THE CENTER FOR TEACHING & LEARNING EXCELLENCE
AT HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

“Faculty Excellence Equals Student Success”
MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Without an understanding of the unique meanings existing for the individual, the problems of helping him effectively are almost insurmountable.—Arthur Comb

Learners will:

- Gain a deeper understanding of cultural diversity as it relates to learning.
- Be able to recognize less obvious aspects of cultural diversity.
- Model tactics for overcoming stereotypes and biases.
- Be able to identify classroom strategies for working with a broad range of students.
In order to address cultural diversity, we first need to define it.

In defining it, we reveal the limitations and assumptions often made by educators about what students identify as culture.
Explore the understanding of culture by listing all dimensions of culture. Categorize the list items. Discuss the relatedness, importance, and of how individuals define themselves and others. Discuss which of the categories you as an educator focus on when trying to teach multiculturally.
Suggest all dimensions of culture you can think of. Reflect on your own culture and the dimensions of that culture with which you identify.
Divide the items into categories. We will be using Nitza Hidalgo’s “three levels of culture.”
Depth and Breadth of Cultural Diversity

Activity

The Concrete
• This is the most visible and tangible level of culture, and includes the most surface –
level dimensions such as clothes, music, food, games, etc.
• These aspects of culture are often those that provide the focus for multicultural
festivals or celebrations.

The Behavioral
• This level of culture clarifies how we define our social roles, the languages(s) we
speak, and our approaches to nonverbal communication. Aspects include language
gender roles, family structure, political affiliation, and other items that situate us
organizationally in society.
• The Behavioral level reflects our values.

The Symbolic
• This level of culture includes our values and beliefs. It can be abstract, but it most
often the key to how individuals define themselves.
• It includes value systems, customs, beliefs, mores, spirituality, religion, worldview, etc.
Depth and Breadth of Cultural Diversity

Activity

- How do you define yourself within these categories?
- Which of the levels is the most important category?
- When you meet somebody, which of those items (under any of the categories) do you use to understand them culturally?
- Is your attempt to understand others culturally consistent with how you want to be viewed and understood?
- What forces in our society might contribute to our simplification of the culture of others, even though we don’t want to be defined simplistically ourselves?
Which of these categories do you, as an educator focus on when you are trying to teach multiculturally?

How has education generally tried to be “multicultural”?

What are the aspects or dimensions of culture that we focus on in our classrooms trying to be “multicultural”?

Is this consistent with how we know people want to be defined?

How might we make conceptualization more consistent?
If we as teachers are teaching at the concrete level (easiest) most of the time, we are not teaching for “best practices” within a multicultural context. The challenge is to present and represent our classroom teaching at the behavioral and symbolic level, along with the concrete.

Instead of trying to define cultures through celebrations or festivals, draw students into thinking, questioning and answering at all three levels.
Culture and learning are connected in important ways. If a teacher is to facilitate successful learning opportunities for all learners, he or she must know the learner. This includes knowing about innate personality and also learned cultural values that affect behavior.
Cultural and Learner Diversity

Discuss the relationship among culture, communication and education
Explore culturally different discourse structures
Discuss ethnic variations in communication styles
Discuss problem solving and task engagement
Cultural and Learner Diversity

Culture

Communication

Education
Cultural and Learner Diversity

Classroom Discourse Structures

Passive Receptive (Conventional)

Participatory Interactive
Cultural and Learner Diversity

- **African American**
  - Call Response
  - Inductive, Interactive, Communal
  - Stage setting

- **Latino**
  - Inductive, Interactive, Communal
  - Stage Setting

- **Asian and Asian American**
  - Moderate Stances
  - Ritualistic Laughter

- **Native American**
  - Inductive, Interactive, Communal

Ethnic variations in communication styles
There are no universal solutions or specific rules for responding to cultural diversity in the classroom and research on best practices is limited.

However there are strategies educators can use to work effectively with a broad range of students enrolled in your classes.
This activity challenges you to re-examine your own teaching practices and think about them as you engage in this activity and hear each other’s stories.

You will share your own experiences as students, exploring different ways people are made to feel “included” in the learning process.

The existence of different learning needs and the necessity for a wide range of teaching styles emerges.
Inclusion/Exclusion Exercise

- You will divide into pairs, preferably with someone you do not know well. Each participant will share two stories with their partner: (8-10 minutes)
- Recall a time from your own schooling when you felt especially included in the learning process in a particular class.
- Recall a situation when you felt excluded from the learning process in a particular class
- As a group the pairs will share each other’s stories. A volunteer will record brief notes about both categories of stories. (What makes students feel included? What makes them feel excluded?)
Inclusion/Exclusion Exercise

What similarities do you see among the situations in which people felt especially included in a learning process?

What consistencies do you notice in the situations in which people felt excluded?

What differences among the stories do you find interesting?

What can you do as a teacher to ensure that the needs of all students with similar varying learning needs are sufficiently met?
Recognize any biases or stereotypes you may have absorbed.
Treat students as individuals and respect and learn about their cultural and personal values.
Rectify any language patterns or case examples that exclude or demean any groups.
Be sensitive to terminology
Sense the cultural climate in your classroom.
Tactics for Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases

Become more informed about the history and culture of groups other than your own.
Convey the same level or respect and confidence in the abilities of all your students.
Don’t try to protect any group of students.
Be evenhanded in how you acknowledge students’ good work.
Recognize the complexity of diversity.
Whenever possible select texts and readings whose language is gender neutral and free of stereotypes.
Aim for an inclusive curriculum.
Do not assume that all students will recognize cultural literacy or historical references familiar to you.
Consider students’ needs when assigning evening or weekend work.
Emphasize the importance of considering different approaches and viewpoints.

Make it clear that you value all comments.

Encourage all students to participate in class discussion.

Monitor your own behavior in responding to students.
Reevaluate your pedagogical methods for teaching in a diverse setting. Speak up promptly if a student makes a distasteful remark even jokingly. Avoid singling out students as spokespersons.
Be sensitive to students whose first language is not English. Suggest that students form study teams that meet outside of class. Assign group work and collaborative learning activities. Give assignments and exams that recognize students’ diverse backgrounds and special interests.
Meet with students informally.
Encourage students to come to office hours.
Don’t shortchange any students of advice you might give to a member of your own gender or ethnic group.
Advise students to explore perspectives outside their own experiences.
Advising and Extracurricular Activities

Involve students in your research and scholarly activities. Help students establish departmental organizations. Provide opportunities for all students to get to know each other.
Participants will take turns reading the questions and offering their answer.
We will go though each answer and poll the class by a show of hands. The correct answer will be given and we will proceed to the next question. Poll the class on the number of questions answered correctly.
Cultural Diversity Quiz Results

- How many of you feel mislead or misinformed about these issues? Why did you struggle with these questions?
- Did any specific questions jump out at you or any answers surprise you? Why did those particular answers surprise you and where did you receive the information that led you to believe something different?
- Where do people generally get information about individuals and groups related to race, gender, and socioeconomic class, and other social or cultural identities?
How do you process information that you get from these sources? Is your understanding of the information informed by your own experiences or worldview?

How can misinformation about these issues contribute to stereotyping and oppression?

What is your role as an educator in challenging these stereotypes or providing fuller understandings of these issues?
If we as teachers are teaching at the Hidalgo’s concrete level (easiest) most of the time, we are not teaching for “best practices” within a multicultural context.

The challenge is to present and represent our classroom teaching at the behavioral and symbolic level, along with the concrete. Instead of trying to define cultures through celebrations or festivals, draw students into thinking, questioning and answering at all three levels.
Education must become more student-centered and inclusive of the voices and experiences of the students.

Teachers must be prepared to effectively facilitate learning for every individual student, no matter how culturally similar or different from her- or himself.

Educators, activist, and others must take a more active role in re-examining all educational practices and how they affect the learning of all students: testing methods, teaching approaches, evaluation and assessment, school psychology and counseling, educational materials and textbooks, etc.