooms, even though they themselves had graduated from high school only a few short years ago. Why was this?

For one thing, our nation is increasingly diverse, and this diversity is reflected in our schools. We often think of diversity as cultural or linguistic difference, and it is true that in almost every part of the country, new immigrants from around the globe are entering our schools. The number of students with limited English proficiency has increased dramatically. Nearly one in every ten students nationwide is an English language learner (ELL). While some ELLs are taught by English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual teachers, most are mainstreamed very soon after arrival.

But classroom diversity encompasses more than language or ethnic backgrounds. Because of new laws, more students with disabilities are now mainstreamed. Students who formerly studied in a resource room with a special education teacher now spend part or all of the day in a mainstream classroom. At the same time, there is a greater recognition that many students are gifted in some way. These students also deserve instruction that meets their varied needs.

Even among students who are native English speakers and who have not been identified as special education or gifted and talented students, there is considerable diversity. School districts often encompass different socioeconomic sections of a town or city, and the student population reflects these differences as well. Further, while some students come from a family with two parents, many have a single parent or live with other relatives.

Some of our teacher education students graduated from high school only three or four years ago. Diversity in the schools has increased during this time, but another factor also comes into play. Most students who go into teaching were not English language learners, at least not beyond their elementary years. They were not special education students either, for the most part, although with improved education for students with disabilities, that fact is changing. Some students in teacher education had been in programs for the gifted and talented, but not the majority. Since most teacher education students were not part of one of these diverse groups, they tended to associate with other students more like themselves. Even though their schools were diverse, many of our teacher education majors were not aware of the diversity when they were in elementary or high school. They were focused on their circle of friends.

However, when our students go back to school and become teachers, their perspective changes. Now they are responsible for differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all the students in their classes. For many new teachers, this challenge seems overwhelming.

Early in their teacher preparation, our students take a course designed to make them aware of different special populations in school. The course focuses on English language learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students. Future teacher educators learn about these different groups and the laws relating to their education. However, the textbook that was being used did not make students fully aware of current classroom realities. Students in this class on special populations could answer questions about these different groups, but the course is offered early in their program, and most of the teacher education students approached the course as they would any other. They wanted to know what they needed to be successful academically, how they could pass the quizzes and tests rather than how they could use this information to prepare themselves to teach the students they would encounter in their classrooms.

The professors who taught this course did their best to supplement the textbook and bring issues of diversity to life, but they realized that one way to improve the course would be to find a better text. However, their search was not successful. They were unable to discover a textbook that contained essential information about each of the special populations and also provided concrete examples of how teachers in different subject areas could meet the needs of all their students. The more department members talked, the more we realized that if we could not find the kind of book we wanted, we would need to write it ourselves. The current book represents our efforts to provide the information and examples that we want our students to have.

Although this project started as a book for students in teacher education classes, as we have talked to administrators and veteran teachers, we have become aware that in many schools there are teachers who have struggled to cope with a rapidly changing student population. Approaches they used in the past don't seem to work too well with their current students. At the same time, teachers are under increased pressure to prepare all their students to meet high standards and pass high-stakes tests. As we talked with educators in the field, we realized that this book could also serve the needs of many practicing teachers by giving them background information and strategies they could use to more effectively teach all their students. Keeping in mind these two groups—new teachers and veteran teachers who find themselves in classrooms with a rapidly changing student population—we undertook the writing of this book.

Overview of the Book

This book is divided into two main sections. The first part describes each of the special populations. Luz Murillo and Patrick Smith open the book with a chapter that explores generally what cultural diversity is and then examines what diversity means for society and for schools. The authors end their chapter with a series of challenges that cultural diversity poses for teachers followed by suggestions for how to meet these challenges.

The following chapters each deal with one of the special populations. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss English language learners. In Chapter 2 Yvonne and David Freeman begin by showing the rapid increase in the number of students with limited English proficiency. The authors then discuss differences among ELLs and how schools identify and classify second language learners. The chapter also reviews the different kinds of programs available for ELLs. Following this discussion, the authors review best practices for teaching ELLs based on current research and theory. They close with an extended scenario that shows how a mainstream teacher works effectively with her limited English proficient students. In Chapter 3 Alma Rodríguez and Richard Gómez Jr. continue the discussion of ELLs, but with a focus on students in bilingual education settings. They explain what bilingual education is and the different kinds of bilingual programs. The chapter includes a discussion of the research and theory that supports bilingual education and concludes with a scenario showing how a teacher works effectively with second language students in a bilingual classroom.

Chapter 4 turns to a second group of students, those with disabilities. Steve Chamberlain begins with a review of the legal mandates for serving students with disabilities in a mainstream setting. He explains how a general education teacher can work with a special education teacher to identify and plan effective instruction for students with disabilities. This chapter concludes with scenarios showing how general education teachers can provide accommodations that students with disabilities need to reach their potential and prepare for a productive life.

In Chapter 5 Darwin Nelson discusses the different types of gifted and talented students and offers suggestions for working effectively with gifted students in a mainstream class, giving special attention to an often neglected intelligence: emotional intelligence. Kathy Bussert-Webb then expands on these ideas in her chapter (6, in Part 2) by discussing multiple intelligences in detail. She explains how teachers can assess and draw on eight different intelligences to provide the best possible education for diverse learners. Both Chapters 5 and 6 include scenarios showing how mainstream teachers can work with students who are gifted and talented in different ways.

Part 2 also contains a series of chapters that demonstrate how teachers can meet the needs of their diverse learners as they use technology, work with young children, and teach different content area classes. Each of these chapters follows a similar structure: theoretical foundations, characteristics of good programs and practices, an explanation of how to differentiate instruction for special populations, and a scenario showing how a teacher puts the theory into practice with his or her diverse learners.

Chapter 7 focuses on technology. Janice Wilson Butler describes a variety of technology tools and techniques available for teachers. This chapter includes an extended scenario showing how one teacher helps her students use a variety of technological tools to complete their class projects. In Chapter 8 Georgianna Duarte presents the theory and research related to early childhood education. This chapter focuses on students in preschool through third grade, a time when young children develop rapidly. The author discusses who these young learners are and what theories guide appropriate instruction for them. She elaborates on the importance of play, an appropriate physical environment for learning, and developmentally appropriate practices for young learners. In this chapter, teachers can see how to meet the needs of very young students who are ELLs or come to school with disabilities as well as those who, even at an early age, demonstrate that they are gifted and talented in various ways.

The final three chapters each deal with one of the major subject areas taught in school. In Chapter 9 James Telese explores math, in Chapter 10 Paula Parson and Renee Rubin review language arts, and in Chapter 11 Julio Noboa and Elsa Duarte-Noboa examine social studies. Like the earlier chapters, each of these chapters explains the theoretical foundations of the discipline, describes the characteristics of best practices, discusses how teachers can differentiate instruction for students from special populations, and then concludes with a scenario that shows how teachers can put theory into practice to meet the needs of all their students.

Each chapter in the book also contains a list of key terms and acronyms. When a term first appears in a chapter, it is italicized. Its definition can be found in the glossary at the end of that chapter. The authors of each chapter also list several applications. These are suggestions for ways readers can extend their understanding of key ideas from the chapter by engaging in an activity, such as observing in a school, interviewing a teacher, or summarizing main ideas. Many chapters also include a list of additional resources, such as websites, for students who wish to explore the ideas in more depth.

New teachers leave teacher education classes prepared to teach their subjects. They know how to plan lessons, use materials, and assess their students' progress. Veteran teachers bring years of experience and skills to their classroom each day. It is our hope that educators who read this book will come away better prepared to meet the challenges posed by the increasing diversity they encounter in their classes. It is only by educating all their students and ensuring that students from special populations are not left behind that teachers can truly succeed.

1

Cultural Diversity

Why It Matters in School and What Teachers Need to Know

Luz A. Murillo and Patrick H. Smith

Hay tantísimas fronteras
que dividen a la gente,
pero por cada frontera
existe también un puente.

There are so many borders
that divide people from one another,
but for each border
there is also a bridge.
Gina Valdés, *Puentes y fronteras: Coplas chicanas*

Introduction

Cultural diversity is an exciting and important issue facing educators in the United States and around the world. The ways that people are raised, socialized, and educated at home and at school are fundamental components of who we are. In our families and other social groups, these ways feel so familiar, so taken for granted, that often we become aware of them only through contact with people who have been raised and educated elsewhere. This is true for all members of society, but because teachers work closely with children, families, and colleagues whose backgrounds are different from ours, learning to understand and work successfully with cultural diversity is especially important for our profession. To borrow the metaphor in Gina Valdés' lovely poem, schools have often acted as *fronteras*, borders between students from different cultural groups. This chapter is written for future teachers who would like to become cultural bridges for their students and communities.

To illustrate this idea, we begin with a brief discussion of how cultural diversity has motivated and shaped our own lives as educators. We then consider the question "What is cultural diversity?" before explaining why it matters for society and for schools. We look at some of the ways the topic of cultural diversity has been addressed in U.S. schools, including pedagogical efforts aimed at working with diverse learners. The chapter concludes with a description of six key challenges facing educators today and some suggestions for how to meet them.

Where We Are Coming From

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator whose work we admire, wrote that teaching people to read implies much more than teaching them to decode or sound out words and sentences. In the fullest sense, according to Freire, teaching people to read means helping them to "read the world," to interpret and connect the texts that they read to the everyday world around them. For educators, this approach offers exciting possibilities because the relationship between teachers and students is transformed from one of dispensers and receivers of knowledge. Instead, teachers guide students, who are interested and actively involved in their own education. This approach also holds the potential to keep teachers and teaching better connected to the world beyond the classroom. As with any theory of education, putting a Freirian approach into practice also poses challenges. For teachers, it means realizing and admitting when we don't know the answer, as well as having both the curiosity and the discipline to continue learning. For learners, it means accepting the challenge and hard work of questioning what we are learning, rather than simply accepting and rephrasing what we are taught.

We believe that these ideas are as true for authors and professors as they are for students and their families. With this in mind, we'd like to briefly describe our backgrounds and where we are coming from in terms of the fundamental matter of cultural diversity and what it means for education in the twenty-first century.

Luz was born and raised in the coffee-growing region of Caldas, Colombia, and Patrick grew up on farms in Michigan and Maine in the United States. Despite these different geographies, we are both children of career teachers and grew up in rural areas and small towns before moving to cities to study.

Although neither of us grew up planning to be a teacher (indeed, our parents recommended that we go into other fields!), our experiences and interests led each of us to become public school teachers working with linguistically and ethnically diverse students. Living and teaching outside our first communities and in new countries (Mexico, the United States, and Kenya) led us to learn new languages and to pursue graduate studies in order to better understand how to work with such learners. The topic of cultural diversity has come to matter to us personally as well as professionally; as parents of bilingual, multicultural children, we have seen firsthand the benefits of teachers who are well prepared to work with students who are different from their mainstream classmates, as well as the problems that can arise when teachers are not prepared.

How Our Approach Differs from Other Approaches to Cultural Diversity

The view of cultural diversity described in this chapter may be a bit different from those found in other works you will read as a student of education. For example, unlike approaches equating cultural diversity exclusively with membership in ethnic and linguistic groups (e.g., Hadaway 1995/2000), we make a connection between culture and ecological diversity. Our approach also incorporates issues of gender, sexuality, and ableism, including the identities formed around deafness and blindness. For this reason, we consider aspects of biology that are usually absent in discussions of cultural diversity.

We also believe strongly that teachers must understand the cultural and family backgrounds of the students from many different countries now studying in U.S. schools. For this reason, we illustrate our ideas about culture with examples from the contexts we know best, including the Rio Grande Valley, Mexico, and Colombia. Although some of these examples may seem unfamiliar to you at first, we encourage you to compare them with your own experiences as a student and future teacher. Finally, we are convinced that the best educators are intellectual actors and that learning to see ourselves as thinkers is fundamental for beginning teachers. Only in this way can we prepare our students to handle the many different situations they will face in and outside our classrooms.

No Single Best Way

One objective of this chapter is to introduce the basic theories that inform studies of cultural diversity. Because there are multiple theories, there is no single correct way of thinking about cultural diversity, just as there is no best way of teaching diverse students. Indeed, as your studies progress, you will find yourself questioning and perhaps challenging what you hear and read about cultural diversity. Our overall goal is not for you to learn the right approach to working with culturally diverse populations, but rather for you to understand the key issues that will allow you to become a successful teacher and lifelong learner about this exciting and important topic. If you wish to continue learning about this topic, consult the resource list at the end of the chapter.

What Is Cultural Diversity?

To begin to answer the question "What is cultural diversity?" let's first consider the related questions "What is culture?" and "What is diversity?"

What Is Culture?

> Anthropologists and many others have always wanted to celebrate culture as that which constitutes the humanity of human beings and allows them to build worlds that were not given by their biological endowments. Neither the pyramids, nor the Bill of Rights, nor the Chicago blues sprang forth fully formed from human muscles, neural networks, or hearts. (Varenne and McDermott 1999, 143)

We start with the observation that culture is not biology. More precisely, we can say that although human culture (like everything that humans do) has its roots in human biology, they are not the same thing. In talking about culture, we are referring to the ways in which human communities organize themselves to do certain things like form partnerships, raise children (including teaching them in formal institutions such as schools), work (including teaching), love, and play. In talking about biology, we are talking about brains and bodies and their capacity to perform activities that are culturally meaningful. We want to emphasize that apparent biological differences such as skin and eye color, hair texture, and facial features are actually quite superficial across human populations. Although fascinating to hairstylists, geneticists, and others interested in how humans came to look the way we do, they are not very useful in understanding how people learn. In fact, in contrast to nineteenth-century theories about racial differences and intelligence, contemporary research on human biology shows that humans around the world are remarkably similar when it comes to our brains and the mental processes by which we learn new things like language, how to read and write, and how to do arithmetic (Hall 2005; Diamond 1999/2003).

What does this mean for our understanding of culture? To begin with, it means that the values we assign to the skin-deep physical differences we observe are imbued primarily with social rather than biological meaning. Although humans are genetically programmed to take quick visual notice of characteristics such as size, age, and gender (indeed, it seems that we cannot help ourselves from performing rapid assessments of this sort, which explains why heads turn when a person enters a room), what we make of these apparent differences (like crossing the street to catch a closer glimpse of a person we find interesting or attractive or moving away from a person we consider threatening or scary) depends on interpretations that have their basis more in culture than in biology.

But just how much do people differ culturally, and in what ways? Recently, anthropologists influenced by descriptions of linguistic universals have examined different cultural groups to ask whether *cultural universals* might also exist. Here are a few of the items anthropologist Donald E. Brown (cited in Pinker 2002) believes are shared across contemporary societies:

- Men are, on average, older than the women they marry. They also engage in acts of collective violence (warfare) more than do female members of the same groups.
- Women are responsible for the bulk of child care.
- All societies have shared routines for how to talk to children and to adults of different social status.
- Homosexuality is present in all groups (although not all groups are equally open about or tolerant of gay people).
- All societies have developed shared means of marking group membership (including styles of dress, ways of speaking, and body piercing and other forms of adornment); conversely, all groups have developed criteria for establishing who is not a member.
- All societies have structures for raising children and passing on cultural knowledge that is regarded as essential for life.
- All groups appear to recognize transgressions of shared cultural values and have developed rules for dealing with people who are judged to have transgressed them.

Notice that none of the items from this list specifies exactly *how* groups go about enacting these shared understandings. What Brown's list demonstrates is not that all human populations are essentially the same or that people everywhere act the same, but that cultural variation across groups is limited in certain ways. In other words, rather than exhibiting random behavior, all cultures follow patterns that are fairly stable collective responses to situations and conditions confronting people in different contexts.

However, culture is far from fixed or monolithic. Juan Castañeda has observed that "culture is produced in the process of all social and community interactions, from art to television, to the ways we prepare food, dress ourselves, fall in love, face death, or dream of the future" (Castañeda 1999, 21). Thus, cultural understandings are reflected in all that we do, and culture is something that members of a group re-create and constantly modify as we live our lives. A scholar of Chicano origin, Renato Rosaldo adds that "culture is what gives meaning to human experience, selecting and organizing it. . . . Culture includes the commonplace and the esoteric, the mundane and the exalted, the ridiculous and the sublime. At all levels, culture penetrates everything. We learn from other cultures by living, reading, or by being there. Cultures are learned rather than inherited" (1993, 26). The notion of culture as constantly changing is nicely summarized by Spanish poet Antonio Machado, "Caminante, no hay camino, se hace el camino al andar," which, loosely translated into English, means "Traveler, there is no road. We make the road by walking" (Machado 1982, 142). In the end, we find it most useful to think of culture as a work in progress rather than a finished product.

What Is Diversity?

This brings us to our next question: "What is diversity?" Diversity means differences, of course, but differences from what? As noted in the previous section, humans are biologically programmed to recognize difference, and all cultural groups have developed ways to mark who is a member and who isn't. In this very basic sense, diversity simply means everyone who is different from me or us. In practice, however, this definition is too simple. Think, for example, of your (great) grandparents or your older aunts and uncles. Because of the circumstances in which they grew up—before email, chat, cell phones, and instant messaging existed—your older relatives are probably less adept than you at handling some of the communications technologies you may regard as basic for modern living. (You may want to test this out by handing your *abuelita* your cell phone and asking her to send a text message!) But don't start feeling too smug. If your elders grew up in times and regions with very different material resources and practices than those you grew up with, it is equally likely that they have certain forms of knowledge (for example, speaking a particular language, knowing how to work on a farm, preparing food in certain ways, observing certain religious practices) that you know less about. Although everyone can recognize these sorts of generational differences, would you say that your older relatives belong to a different culture? And, as we grow older and some of us have children and grandchildren with experiences that are very different from what we have known and done, would we claim that these newer generations belong to different cultures? Thus, thinking about culture means thinking about how people are different even within the same family.

A second problem with a simple definition of difference is that it is *essentialist*. By this we mean the kind of thinking that assumes (1) that all members of a particular group are fundamentally all the same and (2) that being a member of that group can somehow explain or even determine how an individual will act. According to essentialist thinking, all Vietnamese Americans, for example, are basically the same and therefore think and act in the same ways *because* they are Vietnamese Americans. This assumption, if true, would be a terrific tool for policy makers and educators. Imagine being able to predict how all Vietnamese American children and parents would react to a new math curriculum or a new form of bilingual education, or how all deaf parents would want their children to be taught to read.

In real life, of course, people are much more complex than essentialist thinking assumes. Think for a minute about all the different people you know of Mexican heritage. Do they all hold the same view about bilingual education? Does it matter that they were born and raised in different areas, such as Michoacán, Oaxaca, San Antonio, Chicago, or New York City? Does it make any difference that their parents, grandparents, or earlier generations were born and raised in different parts of Mexico (including those that became part of the United States!) or that they speak or spoke different *dialects* of Spanish or different indigenous languages? Does intermarriage with Anglo-, African, Asian, or other Americans, or with a person from another Spanish-speaking area like Puerto Rico, Cuba, or Colombia make someone less Mexican? Raising these sorts of real-life questions—which we can ask of any cultural group—demonstrates that an essentialist view of human nature fails to capture the ways people really are.

So far, we have been thinking about specific types of American status primarily as an example of an ethnic category. But people are far more than the sum of their ethnicities, and the picture gets even more interesting when we consider the other aspects of cultural diversity including language background, gender, age, sexual orientation, differing abilities, and so on. For example, do you act and talk the same way with your siblings as you do when you are with your grandparents? How about when you are with a group of all male or all female friends, or a group of straight friends or (openly) gay and lesbian friends?

What about with people who speak only English or Spanish and people who can speak both languages?

The kinds of slight adjustments we all make depending on the situations we encounter—yes, everybody does it!—mean that human individuals are shifters par excellence. Bilinguals and multilinguals are especially talented at this. Thus, in one context we can act more Mexican if we choose to, and we can act more gringo in another. Often we do these things, like *code-switching* with bilingual friends, without even thinking about them. At other times people are highly aware of what they are doing and choose very deliberately to adopt a particular way of speaking and acting. This is especially true when we sense that a certain aspect of our identity is viewed negatively. Sadly, this is often the case for Navajo children and other indigenous people, who attempt to hide their language and culture, and for some gay or lesbian teenagers, who hide their sexuality from their families and even from themselves because of *homophobia*. Sometimes, however, we celebrate our ability to shift between worlds, as in the poetry and prose writing of author and lesbian Chicana Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 77):

Because I, a mestiza,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.

Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.

For these reasons, one of the myths that educators must avoid is interpreting cultural diversity as deviance from the norm. Culturally speaking, there really is no *normal* or standard group, just as there is no normal or right way to be a woman or a man, a Mexican American, an African American, a blind person, or a member of any other group. Instead, all people, including teachers, students, and parents, are diverse in multiple ways.

Anthropologists have described the ways that adult members of certain groups act in different contexts but have paid less attention to children and teenagers. Although teachers are taught that childhood and adolescence are times of development and change, the notion that identities are multiple is new in many schools. This means that teachers who give learners the freedom to express themselves, literally to try out different aspects of who they may choose to be as adults, are truly acting as leaders in a new era of education. For this reason, classrooms and all areas of schools need to be safe zones where cultural experimentation is respected and encouraged.

Defining Cultural Diversity Means Understanding Power Relations

Now that we have looked at the questions of what culture and diversity are, we are ready to tackle the larger question, "What is cultural diversity?" If you have read this far, you are probably not expecting a simple definition, and that is good because there really isn't one! There are, however, some excellent places to look for answers to this question. Rosaldo (1993) writes that cultural diversity is best understood by looking at historical change, socioeconomic inequities, and especially the differences salient to the members of specific groups themselves. He argues that contemporary ideas about cultural diversity have been shaped by social movements that have organized to protect the rights and interests of key groups including environmentalists, feminists, gays and lesbians, and Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. While this description refers specifically to the United States, these ideas have also been developed elsewhere around the world, especially in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Canclini 1995; Martín-Barbero 2001). Rosaldo's nondefinition invites us to go beyond simply adding new groups to a list. Instead, by framing cultural diversity in terms of struggle and resistance, we can see that the power relations between different groups are critical for understanding cultural diversity.

This brings us to the confusing concepts of minority and majority groups. Federal and state departments of education use the term *minority* to refer mainly to nonwhites, as in this definition from a recent court decision in Texas: "A school district with a student population comprised of more than fifty percent minority students is commonly referred to as a 'majority-minority' district. For this purpose, the word 'minority' includes African American, Hispanic, and Asian" (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit 2006). As you can see, this use of the term *minority* doesn't really make sense in schools in South Texas, where school populations are typically close to 95 percent Mexican origin, or in New York City, Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Boston, and other communities, where some public schools are composed almost completely of African American and Latino students (Kozol 2005). Even in schools where the minorities are the numerical majority, they are still subject to the power differential that places one group (middle-class European Americans) as the standard by which all other groups are measured and evaluated. Thus, we cannot use these terms without carefully considering the specific local context and the power relations among the various groups involved.

Definitions of cultural diversity have expanded considerably in the past two or three decades. Whereas diversity training for teachers in the past focused mainly on issues of *ethnicity* and ethnic diversity, broader notions of diversity mean that twenty-first-century educators must also understand other forms of diversity including language background, migration and national origin, gender and sexual orientation, and diverse abilities such as deafness, blindness, and different learning styles (Banks et al. 2005). Although these issues were once viewed as completely separate, there is growing recognition that they actually combine to form individual and group identities.

Why Cultural Diversity Matters

At the most basic level, cultural diversity matters because it reflects the human condition. Human individuals, communities, and populations have always been diverse, although historically schools and other public institutions rarely have been organized to reflect and honor this fact. In the nineteenth century, for example, schools and universities across the United States were structured to exclude girls and women. And, as noted in the next section, up until the mid-twentieth century, education laws were enacted in many states to prohibit Native Americans and African Americans from attending white schools or from attending school at all.

Diversity also matters because unique and important forms of knowledge are embedded in specific cultures and their languages. Linguists Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (2000) describe the specialized knowledge that traditional fishermen in Polynesia have developed about fish species that formally trained ichthyologists are only beginning to understand. They argue that those of us schooled to accept the scientific method as the only way of discovering new knowledge are actually missing the boat in this case. As competition from large-scale, industrial fisheries pushes Polynesian fishermen to adopt nontraditional methods or to drop out of fishing altogether, these important forms of knowledge are lost to future generations. Murillo (2004) makes a similar case for land management practices developed over centuries by Arhuaco Indians in the Sierra de Santa Marta mountains in northern Colombia. The Arhuacos regard themselves as the keepers of this fragile ecosystem. Pointing to the devastation of the lands held by *bunachi* (non-Indians, literally "foolish little brothers"), they resist attempts to show them better ways of protecting the environment in the name of modernity and progress. Although we find it easy to dismiss local forms of knowledge, as these examples show, we do so at our own risk. As Maffi (2001) points out, many terms for describing plants, animals, and the practices that indigenous peoples have developed are simply untranslatable into English, Spanish, and other dominant languages. If the endangered languages spoken by these people are allowed to die out, a great deal of knowledge will be lost, with consequences for people everywhere.

You may be asking yourself at this point, as many students have asked us, what consequences follow when local forms of knowledge are lost? A famous example comes from the Navajo code talkers, Navajo speakers in the U.S. military during World War II who used their first language as an uncrackable and extremely valuable code for the Allies' communications. Banned in Arizona and federal Indian schools for many years, Navajo remains the Native American language with the greatest number of native speakers in the United States (Gordon 2005). Unfortunately, many Navajo children growing up today are rejecting Navajo in favor of English in order to appear less Indian and more white (McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda 2006). Linguists predict that if this trend continues there will be very few native speakers of Navajo by the year 2050. Examples like this one show that diversity matters because human innovation and creativity—something that governments and businesses spend billions of dollars on each year—are fostered by access to multiple sources of new ideas and ways of thinking. By rejecting the ideas of individuals or groups because of who they are (or who we think they are), we risk homogenizing the sources of ideas and limiting our potential to find solutions to new problems that arise. Thus, protecting cultural diversity isn't just about respecting the past; it is also about keeping our options open for the future.

Why Diversity Matters for Schools and Education

In the most immediate sense, diversity matters for schools because international, federal, and state laws say that it does. At the international level, most nations have signed *UNESCO*'s declarations of human rights and cultural diversity, which means that they promise to protect the diversity of their populations, including the right to be educated in a language they understand. At the national level, various parts of the U.S. Constitution protect the rights of all citizens. And in Texas, competency standards for beginning teachers include knowing how to "use diversity in the classroom and the community to enrich all students' learning experiences" (Texas Education Agency 2006, 7). So in a very basic way, protecting and fostering the rights of culturally diverse learners matter because it is the law, and this powerful fact can be useful when students, parents, politicians, and other members of the public ask teachers if culturally responsible programs are really necessary in schools.

Legal protection is not absolute or permanent, however, as we can see in the case of women's right to vote in the United States. Although some western states permitted women's suffrage earlier, this right was not guaranteed nationally until the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1920. And, despite the constitutional amendments adopted after the Civil War "guaranteeing" the rights of African Americans to vote (Fifteenth Amendment), hold office, and own property (Fourteenth Amendment), many states and cities found (illegal) ways to disenfranchise and oppress African Americans and other people of color for more than a century (Delpit and Dowdy 2002). In fact, most of the laws protecting culturally diverse populations now in place in the United States were developed only in the last forty years or so. For example, the Bilingual Education Act, first passed in 1968, must be periodically renewed by Congress, and this is also true for the Voting Rights Act, originally passed in 1964, and Public Law 94-142 (now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), first passed in 1977.

Protection of the rights of gays and lesbians is one of the most recent examples. For instance, the state of Texas outlawed homosexuality until 2002, when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld those rights and struck down the Texas law as discriminatory. Currently, only a handful of states permit civil unions between same-sex couples, and only Massachusetts permits marriage between people of the same sex. Like the rights of immigrants, rights for gay, lesbian, and transgender students are far from guaranteed in the United States today. Thus, while these examples illustrate the importance of establishing laws that protect culturally diverse populations, they also teach us how fragile and impermanent legal protections can be.

A more lasting rationale for cultural diversity in education is that educators can use this idea to promote equity and social justice. As teachers, it is our job to teach the students we have rather than to teach all students as if they were all the same. Teaching from an awareness of and a deep respect for cultural diversity is a step that teachers can take toward building "democracy in education, a tradition that insists . . . that all human beings have similar opportunities to develop themselves" (Varenne and McDermott 1999, 131). As we stated earlier, it is also true that different cultural groups hold knowledge that is potentially useful to anyone, including members of other groups. It follows, then, that all learners can benefit from learning new ways to approach problems.

Pedagogical Responses to Cultural Diversity

Following is a brief look at some of the ways that cultural diversity has (and hasn't) been addressed in U.S. schools. There is not space here for thorough treatment of this issue, but we mention a few early approaches, beginning with official policies aimed at exterminating Native American groups. Fortunately, most culturally different groups were not targeted for genocide, but many have experienced policies of exclusion and neglect. In some cases, they were simply not allowed to attend public schools at all. In others, schools were provided for nonwhite children, but these were typically greatly inferior to the schools attended by whites. A Mexican father in Nueces County, Texas, recognized the harmful effects of segregated schools, saying, "Having all children together is better. Then the teachers who teach the white boys have to do the same for the Mexicans" (Taylor 1971, as cited in San Miguel 1997, 144). This has also been the case for African Americans throughout the history of the United States. A half century after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed the concept of "separate but equal" schooling for blacks and whites, African American, Latino, and immigrant children in many cities now attend segregated schools characterized by *dumbed-down curricula*, inferior material resources, and inexperienced and poorly paid teachers (Kozol 2005).

Another common approach to addressing cultural diversity in schools was the policy of forced *assimilation*, typified by the *Americanization policies* common in southwestern states from the early 1900s and extending into the 1970s in some cases. Under such programs, Mexican-origin children, including many born in the United States, were educated in schools organized for white, English-speaking students and were taught by Anglo teachers with books and curricula designed to whitewash them, or transform them into monolingual speakers of English. A report on Hispanics in the United States recalls the period this way: "Until the Civil Rights era, these Mexican Americans, especially those in Texas, endured pervasive social and economic discrimination, reflected in segregated schools, churches, and residential neighborhoods" (National Research Council 2006, 21).

Because anti-Spanish and anti-immigrant practices continue covertly in many places, many Mexican-origin students today grow up feeling that they are inferior to mainstream or so-called majority culture, even though they now make up the majority population in many U.S. schools. An education student told us,

> Going to school in my town was very tough since my first language was Spanish. At the time I entered the first grade, teachers would still

> slap your hands if you spoke Spanish at school. That meant I had to learn the English language no matter what. I went through first, second, and third grade having a very quiet, low self-confident attitude since I spoke English "funny."

Another reason that culturally diverse learners may feel "funny" in school is that they seldom see people who look or sound like them in instructional materials. For example, textbook publishers continue to leave Latinos, African Americans, and other minority groups out of social studies textbooks (Noboa 2006). And, despite research showing that American Indian societies were as complex and technologically advanced as the European societies that invaded them, U.S. history books continue to describe indigenous cultures as primitive and technologically inferior (Mann 2006).

Although individual teachers and advocacy groups like the *LULAC* and the *NAACP* were early champions of educational rights for students of color, it wasn't until the civil rights and brown power/*la raza* movements in the 1960s and '70s that equal educational opportunities for culturally diverse students started to become part of the national discourse through legislation. Some of these efforts did become law (such as the Bilingual Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act) and some did not (such as the Equal Rights Amendment, which sought to guarantee equal rights for women). One consequence of better access to higher education for members of groups historically denied an opportunity to attend college was the growth of academic departments and degree programs focusing on minority groups, including women's studies, African American studies, Chicano studies, Latin American studies, gay and lesbian studies, deaf studies, and special education. Although such programs have sometimes been criticized as too narrow in focus, they have given us valuable information about the social and economic history of the United States, information that was previously practically invisible in most schools and universities.

Multicultural education is another approach to culturally responsible teaching. Broadly, multicultural programs try to include the histories and literatures of various groups in the design of curriculum and instruction for all students. In their heyday in the late 1970s and early '80s, there were many different variations of multicultural programs, ranging from those that dealt with diversity in mostly superficial fashion (limited to celebrations of ethnic holidays, for example) to programs that aimed to use schools to resist and reverse inequities and injustice (Sleeter 1996). Although multicultural education programs were also criticized by progressive educators as not challenging the exclusionary biases of public education, the strongest criticism, beginning in the 1980s, came from conservative educators concerned that studying different cultural groups would water down the curriculum and divide the country by removing the core or basics that all Americans need to know (Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil 2002). This critique of multicultural education raises two fundamental questions all teachers should ask: "Who defines the content of our curriculum?" and "Which actors have the authority to make curriculum decisions that affect students and the teachers who teach them?"

The current economic and political dominance of the United States has led many people in this country and around the world to believe that U.S. ways of educating children are the best. However, important criticism of multicultural education has come from educators and researchers in Latin America and elsewhere outside the United States. Although supportive of the goals of inclusive education, international educators have pointed out that programs and materials developed in the United States convey dominant and colonizing ideologies that are harmful to societies in development. Because power relations are quite different in nations with a greater presence of Afro-Caribbean populations (Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, and Brazil), indigenous groups (Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru), and *mestizos* (Mexico), scholars from such places have proposed *intercultural education*, a form of schooling that attempts to decolonize society (Walsh 2003). These programs are based on the idea that teaching about cultural diversity must include questioning why some groups have been excluded and others are more economically privileged and powerful (Muñoz Cruz 2002), as well as thinking about how schools and society can be reconceptualized and restructured to address these power imbalances. As U.S. schools receive more immigrant students and families from other countries, forms of education developed outside the United States are attracting attention and teachers are beginning to realize that there is much to be learned from schools in other places (Smith and Jiménez 2006).

A key lesson learned by educators working in and out of the United States is that students learn best when materials and teaching methods are familiar, an idea that can be termed *culturally relevant pedagogy*. The best-known example is an approach called *Funds of Knowledge* for Teaching, first developed in the U.S.-Mexico *borderlands* in the 1990s. Anthropologists doing ethnographic research with families in Sonora, Mexico, and Arizona were impressed by the many skills of Mexican children in these families, especially their ability to contribute to family businesses using math and literacy skills. However, when the researchers began to study the children's school performance, they were surprised to learn that the children had been judged as poor learners with few skills in math and reading. The researchers discovered that teachers knew very little about their students' home lives. When children did not do well on school tests, the teachers mistakenly assumed that the children had little knowledge of basic concepts of math, science, and reading.

The Funds of Knowledge Project (see González, Moll, and Amanti 2005) grew from the researchers' desire to work with border teachers to show them how smart and capable Mexican American children really are, and how the knowledge and skills they have developed at home can be built on in school. To gain this understanding, Funds of Knowledge teachers visit children's homes on a regular basis. Besides receiving special training in interviewing and interpreting life history, they also participate in teacher study groups where they read and discuss articles and books about teaching and compare these ideas with what they have observed and learned during the household visits and interviews. Although making the necessary release time to conduct home visits and study groups is often an issue, this approach to developing culturally relevant pedagogy has expanded from the Southwest to schools across the United States (McIntyre, Rosebery, and González 2001).

The final approach we discuss here is the current federal education policy, known by the name *No Child Left Behind* (*NCLB*). Aspects of the program such as rigid teacher certification programs, heavy reliance on standardized testing, and new accountability measures for schools that don't reach goals set by national and state departments of education were first tried out in Texas in the 1990s and then instituted at the national level by the Bush administration in 2001. Because of the emphasis on achieving high test scores in math and reading, and accountability in the form of penalties for not reaching them, many school districts have reduced the amount of time students spend learning about other subjects, including social studies and history (Meier and Wood 2004). This seems to be especially true for children in poor districts and for minority students (Goodman et al. 2005). In addition, increased reliance on mandated textbooks and scripted programs has taken away much of teachers' autonomy to select materials and pace lessons to fit the needs of their students.

Thus, although the primary argument behind the NCLB Act is that schools best serve children by holding all students to the same national standards, it appears that this goal cannot be reached without teachers who have developed a deep understanding of cultural diversity and have learned how to teach diverse learners. Unfortunately, despite teaching certification standards promoting cultural diversity and racial tolerance, many teachers probably find it more difficult to practice culturally responsible teaching in the era of NCLB than before the act was passed.

Challenges for Culturally Responsible Teachers in the Twenty-first Century

Six key challenges face teachers in the new century. Whether you teach in the community where you grew up or move to teach in a different state or even a new country, the increasing diversity of U.S. schools means that these are issues that all teachers will face sometime in their careers. In the "Applications" section at the end of the chapter, we provide some specific ideas you can try out with the diverse learners you will meet wherever you teach.

Challenge 1: Finding Out Who Your Students Are

The first challenge for *culturally responsible educators* is to learn who our students are. It is important but not enough to know something about the learners' ethnic backgrounds, the languages they speak, and what their parents do for work. *Amistad*, a Steven Spielberg film about an armed revolt aboard a slave ship in 1839, provides a powerful example of the importance of listening to stories. In this real-life case, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court during the international movement against the slave trade and the long buildup to the U.S. Civil War, the central question that developed was who the rebellious Africans really were. According to international law at the time, if born in West Africa, the *Amistad* Africans had been illegally enslaved and should therefore be awarded their freedom. On the other hand, if born into slavery in the Americas, they could be legally sold and held as slaves. This seemingly simple question proved very difficult to answer, in part because the Africans' lawyers did not speak any of the West African languages spoken by their clients and the Africans did not speak English, the language of the courts. With the help of a Mende-speaking interpreter, the Africans were eventually able to communicate with their lawyers, but it took a sort of superlawyer (former U.S. president John Quincy Adams, played by Anthony Hopkins in the movie) to convince the court to set them free. He did this by arguing that it isn't enough to know where people are from. Rather, you have to know their story. Here is an excerpt, in which Adams tells an abolitionist, a former slave named Joadson (played by Morgan Freeman), how to win the case:

> In a courtroom, whoever tells the best story wins. . . . What is their story, by the way? Mr. Joadson, you're from where, originally? Georgia. Does that pretty much sum up who you are, a Georgian? Is that *your* story? No! You're an ex-slave who has devoted his life to the abolition

> of slavery, overcoming great hardships and obstacles along the way, I should imagine. That's your story, isn't it? You and this young so-called lawyer have proven you know *what* they are. They're Africans! Congratulations. What you don't know and, as far as I can tell, haven't bothered in the least to discover, is *who* they are.

Few cases facing teachers today are as dramatic or difficult as the case of the *Amistad* prisoners. However, over the course of a career in education you will surely participate in decisions about the best ways to teach students who are culturally different from students whose backgrounds are most familiar to you. To meet this challenge, you will need to listen carefully to your students in order to understand the many stories present in your classroom.

Challenge 2: Recognizing That All Students Are Diverse in Multiple Ways

Part of understanding who students really are lies in recognizing that all learners are diverse in multiple ways. Ironically, increased recognition of cultural diversity has led to the creation of new categories and terminology for describing students (limited English proficient, English language learners, bilingual, Hispanic/Latino, white, poverty, middle-class, single-parent family, gifted and talented, special needs, etc.). These labels, while required for recordkeeping purposes, can never capture the diversity of human beings. Teachers who wish to work with cultural diversity as a resource and tool for excellent instruction need to keep this in mind rather than accept essentialist labels that imply that children can be only one kind of person. The best tool that we have found to avoid pigeonholing our students is to spend time with them to find out who they are. In David and Yvonne Freeman's book *Between Worlds*, teachers talk about discovering the instructional value of getting to know their students better. One teacher reflected,

> I was amazed at Mony's proficiency in English and shocked at what I'd wrongly perceived it to be when she was in my class. It sounds so simple, but if we as teachers put more effort into *who* we're teaching, more of the *what* would take care of itself. When we concentrate on programs, or strict timelines, we lose sight of the important human element. (2001, 5)

Although discovering the diversities embodied by your students makes for richer teaching and increased opportunities for learning, it doesn't necessarily make teaching any easier. Another teacher commented on her experiences following a Hmong student in seventh and eighth grade: "This experience made me sadly aware that my students are all individuals with diverse and complicated needs and that I can never hope to solve them all. Just my one-on-one interviews with Tou and my special efforts to talk at least briefly with him every day pointed up that all my students need special attention. I feel stretched to the limit" (2001, 11).

Challenge 3: Understanding That Difference Is Not the Same as Deficit

As schools become more diverse in the ways that we have outlined in this chapter (and perhaps in ways we have not foreseen here), teachers must learn to see the cultural groups from which students come as representing resources rather than problems. Schools need "teachers who regard color, ethnicity, and language variations among children as strengths to be drawn upon instead of deficits to be overcome" (Berliner 2005, 182). At the level of individual learners, you will need to see abilities rather than only what children are (currently) unable to do. Ultimately, this requires you to be able to see your students and their families as actors, not victims. It means understanding that people are capable of making choices in social circumstances that, while difficult at times, do not reduce them to the role of passive bystanders in their own lives.

Challenge 4: Teaching in and Outside the Classroom

As teachers, our first responsibility is the intellectual growth and well-being of our students. For new teachers, juggling the myriad tasks involved in curriculum planning, materials development and selection, lesson planning, teaching, and assessment of your own students will probably seem like more than enough work! And yet, as any middle school teacher will tell you, articulation with the abilities developed at earlier levels is also of great importance. The same is true for the transition between middle school and high school and between high school and college. Therefore, no matter what grade level or content area we teach, our jobs are inevitably linked with the teaching done by colleagues working in earlier and later grades.

But teaching does not stop at the classroom door or even at the door of the school. Culturally responsible educators also need to consider how our teaching connects to the outside world. As the principal of a successful dual language school once told us, her greatest challenge is not in educating students bilingually, but rather in keeping parents and community members informed about how bilingual education works. The same is true for all forms of culturally responsible teaching. We cannot assume that everyone will automatically understand the thinking underlying culturally responsible programs. Because these efforts are probably very different from the ways parents were educated, you need to be able to clearly explain to parents and community members what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Challenge 5: Keeping Up with Change and New Ways of Thinking About It

At the beginning of this chapter we described our own growth as multicultural educators, noting that learning about cultural diversity never stops. While not all teachers end up specializing in diversity issues, none of us can afford to stop paying attention to them. The children we teach certainly cannot afford it! Keeping up with change means keeping up with new ways of thinking about how the world and the worlds of our students are ever changing.

Technological developments are one example of rapid change, as well as the educational consequences of not keeping up. For example, many learners today have access to new forms of information technology, including the Internet, email, cellular phones, and text messaging, that parents and teachers are less familiar with. These technologies are changing the ways children learn and process information outside school, but what does this mean for teaching? Some scholars believe that teachers who don't become familiar with these new ways of learning, those who stick to "the subject-based curriculum based on texts and academic teachers as authority[, are] in trouble" and at risk of being outdated (Lankshear and Knobel 2003, 176). Similarly, even in the most culturally homogenous communities, digital technologies make a wide variety of new cultural influences available to learners. Thus, teachers who want to be able to teach effectively in a variety of contexts (with students of different ages, in different schools, and in different regions) need to be lifelong learners about the population movements and globalization that characterize life in the twenty-first century.

Challenge 6: Understanding the Limits of Culturally Responsible Education

Given our focus on the importance of cultural diversity for education, it may seem strange that we conclude by cautioning teachers to recognize the limits of culturally responsible teaching. There are two parts to this challenge. First, teachers need to recognize that culturally responsible teaching is not a panacea for the many real-life issues facing schools and their culturally diverse students. For example, as you will read in the subsequent chapters of this book, culturally responsible teaching is certainly not a substitute for content area preparation. Although current policies embodied in No Child Left Behind have motivated schools to emphasize reading and math, teachers of science, social studies, art, and physical education still need to be well prepared to teach their respective subjects *in addition to* keeping in mind the issues we have outlined in this chapter.

Finally, policy makers and the public tend to be overly optimistic about the power of schools to redress the historic and current inequities between white, middle-class students whose first language is English and the growing number of students with less privileged but equally legitimate backgrounds. As scholars and many veteran teachers have observed, schools are not wholly responsible for the wide disparities in income and access to quality health care and housing that characterize many U.S. communities. It is illogical to expect that schools can make the whole difference without support from other parts of society. But we do what we can. For those of us who dare to teach (Freire 1998), accepting the challenge of learning to be culturally responsible educators can be an important *first step* in doing a better job of serving all learners.

Conclusion

Clearly, cultural diversity matters for schools and for learning, and educators who base their teaching practices on this understanding will be better prepared to teach the students of today and tomorrow. Schools can be very conservative institutions, but they are also places in which new members are always arriving and others leaving. Thus, schools are continuously changing, whether we like it or not. Understanding how to work with these changes presents a significant challenge to beginning and experienced teachers alike, and we invite you to continue this important journey with classmates and colleagues. We close with a quote about the power of teacher collaboration from a participant in a bilingual teachers study group:

> Learning how to learn together and to work together was a major transformation. It did not happen quickly, smoothly, or easily. We experienced dissonance and frustration as we struggled to understand what we were learning and sharing with each other. We tended to want to find ideal solutions, to try to resolve hard issues and lay them to rest once and for all. It took considerable work before we were able to welcome ambiguities. But as we persisted in the inquiry process to

> which we had committed ourselves, we began to experience some profound and exhilarating changes. (Saavedra 1999, 308)

Like these collaborating teachers, we find that working with culturally diverse learners requires us to look at people and issues in new ways, ways that are not always comfortable or easy. In the process of becoming a successful teacher for all students, especially learners whose language and cultural backgrounds, identities, and abilities are unlike your own, you will continue to grow too.

Applications

Because teaching is a complex activity that changes with each new group of learners, we offer the following strategies not as recipes to be followed but as possibilities to be modified to fit the needs of your students as well as your own interests and developing strengths. With experience and reflection, you will be able to find what works best for you and your students.

Applications for Challenge 1

1. In *Teacher Man*, Frank McCourt recalls how he relied on the power of storytelling as a first-year teacher in New York City: "I'm twenty-seven years old, a new teacher, dipping into my past to satisfy these American teenagers, to keep them quiet and in their seats. I never thought my past would be so useful. Why would anyone want to know about my miserable life?" (2005, 26). McCourt's more experienced colleagues warn him against this tactic ("You can never get back the bits and pieces of your life that stick in their little heads. Your life, man. It's all you have. Tell 'em nothing"), and it backfires initially when students begin to ask about his love life, and he isn't sure how to respond. As a new teacher, you will want to think carefully about which life experiences are appropriate to discuss with your students and then plan how you will incorporate them into a lesson. With these words of caution in mind, consider sharing parts of your life story. Like McCourt, you might be surprised by how interested the students are and by the assumptions they make about teachers. For younger learners and less proficient readers, you can tell your story in oral form; older students and more advanced readers can read an autobiography you prepare ahead of time, and English language learners can write sentences or a short biography based

on a time line you provide. You can begin by asking students to guess where you are from, where you went to university, what languages you speak, and so on, as well as why they have reached these (perhaps faulty) conclusions.

2. Ask students to write or talk about themselves. Depending on students' age and literacy proficiency, they can prepare oral or written autobiographies like the one you model in class. Be aware that some students are shy and that those students who are already feeling different might be reluctant to share their stories with classmates at first. The important thing is not that all students' stories become immediate classroom knowledge—it might take longer for some students to feel comfortable about sharing their stories in public—but that all feel valued and important in your class.

Applications for Challenge 2

1. What groups do you belong to? List all the characteristics that you believe compose your identity (for example, woman, heterosexual, Asian American, college student, etc.). Add any groups that you feel are truly important for understanding who you are as a person. As you compile your list, you may wish to show it to a classmate to get new ideas or to keep it private, only for yourself. When you are finished, add the names of other people you feel belong (like you) to each of these categories.

2. Are new cultural groups forming? Go back to the section where we discuss "What is cultural diversity?" In 1989 Renato Rosaldo listed several cultural groups (environmentalists, feminists, gays and lesbians, Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans). Rosaldo claimed that ideas about cultural diversity have been shaped by social movements that have organized to protect the rights and interests of key groups. Looking at his list, what other groups would you add today? Are there some you would subtract based on their assimilation into a larger U.S. culture or other factors? What are some of their defining characteristics, in your opinion? What is your evidence for adding or removing these groups from a contemporary version of the list?

Applications for Challenge 3

1. Make a list of all the labels that might be used to describe the children in your classes. What problems or deficits are typically associated with members

of these groups? Next, have students make a list of all the things that they are good at or know how to do. In addition to academic skills, be sure they include home activities and responsibilities like cooking, taking care of children, helping out in the family business, language and translating skills, family chores, music or arts abilities, sports, hobbies, and other interests. Compare the list of assumed deficits or problems with the list of strengths compiled by your students. What are the differences between them?

2. Learners often take for granted what they already know how to do, especially in regard to their out-of-school activities. At first, it might be difficult for your students to imagine that what they know is important. To help them think about this, you can ask them to write about how they help their families by responding to the following prompt. We've filled it in here with an example of the kind of response a student might write:

   > When people in my *family* need to *write a song*, they ask me because
   > I am *really good at making up the words for songs*. One time . . .

   You can use this prompt as the beginning of a story or composition in which students write about a time they showed someone how to do or make something.

Applications for Challenge 4

1. Ask parents about their own education backgrounds. Be ready to explain how things are different in the school where you work with their children. For example, parents who expect homework to be assigned daily in each subject may be surprised if their child isn't assigned daily homework. Similarly, parents may be accustomed to particular forms of written schoolwork that stress products (copying, dictation, writing sentences or words in a list). For example, literacy programs that stress process and development (such as invented spelling, creative writing, and writing multiple drafts of the same assignment) may need to be explained to noneducators, particularly to parents who attended schools where such practices were not common.

2. Make sure that your students understand what the class is doing and why, and have them explain and show their work to their parents. Borrowing a technique from Mexican public schools, you can write individual notes to parents in children's notebooks. Framing your notes in question form will invite parents to respond back in writing or to call or visit the school if they have questions.

Applications for Challenge 5

1. James Gee (2004) believes that video games require students to use more higher-order thinking skills than typically called for in school. Test Gee's claim by observing a child or young adult complete an in-school or school-based activity. Then observe the same learner using digital technology for school or play (outside school). What are the differences in the number and complexity of tasks the learner is called on to perform? Based on your observations of what a child is able to do outside school, would you say that the school curriculum is actually holding back this student's learning?

2. Is there a special topic you've been meaning to learn more about? Teach yourself more about it via the Internet or another type of information technology. Keep a journal of how your learning is different using this new kind of tool. What aspects are easier or more difficult than with the ways you are used to learning?

Applications for Challenge 6

1. Talk to veteran teachers to find out what their aspirations for social change were when they first began teaching. How have those aspirations changed? Are they as optimistic about the role of teachers and schools to change society for the better? What barriers do they see hindering the power of schools to promote social change? One interesting project is to interview teachers at the beginning and others nearing the end of their teaching careers and compare their ideas about how teaching and schools have changed.

2. Look in the library or online for articles and websites that claim a positive relationship between education and equity in schools. Identify the claims in the articles you find. What evidence do they give in support of this assumption? Do you agree with the authors' claims? Why or why not? Some places to look include websites for FairTest, Rethinking Schools, and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, listed in the "Online Resources" section at the end of the chapter.

3. Think across disciplines. One fascinating way to keep up with change and new knowledge is to discuss issues with students majoring in other disciplines. Just as this chapter draws on ideas from anthropology and biology, you can invite students and professors from those disciplines to read the "What Is Diversity?" section with you and to discuss the points raised there.

How does your thinking about culture and human diversity change as a result of your discussion?

Key Terms and Acronyms

Americanization policies. A series of laws passed in the early and mid-twentieth century in southwestern states such as Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico aimed at turning Mexican-origin and other migrant students into monolingual speakers of English and thus (so the thinking went) into better Americans.

assimilation. A process in which migrants lose their distinct cultural traits and develop new customs and practices consistent with mainstream culture.

borderlands. Term describing the geographical area on both sides of the physical border between the United States and Mexico, but also the cultural spaces occupied by people who share characteristics of Mexican and U.S. cultures.

code-switching. The use of two or more languages in a single sentence or conversation. Rapid code-switching is a marker of highly fluent bilinguals.

cultural universals. The idea that some aspects of human behavior and social organization are shared by all cultural groups.

culturally relevant pedagogy. Instruction that is designed to fit the cultural needs of the learners.

culturally responsible educators. Teachers who shape their teaching to meet the cultural needs of their students.

dialect. A way of speaking, writing, or signing a language that is noticeably different from other ways, including differences in pronunciation, accent, and vocabulary. World languages such as Arabic, English, Mandarin, and Spanish are composed of many different dialects, often associated with a particular region.

dumbed-down curriculum. A plan of study that is beneath the learners' intelligence. Whether the curriculum is well intentioned or cynical, the long-term effect is that students leave school poorly prepared for advanced study or well-paying jobs.

essentialist. The idea that a group of people share all the same characteristics and, therefore, their actions are determined by membership in that group.

ethnicity. A group identity based on shared characteristics such as race, language, and culture.

funds of knowledge. Knowledge that children acquire in their homes and communities.

homophobia. Fear of and discrimination against gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals and groups.

intercultural education. A form of schooling based on the idea that teaching about cultural diversity must include questioning why some groups have been excluded and other are more economically privileged and powerful. Compare with *multicultural education*.

LULAC. League of United Latin American Citizens.

mestizo. A Spanish word describing a person of mixed indigenous and European heritage.

multicultural education. A form of education that attempts to incorporate important elements of different cultures. Compare with *intercultural education*, which explores why some groups have greater prestige and power than others.

NAACP. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A federal policy requiring schools to meet standards as measured by testing all students.

normal. The popular idea that there is a single value-neutral or natural way to be human. A persistent fiction that is used to present others as abnormal and deviant.

UNESCO. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Resources for Further Study

Online Resources

Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence: http://crede.berkeley.edu/index.html

The Deaf Resource Library: http://deaflibrary.org/

Ethnologue: Languages of the World, fifteenth edition: www.ethnologue.com/

Houston Teachers Institute: http://teachers.yale.edu/league/hti/index.php

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest): www.fairtest.org/

Rethinking Schools: www.rethinkingschools.org/

Teaching Tolerance: www.splcenter.org/center/tt/teach.jsp

U.S. Census Bureau: www.census.gov/

Audiovisual Resources

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Spielberg, Steven, dir. 1997. *Amistad*. Universal City, CA: DreamWorks Entertainment.

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