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# Introduction

Those of us who are involved in effectively teaching a diverse student body need to share what we have learned (often through trial and error). There are a myriad of ways to address the unique issues each student brings to the classroom, and to facilitate learning we must first understand the individual cultural context of each student. It is an ongoing process, and each of the authors of this book has come to answer it in a different way.

## Neal Glasgow

One of the wonderful things about teaching Advanced Placement Art History is that the curriculum and assessment are clear and well defined. The course is designed as a college-level survey covering the highlights of the creation and use of art and architecture over the length and breadth of human history. There is very little choice in what content is covered to help students pass the Advanced Placement test. It's clear the "assessment tail wags the curriculum dog" in Advanced Placement Art History. I don't have the option to customize instruction to my specific localized mix of students. I can change how I teach, but not much of what I teach as the tests draw questions from anywhere in the art history world. I am always under pressure to "fit" it all in before the test.

So what makes this an interesting story? Unlike most courses, my "multicultural" responsibility is easy to see. A search of the Advanced Placement Art History Web site finds the exact proportion of how the "multicultural" mandate fits into the curriculum. The course content is divided between Western art, defined as art "within the European tradition," and art "beyond the European artistic tradition." Art classified beyond the European tradition includes art originating in Africa (including Egypt), the Americas (Central and South America and Native American), Asia, Near East, art of Oceania, and the global Islamic tradition. In a survey of college and university courses these non-European art traditions make up roughly 20 percent of the art classes offered. The current Advanced Placement Art History test reflects that 20 percent in its questioning.

## xx ● What Successful Teachers Do in Diverse Classrooms

The Advanced Placement Art History course features an educational approach in which all students acquire an awareness, acceptance, and appreciation of cultural diversity and recognize the contributions of many cultures via an art history context. Unfortunately, few other courses in schools today can make this claim. The multicultural education genre and its exact role in the classroom remains less than clearly defined. Most educators understand the reasons we need to be multiculturally sensitive but may not know exactly how to do that.

**Sarah McNary**

I was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada, and had the opportunity to attend school in a time when cultural differences were accentuated and celebrated. Even today, many Canadians define themselves as Chinese Canadian, French Canadian, Russian Canadian, and so forth. Their ethnic heritage precedes their current citizenship, and the common belief is that individuality is to be valued.

When I came to teach in the United States, it was a small step to embrace the cultural differences I found in my students. The real challenge for me came when I began working at a lower-income school a few miles from the Mexican border. Celebrating my students' ethnic culture was easy, but understanding the issues they faced because of their socioeconomic status was not. The following year I became a special educator, and my definition of culture expanded once again. My students had a whole other set of concerns related to their disabilities, in addition to their ethnicities and family income levels.

For years, I worked on learning how best to meet my students' individual needs. I read whatever research I could get my hands on and queried my students and their families. Over the last three years, I have been teaching a credit recovery class and, as a result, my view of culture has expanded again. These days, I have the good fortune to know my students as individuals, and the experience has humbled me. There is no one right answer, no one definition of culture, and no single instructional technique that works every time. But there are a variety of techniques that can make all the difference in the right set of circumstances.

**Cathy Hicks**

Although my career began in the gymnasium, I spent 18 years as a Health Education teacher working with high school students. Because Health is a graduation requirement in our district, I taught almost every student in the school. I valued and embraced the diversity of the students, who came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, in my classroom. Yet their diversity placed a responsibility on my shoulders to ensure that issues were discussed with sensitivity and compassion. The curriculum for

Health deals with many controversial areas including sex education, hate and violence prevention, drug use and prevention, and disease prevention. Each of these areas requires sensitivity to make sure that each student feels safe and respected.

Let me give you an example. Often in American culture, people are comfortable with general conversations about reproduction. Yet in other cultures, reproduction and sexuality can be taboo subjects even to the point of talking about childbirth. I can remember assigning a homework project where students had to interview their parents about the circumstances surrounding their mothers' pregnancies and subsequent births. Some students returned with childbirth videos while others explained that their mothers were embarrassed and said they would complete the paper for the teacher privately. Still other parents were confused by the scientific language used to describe the human body. This assignment also called for sensitivity with regard to students who were adopted or no longer lived with their mothers.

In the last six years working as the director of our district's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment/Induction program, I have learned that it is important for each teacher, regardless of the subject he or she teaches, to make every student feel emotionally and physically safe and respected. Health classes offer the unique opportunity to bring some of the issues surrounding culture, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, gender, and other topics out into a positive discussion. But other classes can embrace these differences in a supportive environment. The most important consideration for teachers to remember is that we are teaching students first and the subject matter second.