Crossing Multicultural Borders:
Students, Faculty, and Difference in the University Classroom

WANDA CREASER
Texas A & M International University

With all the emphasis on theoretical and cultural studies in literature programs and in rhetoric and composition programs today, English departments seem to believe, perhaps by default rather than careful reflection, that their PhD graduates are well prepared for the multicultural reality of U.S. colleges and universities. Scholars and teachers with PhDs in English are well-versed in identity studies, gender studies, ethnicity studies, and postcolonial studies. They are very good at talking and writing about these subjects in the abstract. However, when facing a classroom of students who come from cultural backgrounds considerably different from the hypothetical college student's, with identities, values, faiths, beliefs, and myths unlike those of mainstream America, they—we—are woefully ill-prepared.

The most complete body of literature on diversity in the classroom, quite reasonably, focuses on language issues. However, less tangible elements of culture, invisible within statistical data, are divorced neither from student performance nor faculty success in the classroom. I would like to encourage a more open and honest dialogue about teaching diverse student populations at the college level, populations representing cultures, religions, social classes, and ethnic backgrounds unlike our own, whatever our own may be. I do so with the hope we can build a body of literature on the subject, as the existing literature is sparse. Furthermore,

it tends frequently to be so short on specifics as to be of little assistance to faculty seeking

information and guidance on how best to serve their students.[1] A variety of factors contribute to

the silence, including the proclivity of English PhD programs to prepare students for institutions

like the ones from which they are graduating, where undergraduate demographics may differ

substantially from the demographics of "teaching" institutions, and where discussions of

diversity remain largely theoretical. Only thirty-three percent of PhDs in English who acquire

faculty positions (full- and part-time) do so at research institutions; the rest are spread out across

the country, primarily at regional universities and community colleges (Laurence 12). These

regional universities and community colleges, along with liberal arts colleges, enroll

approximately seventy-five percent of the undergraduate population in higher education (*Higher

Education* Fig. 2-1). Moreover, statistics on "race/ethnicity" reveal that eighty percent of faculty

in higher education are White (*Digest of Education Statistics* Table 253). The numbers may help

explain the scarcity of focused and frank examinations of teaching and diversity.

Undoubtedly, a fear of stereotyping or ethnocentricity has resulted in ambiguous

references to culture in the classroom or, more often, to avoidance of the topic altogether, but I

would suggest that nothing is more ethnocentric than pretending everyone is the same. By our

omission, we also pretend the classroom is devoid of human beings and their emotions. More

than twenty-five years ago, poet and feminist Audre Lorde noted the serious error we make when

we fail to acknowledge differences among groups of people:

> Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences
>
> between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the
>
> distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation.

And:

> Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those
>
> differences are insurmountable barriers, *or that they do not exist at all* (emphasis mine). (115)

We in the English profession would be better served and could better serve our undergraduate and graduate students if we heeded Lorde's advice and acknowledged that, whereas people may be alike in holding values, desiring happiness, and possessing dreams, not everyone's values and dreams are the same, and happiness is not derived from the same sources by everyone. Significantly, these differences are not left at the classroom door by either students or professors; they affect the learning environment. Our profession needs to be better prepared to anticipate and to respond productively to them.

The potential for cultural differences, cultural naiveté, even culture clashes between professors and students that affect teaching and learning can occur in a variety of permutations, including but not limited to: social and political liberals teaching in conservative regions of the country; non-religious individuals or secularists at universities with a large number of students of any given religion (Baptist, Catholic, Mormon, Muslim, for example); Jews by ethnicity but not faith at Orthodox Jewish institutions; faculty with no military background teaching in military institutions or at universities serving military populations; white (or other non-Black) professors teaching at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); and white (or other non-Hispanic) professors teaching at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).

The time calls for reassessing our own relationships to our students' cultural assumptions and traditions if for no other reason than the demographic transformation the country is presently undergoing. A reassessment proves especially critical for English departments because they

serve most university and college students, who are channeled through them for their

composition and humanities requirements. Moreover, writing classes are usually small, relatively

speaking, with more student-instructor contact than in other departments, and assignments

frequently include topics containing a cultural component. The opportunity to discuss candidly

the confusion, discomfort, frustrations, pleasures, successes, and failures that can result from

cultural differences between students and instructors, as well as among the students themselves,

should be embraced, not ignored or avoided.

I.

My own teaching environment has led me on a quest for information on the subject, as

have conversations with faculty from across the country. For five years I have taught at a

Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in Laredo, Texas, on the U.S.-Mexico border of south Texas,

where the local population is approximately ninety-five percent Hispanic (United States. Census

Bureau). My experience is as a white female who grew up in the upper Midwest not far from that

other U.S. border, the one with Canada. However, I consider the Southwestern region of the

United States home, having spent most of my adult life there. At my previous university, in

Arizona, I regularly taught Mexican-American and Mexican students, and although this

background may have been a contributing factor in my being hired at my present institution, it

has done surprisingly little to prepare me for some of the situations and challenges I now

encounter. My specialty is eighteenth-century British literature, and I regularly teach it and the

first half of the English literature survey, as well as advanced writing courses and the occasional

theory course. My students are mostly young and bright, exhibiting a variety of study habits,

some good, some poor—in many ways they are no different than the "traditional" university

student. But, culturally, students on the border of south Texas are quite different from the hypothetical students (i.e., white, middle-class) most of us were prepared by our PhD programs to teach. Border cultures are uniquely different from the dominant cultures of the countries they straddle. And whereas U.S.-Mexico border communities share some similar traits as well as similar problems, including a history of poverty, they are by no means homogenous. The border communities of south Texas are dissimilar in a number of ways from those of California or Arizona, for example, as well as from each other. Religious tradition, geographic isolation, long-standing poverty, and stronger cultural and familial ties with Mexico than with the United States have all contributed to the distinct culture of Laredo and its surrounding areas.

These are the particulars of my own situation; however, I am not alone in my pursuit of information regarding teaching and multiculturalism. Conversations with colleagues from across the country suggest English faculty are hungry for resources and for the opportunity to share stories, ask questions, and seek advice from others in comparable environments or any environment that can lead to cultural confusion in the classroom. (It should be noted that cultural differences can cause students as much bewilderment as they do professors. Furthermore, students make assumptions about their professors based on the students' own cultural backgrounds, just as professors do about students.) Questions posed at conferences also indicate the need for open discussions about multicultural teaching environments. For example, the topic of teaching in the American Bible Belt has arisen regularly at literary studies conferences I have attended in the past few years. Sometimes a presenter or an audience member asks for advice directly; at other times, the question is of the "Can you believe what my students" did/said/thought variety. The fact that people are cautious about seeking information at their

home institutions relating to culture and religion, waiting instead for the safety of the question-and-answer period following conference sessions when they are among distant colleagues, certainly suggests their awareness of the sensitive nature, or the perceived sensitive nature, of the subject matter as well as the possibility of others passing judgment. Junior faculty tend to avoid broaching with their more established colleagues back home the subject of cultural differences for fear of someone interpreting their request for help as an indication of their failure in the classroom, or worse, as evidence of their prejudice or insensitivity towards their students—when, in fact, their curiosity signifies the exact opposite. Instead, informal discussions about culture sometimes spill outside conference venues onto the sidewalk or continue over lunch among newly formed acquaintances bonded by similarly puzzling experiences with students. But why must this dialogue be so surreptitious—and what good is it doing the profession when it is?

II.

In the spirit of avoiding ambiguity and leaving to vague language a topic in need of precise details, I discuss below three specific examples of cultural disparity that have influenced my own professor-student dynamic. I do so with the hope of reaching out to others who encounter similarly perplexing dilemmas. Perhaps some readers can identify with the uncertainty and other emotions that present themselves when the cultural assumptions of students and professors differ. Please note that I am not claiming any one culture is wrong or right, only that differences exist; it seems pointless and certainly detrimental to ignore them. The first scenario relates to what I will term family values; the second, to values associated with education and work; and the third concerns a particular cultural myth that has emerged in my classrooms and office hours in most unexpected ways.

Family Values

In the local Hispanic culture and the Latino culture more generally, the concept of family operates in a way most of mainstream America cannot easily comprehend.[2] The family unit, which includes a large extended family network, offers identity, pleasure, and solace, but, by mainstream American standards, it is likely to be viewed as interfering and controlling when it comes to the life of the individual. In South Texas Hispanic families, the focus is not on the self, as it is for many Americans, who adopt a very individualistic approach to their "unalienable right" to the "pursuit of happiness" promised in the Constitution. In the Latino culture, family is the center of everything, and the individual's obligation to it is crucial; the family is privileged over the individual's needs and desires. As Jeannette Rodriguez maintains, "The family (including good friends and godparents—*compadres*) is the single most important unit in Mexican-American life" (78). Or, in sociological terms, the culture is collectivist, as opposed to individualistic (Powell and Caseau 49).

This intense emphasis on family plays out in the university student's life in a number of ways. One very conspicuous consequence is the reluctance of young adults to leave the region. Most students at my university stay in the immediate area their entire lives because their families expect them to remain geographically close. Young adults are often dissuaded or forbidden by family from going elsewhere for their undergraduate degrees, to pursue advanced degrees in other states or even elsewhere in Texas, or to leave to take a job in their chosen career fields. The force of this cultural directive is evidenced in the following real-life scenario, one of several like it I could relate. A student in a non-fiction prose writing class wrote passionately about the dream she had held since she was a young girl of becoming a marine biologist. But the student

was registered as an education major, and my university does not offer studies in marine biology. In her essay, this student described her feelings over a broken dream. She explained that even though teaching was not her preference, becoming an elementary school teacher would allow her to stay in town, remaining in close proximity to her parents, which is what they wanted. When I conferenced with the student about her essay, I asked her to talk about her dream and why she had given up on it. She explained that because she would have to move far away to enroll in a marine biology program, her parents forbade her from going. I pointed out that she lives only two hours from a good marine biology program, on the Gulf Coast. Yes, she replied; that was the problem; the university with the program is so far away she could not possibly leave her parents to go there.

This student's decision challenges mainstream American values in multiple ways. In most American working- and middle-class families, children of legal age typically leave the nest to go to college, to join the military, or to take a job. This is what most young adults do; more significantly, it is what is *expected* of them. Young adults are expected to break away, to make choices for themselves, and to seize their independence as an integral part of maturing into adulthood. In contrast, grown children stay with the family in Hispanic families, and certainly in south Texas families. Females, especially, stay until they marry. The decision also challenges values of the academy. One of our most basic commitments as professors is to help students achieve their individual aspirations; surely we are not keen on witnessing students jettison their dreams. Moreover, many faculty have given up a great deal to pursue their own career goals, moving around the country, taking on heavy debt, and relocating to places far away from family

and friends. Individuals in both cultures are willing to make personal sacrifices, but they choose to sacrifice in very different ways. What each is willing to sacrifice is culturally determined.

In addition to helping undergraduates pursue their dreams and attain their goals, another important part of our job as professors is preparing talented undergraduates to go on to graduate or professional school. But frequently, promising undergraduates on the south Texas border who seem likely candidates for continuing their educations choose instead to stop at the bachelor's degree when continuing would mean moving away. Faculty reaction may include very human feelings of disappointment or discouragement or even a sense of failure. After repeated "failures," some faculty may be unwilling to continue investing the kinds of time and energy it takes to ready undergraduates for graduate programs. In fact, I have witnessed a colleague express frustration over having "wasted time" again and again on students who back out of tentative plans for attending graduate school or who have been accepted into prestigious programs only to turn down remarkable opportunities in order to stay put. Intellectually, faculty can accept the student's decision as fitting well within the parameters of cultural expectation, and they can comprehend the willingness to give up personal goals for the sake of family as something that may be viewed with admiration, but on an emotional level, they may find the decision disturbing. The situation brings to light one of the most difficult challenges of maneuvering cultural differences: accepting values our own culture has taught us to reject.

Work or College, Work *and* College

The values of mainstream American culture, from which the majority of English faculty originate, and the Hispanic culture of south Texas are also at odds over the relationship between education and work. In American society, a university education has historically been seen as a

means to a better life. This perspective is not shared by a significant portion of the south Texas

Hispanic community. Instead, education and work can be pitted against each other. Most parents

of students at my university are proud of their children for going to college, but, despite

extensive university outreach, they possess little comprehension of just what university study

entails. At worst, some parents and grandparents discourage or forbid the pursuit of a degree

because they see four or more years in college as four or more years of lost income; the

individual could be earning a paycheck instead of sitting in classrooms. At best, a university

degree is too often something to be acquired on the side, something to be obtained while

working. It takes not a secondary position but a tertiary one because family and work precede it

in order of importance. When "college attendance is viewed as delaying one's entrance into the

workforce" and "family expectations constantly conflict and compete with academic"

obligations, the result is "conflict for the student" (Newman 19). Some readers may be

uncomfortable with claims such as these. They may feel, as Aja Y. Martinez suggests, that the

perspective of Mexican-Americans as devaluing education is inaccurate. Martinez maintains that

her Latino/a students in southern Arizona "internalize" what she sees as a well-worn stereotype,

one she finds linked to the push by mainstream America to assimilate (587-588). Certainly,

marginalized people may internalize negative images. However, I would like to reemphasize the

unique nature of the Laredo area of south Texas. At nearly ninety-five percent of the population,

Hispanics constitute the majority by a wide margin, with local government and businesses

reflecting that figure. And although many of my students watch MTV, and, as a graduate student

of mine likes to point out, consider the Whopper as authentic as tamales when it comes to

"native" cuisine, assimilation is not a driving force because it is unnecessary. A distinctive

society developed in the region long ago—far both geographically and culturally from

mainstream America, and not exactly Mexican, either. Various students have described their own

family experiences with this conflict between education and work, have discussed their own

battles to get themselves into college when parents objected, and have reported that classmates

who have disappeared from class in the middle of a semester did so because they were ordered to

stop attending school and get a job. I have no reason to doubt my students' stories of their own

real-life trials. Students have chosen to share this information with me, and I choose to listen, for

they have much to tell me about lived experiences very different from my own.

University faculty across the U.S. complain that their students work too much these days,

taking precious time away from their coursework, but the students at my university *really* work

far too much. It would be impossible for me to count the number of students in my classes who

have tried to work full time while going to school full time. They attempt to do both

simultaneously because they are expected to help support their families. In some cases students

wholly support their parents and siblings, and sometimes their grandparents or extended family

members, as well. The focus on having a paying job, even a low-wage job, is understandable,

given the entrenched poverty in the region: the county's poverty rate is thirty percent.

Moreover, the community has no tradition of education as a means of elevating lives, with only a

fifty-three percent high-school graduation rate (United States. Census Bureau.). In addition to the

difficulties students who work excessively face completing their assignments, missed

information and missed classroom participation exacerbate their struggles to succeed in college.

Students also accumulate absences due to other types of family obligations, including providing

child care for siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews, or their own children; driving family

members to doctors' appointments and to the grocery store; sitting by the bedsides of ill grandparents, uncles, aunts, and extended family members; and attending funerals—all frequent, not occasional, occurrences.

Again, faculty can learn to accept the family demand on students' time as part of the cultural norm. They recognize that "going to work to make enough money to pay the rent or the electric bill may, indeed . . . appear more pressing than handing in Essay #3" (Millward, Starkey, and Starkey 41). But what should faculty *do*? Professors want students to complete their educations in order to gain access to the opportunities a degree gives them. But the fact is, if responsibilities at home are so onerous that students miss classes and fail to do their readings and assignments for their courses, they cannot do well in school. The decision to work may be a family matter, but faculty are not left out of the equation. The pressure is on us as well as the students.

The contest between education and employment lies at the core of the next story. The parents of a student who was recently enrolled in one of my technical writing classes had decided their son could go to college and would not have to work. When not working outside the home, however, he would be expected to pull his weight around the house. Although this sounds like a reasonable request, what happened, according to my student, was that any time he sat down in a quiet part of the house to read or to work on his writing assignments, his parents sought him out and demanded he get up and "do something." They perceived him as "not working" if he was sitting still, attempting to study. This portion of the scenario is one other students have also reported. Studying elsewhere, such as at the library or a friend's house, is not an option because parents with little understanding of the demands of college beyond class attendance expect their

sons and daughters to be at home when not in the classroom or in transit to the university. This student's work in all of his classes suffered, and he fell further behind as the semester wore on. The student sought my assistance, and I guided him in finding financial aid and moving into the dorms. But this is only part of the story because, although my student succeeded in moving out, the stress he was already undergoing was compounded by the pressure associated with the cultural perspective that by moving away (a move of fewer than ten miles), he was turning his back on his family, which needed his help. And as for me, in my role as his professor, was I right to encourage him to go against cultural norms in order, as I saw it, to save himself?

Patrolling the Border

If cultural differences as they relate to the values placed on family and education qualify as sensitive subjects, the next one addressed here undoubtedly does. The subject is virginity. Despite the fact I study the history of medicine in conjunction with my eighteenth-century scholarship, virginity is not a topic I ever expected to be writing about. But then, I never expected, as a professor of literature and writing, to have to teach students human anatomy and physiology, the facts of which often contradict my students' religious, cultural, and familial beliefs. Cultural myths engender real-life consequences. As a feminist and a professor who wants her students to have the facts in order for them to make the best decisions for their own lives, what am I to do when local folklore and traditions affect the health and well-being of my students? Imagine the confusion and potential embarrassment, both for the student and the professor, when an undergraduate's literary analysis paper revealed the utter misinformation some of my students have about virginity.

Let me be the first to point out that the south Texas Hispanic community is not alone in attempting to control the sexuality of females, nor is it the only one to employ myths about virginity as a strategy for doing so. All cultures possess myths about virginity, including mainstream American culture. Virginity is socially constructed. Religious doctrine, religious authorities, community elders, and family all contribute to an individual's sexuality; all have a part in shaping for the community notions about virginity, as well as in proscribing for the females and males alike "appropriate" sexual behavior.[3] A myth all cultures appear to share is that of a physical marker of virginity in the female, namely in the form of the hymen. But the hymen, too, is a social construction, not a biological fact. No reliable physical indicator of virginity exists. Historically, the hymen's existence has been disputed within the medical field, and with good reason, for what has been named the hymen consists of nothing more than a typically tiny bit of tissue remaining from the formation of the vagina during fetal development. Hanne Blank bluntly explains it thus: "PUT IN THE SIMPLEST TERMS POSSIBLE, a hymen is what's left over when you dig a hole" (32-33).[4] What the hymen is not is a seal, a closure, or a covering; nothing closes off the vagina as a sign of a female's sexual "purity."

But scientific facts have never stopped myths from flourishing, and the south Texas Hispanic community uses folklore to control the sexuality of young women through overt and covert means. The incident with my student's paper was my introduction to local virginity myths and their potential effect on students. It occurred when an undergraduate in a senior-level eighteenth-century literature class wanted help with her paper on a prose work published in 1725, Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze*. The story is about "A YOUNG Lady of distinguished Birth" reared in the countryside (Haywood 257), who, seeing that London men

enjoy the company of the prostitutes at plays more than the company of a virtuous young woman like herself, disguises herself to get their attention and to partake in the unrestricted conversation, flirting, and fun the prostitutes and the men appear to have. Matters quickly get out of hand, and the protagonist ends up having sex without the benefit of marriage. Her sexual adventures continue for a period of months. The protagonist, Fantomina, experiences an "Authority over herself" (287), a level of freedom women of her time and social class were prohibited from knowing. But because the story is written and set in the early eighteenth century, Fantomina must be punished for flouting societal norms and having sex at will, and, ultimately, she becomes pregnant. After Fantomina gives birth, her mother plans to send her off to France to live in a convent.[5]

My student was interested in the disgrace the protagonist's behavior brings on her mother, which, in itself, is a very culturally based concern. My student's thesis focused on deceit and honesty, with her claim stating that Fantomina would have to be honest if she were to mend her ways and protect her family's reputation. Reading through my student's final point, in which she suggested that even if Fantomina wanted to marry in France, she would not be able to do so without the man's knowing about her past, I *thought* my student meant the man would know because, following my student's argument, Fantomina would have to tell him if she were truly committed to honesty. But what she meant, I discovered from an exchange that can only be described as a comedy of errors, one too lengthy to recount here, was that the husband would know Fantomina was not a virgin. (She was not about to say the words "virgin" or "hymen," however.) I told her that men really cannot tell whether or not a woman is a virgin, although some may think they can, and then, feeling uncertain to what extent I should burst the cultural

bubble, I bluntly told her this notion and the hymen are myths. And I asked her where she had learned her information: was it something girls talk about among themselves as they are growing up, or is it something mothers and grandmothers teach their girls, to which she nodded yes, it was something learned from the women of the family. Then I knew for certain I was not dealing with erroneous information only but also with a cultural belief, and, as a white female outsider, I was not sure just what I could or should say. After all, I was not happy to learn that girls were being supplied with such fictions for their edification, but was it my place to unravel them for my students? I was not certain. I am still not entirely certain.

Underlying my student's thesis was a cultural assumption connecting a daughter's virginity with family honor, an assumption my student believed any reader would comprehend and share.[6] Since the incident with my student's paper, young women in the community have chatted informally with me about the topic of virginity, sharing experiences and family lore that suggest a private parallel to the ubiquitous border patrol presence in the region. The community and the family—mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers and cousins—are all charged with protecting the virginity of young females. Largely, what the family feels the need to protect, of course, is the fantastical hymen. Not surprisingly, the girl is the one primarily responsible. And that means no "messing around" with boys, but it implies much more: it means no penetration of any sort, a prohibition that extends beyond sexual intercourse to the use of tampons and even to gynecological exams. Girls in the community are told not to use tampons because the belief is tampons will break the hymen. In a study of Latina students enrolled at universities throughout the American West and Southwest, Aida Hurtado also encountered this "Nice girls don't use tampons" admonition (61). More alarming, local girls are told it is wrong to

see a gynecologist before they become pregnant. The common reproach, as translated into

English**,** is, "*Good girls* don't go to the doctor until they're pregnant." That would be married

and pregnant, of course. Cautionary tales of "ruined" aunts and cousins who were rejected by

fiancés and new husbands are also sometimes trotted out as ammunition in the argument against

seeing a gynecologist before pregnancy. The taboo engenders some frightening repercussions,

increasing health risks and prohibiting or limiting access to birth control for young women who

would otherwise be willing to use it. The recommendation of the American College of

Obstetricians and Gynecologists for the age at which girls should first see a gynecologist is

thirteen to fifteen (*Your*). The cultural prohibition against seeing a gynecologist before becoming

pregnant means young females miss regular medical exams, screenings for specific health

problems, and information about their bodies, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases

(STDs). Moreover, potentially serious health problems go unaddressed. As one example, a bright

and delightful former student of mine experienced a gynecologically related health scare that

frightened and worried her, but the proscription against having a vaginal exam has been so

ingrained in her that she cannot bring herself to seek medical attention—even with my offer to

accompany her to the doctor's office.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the pregnancy rate among young women is high in the area, at

over sixty-seven percent above the national average for teens fifteen to nineteen (United States.

National Center for Health Statistics). This data amounts to more than cold statistics, for I am

drawn into the reality behind it each time one of my students visits during office hours to inform

me she is pregnant and cannot concentrate on her university studies or must drop out, perhaps

temporarily, perhaps permanently. The exact stories may differ, but my predicament is not

entirely unique; female English faculty at universities in religiously conservative areas of the

United States have recounted making the difficult decision to discuss birth control with their

young female students after recurrent versions of these office visits. And I am aware of male

faculty who have decided to give lessons to the young men in their classes about how to use a

condom. Such decisions are not easy to make because faculty must weigh doing what they

believe is right out of concern for individual students who are clearly in need of the information

against overstepping religious boundaries and interfering with the ways of the community.

Dilemmas such as those described here are not hypothetical. They arise with no warning and in

real time, and they involve human beings, sometimes in emotionally wrought situations.

The discourse on multiculturalism has long been dominated by the center; that is, by

theoretical scholarship emanating from research universities. This discourse is of great value, but

in combination with its theoretical nature it frequently tends to the idealistic. Faculty located at

the far corners of the country, or in religiously conservative regions in its middle, or in

metropolitan areas with large international student populations know idealism can take flight

quickly when cultural assumptions diverge, beliefs clash, and values collide. Moreover, when

sources aiming to focus on praxis rely on vague allusions to difference without ever naming it

and analyzing it, we make little progress. No one should have to fear a candid discussion of

difference, especially when the goal is to improve teaching and learning. We would do well to

appreciate that "[i]n addressing diversity, we must address the issue of difference. . . . differences

must be critically examined" (James 46). It is time to take the next logical step of moving the

discussion out into the field, where faculty both contribute to difference and work in its midst on

a daily basis. This dialogue would complement the theoretical work already being done on the

topic of diversity. We will never be able to respond effectively to multiculturalism in the classroom if we cannot examine it openly and honestly.

Notes

[1] To date, the area of preservice teacher preparation within the discipline of Education has explored the topic of diversity within the K-12 classroom to some extent, whereas diversity within the college classroom has been largely ignored. But even then, an assessment of peer-reviewed and online sources designed to offer advice for establishing successful multicultural K-12 classrooms turns up fuzzy platitudes such as "we must be open" and "non-judgmental" (Fish). Sources offering real-life examples and insights as forthrightly as Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children,* for example, are in the minority (*Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New Press-Norton, 2006). Regardless of the literature's specificity, or its applicability beyond the K-12 years, PhDs in English are unlikely to encounter it because they rarely cross paths with the literature from the field of Education.

For a review of some preservice sources, see Banks, James A., and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds., *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. 7th ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2010; Phillion, Joann, Ming Fang He, and F. Michael Connelly. *Narrative and Experience in Multicultural Education*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005; Dilg, Mary. *Thriving in the Multicultural Classroom: Principles and Practices for Effective Teaching*. New York: Teachers College P, 2003; Banks, James A., and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds. *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003; Boyle-Baise, Marilynne. *Multicultural Service Learning: Educating Teachers in Diverse Communities*. New York:

Teachers College P, 2002; Sleeter, Christine E. "Epistemological Diversity in Research on Preservice Teacher Preparation for Historically Underserved Children." *Review of Research in Education*. 25 (2000-2001): 209-250; Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

[2] I intend by "mainstream" the standard connotation, i.e., the dominant, White, primarily Protestant culture of the United States.

[3] See, for example, Loughlin, Marie H. *Hymeneutics*, Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1997; Ferguson, Margaret W. Foreword, *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie, Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999, 9; Schwartz, Kathryn, "The Wrong Question: Thinking through Virginity," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13 (2002): 1-34; Seidman, Steven, *The Social Construction of Sexuality*, New York: Norton, 2003; Zavella, Patricia, and Xóchiti Castañeda, "Sexuality and Risks: Gendered Discourses about Virginity and Disease among Young Women of Mexican Origin," *Latino Studies*, 3.2 (2005): 226-245.

[4] For commentary from the eighteenth century, see Marten, John. *A Treatise of the Venereal Disease*. London, 1711. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Web; and *Medical Records and Researches, Selected from the Papers of a Private Medical Association*. London, 1798. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Web. See also Loughlin, Marie H. *Hymeneutics*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1997, 30-32, for a summary of dissention on the topic among French physicians during the Renaissance.

[5] This bit of information, coming at the very end of the story, is no doubt a joke, since the reputation of French convents in the eighteenth century, and earlier, was one of loose morals and

looser women. However, my student was unaware of this information at the time she wrote her paper. See Croskery, Margaret Case. "Masquing Desire: The Politics of Passion in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*." *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*. Ed. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2000. 91-92.

[6] For discussions of the relationship between female virginity and family honor, see Zavella, Patricia, and Xóchiti Castañeda. "Sexuality and Risks: Gendered Discourses about Virginity and Disease among Young Women of Mexican Origin." *Latino Studies* 3.2 (2005): 226-245; and Rodriguez, Jeanette. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1994.

Works Cited

Blank, Hanne. *Virgin: The Untouched History*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print.

Fish, Larri. *Building Blocks: the First Steps of Creating a Multicultural Classroom*. Research
    Room, EdChange Multicultural Pavilion. Fairfax, VA, 2002. Web. 16 Jan. 2010.

Haywood, Eliza. *Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze*. *Secret Histories, Novels and Poems*. Vol. 3.
    2nd ed. London, 1725, 265-291. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Web. 13 Jan.
    2010.

Hurtado, Aída. *Voicing Chicana Feminisms: Young Women Speak Out on Sexuality and Identity*.
    New York: New York UP, 2003. Print.

James, Carl E. "Diversity in the Classroom: Engagement and Resistance." *Voices from the*

Classroom: Reflections on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Ed. Janice

Newton, et al. Aurora, Ontario: Garamond P, 2001. 45-53. Print.

Laurence, David. MLA. *Demography of the Faculty: A Statistical Portrait of English and

Foreign Languages*. New York: MLA. Web. 10 Dec. 2008.

Lorde, Audre. "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." *Sister Outsider*.

Berkeley: Crossing P, 1984. 114-123. Print.

Martinez, Aja Y. "'The American Way': Resisting the Empire of Force and Color-Blind

Racism." *College English* 71.6 (2009): 584-595. *ProQuest*. Web. 12 Jan. 2010.

Millward, Jody, Sandra Starkey, and David Starkey. "Teaching English in a California Two-Year

Hispanic-Serving Institution: Complexities, Challenges, Programs, and Practices."

*Teaching Writing with Latino/a Students: Lessons Learned at Hispanic-Serving

Institutions*. Ed. Cristina Kirklighter, Diana Cárdenas, and Susan Wolff Murphy. Albany:

State U of New York P, 2007. 37-59. Print.

Newman, Beatrice Méndez. "Teaching Writing at Hispanic-Serving Institutions." *Teaching

Writing with Latino/a Students: Lessons Learned at Hispanic-Serving Institutions*. Ed.

Cristina Kirklighter, Diana Cárdenas, and Susan Wolff Murphy. Albany: State U of New

York P, 2007. 17-35. Print.

Powell, Robert G., and Dana Caseau. *Classroom Communication and Diversity: Enhancing

Institutional Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. Print.

Rodriguez, Jeannette. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-

American Women*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1994. Print.

Texas. Department of State Health Services. *Texas Health Data. Births to Texas Residents*.

Austin: State of Texas, 7 Oct. 2009. Web. 12 Jan. 2010.

United States. Census Bureau. *Webb County QuickFacts*. Washington, DC: GPO, 16 Nov. 2009.

Web. 6 Feb. 2010.

---. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education

Statistics 2008*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2009. Web. 13 Aug.

2010.

--. National Center for Health Statistics. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for

Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta: CDC, 24 Jul. 2008. Web. 26 Jul. 2009.

---. NSF. *Higher Education in Science and Engineering*. Arlington: NSF, 2004. Web. 1 Aug.

2010.

Your First Gyn Visit. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Washington, DC,

June 2006. Web. 22 Jan. 2010.