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Diversity in student attitudes and motivations in the community college composition classroom

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Diversity in student attitudes and motivations
in the community college composition classroom

by

Martha E. Boysen

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

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Iowa State University
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION
- Statement of the Problem .......................... 1
- Need for the Study .................................. 1
- Purpose and Objectives of the Study .......... 3
- Organization of the Study ......................... 4

## CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW
- Definitions of Diversity ............................ 5
- Approaches to Diversity ............................. 7
  - The Administrative Approach .................... 8
  - The Pedagogical Approach ....................... 10
  - The Political Approach ........................... 12
  - The Influence of the Diversity Literature .... 16
- Problems in the Application of Diversity Research .... 17
- Uses of Large-Scale Patterns of Diversity in Classroom Management 18
- The Problem of Individual Variation ............. 19
- Complicating Our Conception of Diversity .......... 21

## CHAPTER II. METHODS
- Description of the Study Group .................. 23
- Study Environments ................................ 25
  - Ellsworth Community College .................... 27
    - Enrollment demographics ....................... 27
    - Enrollment trends ................................ 27
    - Composition program and study classes .... 28
  - Boone Campus, Des Moines Area Community College .... 29
    - Enrollment demographics ....................... 29
    - Composition program and study classes .... 30
  - Kirkwood Community College .................... 31
    - Enrollment demographics ....................... 31
    - Enrollment trends ................................ 32
    - Composition program and study classes .... 33
- Data Collection .................................... 34
  - Questionnaires .................................... 34
    - Demographic information ....................... 35
    - Attitude survey .................................. 35
    - Individual response questions ............... 37
    - Classroom observations ....................... 38
Current discussions of diversity tend to focus primarily on broad categories of difference within the student population—age, gender, race, ethnicity, ability. These discussions have been useful in making educators more aware of the diversity of students and student needs. Some critics, however, have begun to question their value as a basis for classroom practice, arguing that the focus on the general qualities of large populations is of limited practical value to teachers, who work with individual students rather than populations, and who may therefore require more information on the nature of individual variation within populations. This thesis considers some of the ways in which the experience of individual students may relate to the larger patterns of diversity present in the classroom. Specifically, it explores age- and gender-related patterns in student attitudes toward writing in six Iowa community college composition classes. Student attitudes were measured across four domains—control, writing apprehension, student agency, and collaboration. Gender appeared to have a significant effect on overall writing apprehension scores; differences in control scores by age x pre/post scores were moderately significant. Interactions between these patterns were considered; a significant age x gender interaction was found in the writing apprehension domain. Finally, the study considered the relationship between these patterns and the experience of five individual students within the study population.
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges face a diverse and rapidly changing student population. Over the last two decades, community college student populations have become increasingly non-traditional—since the 1970s, both the total enrollment and the percentage of the total student population constituted by female, older, ethnic, international, physically- and learning-disabled, occupational, and part-time students have risen markedly. Most projections seem to indicate that the trend toward increased student diversity will continue well into the new century. Because many of these groups of students have, or are often assumed to have, different needs, expectations, and abilities than the mythical "traditional student" (male, white, eighteen, middle-class, academically-inclined, highly motivated, and well-scrubbed), diversity has become an increasingly important issue for community college instructors and administrators.

Need for the Study

Despite the fact that diversity has been for the past few years perhaps one of the most widely discussed topics in education, current research specifically on
diversity within the English composition and community college education literature is sparse. The term itself, freely as it is used, is not well-defined. In general, writers who discuss diversity overtly seem to take one of three approaches. The first is the administrative approach (e.g., Kasworm, 1990; Long & Blanchard, 1991), which is concerned primarily with student groups requiring special programs and/or remediation. The second approach, the pedagogical approach (e.g., Galis, 1993; Bizzell, 1986), focuses on classroom management of groups perceived to have special learning needs; the special groups studied in this literature include a wide range of types of student difference, among them gender, race or ethnicity, sexual preference, age, socio-economic status, social background, physical disability, learning disability, personality type, learning style, educational objectives, primary language, and writing ability. The third approach, the political (e.g., Gold, 1977; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991), is primarily concerned with defining the unique characteristics of traditionally subordinate social groups, altering existing power relationships between dominant and subordinate groups in the classroom, and empowering subordinate groups.

All three approaches, the administrative, the pedagogical, and the political, share a tendency to define diversity in terms of broad categories of difference—age, gender, race, ethnicity. The focus of much of this research has been on defining the general qualities of particular populations of students, and from these qualities drawing implications for administrative or classroom practice. A number of critics have argued that although such generalizations have been valuable in raising awareness among administrators and educators of the needs of previously overlooked student populations, they provide a
relatively poor guide for day to day classroom practice. The primary problem is not the classifications themselves, but rather the fact that teachers must work with students, not at the level of the population, but at the level of the individual. Attempting to apply generalized categories directly to individual students, critics argue, overlooks both the complexity of the classroom environment and the individual variations that may exist within any given population.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

To better understand and more effectively manage student diversity, it will be necessary to develop a more realistic definition of diversity, one which takes into account the complexity of the classroom setting, the range of differences between students, and the relationship of individual students to larger patterns of difference. While it is admittedly impossible to explore every aspect of diversity in the scope of this thesis, I would like to begin complicating the conception of diversity set forth in much of the existing literature. In this thesis, I will explore the range of student motivations, attitudes, and expectations within six community college freshman English classrooms. What large-scale patterns of difference are evident? What range of individual variation exists within these large-scale patterns? How do the experience, attitudes, and expectations of individual students relate to these patterns? Are there ways in which both the large-scale patterns and the individual variations within those patterns might provide a useful guide for classroom practice?
Organization of the Study

This study is presented in four chapters. Chapter I reviews the historical and current literature on student diversity and difference, reviews current criticism of the existing literature, and proposes alternate definitions of diversity. Chapter II explains the choice of observation and survey as research methodologies, and details elements of the study, including environments, subjects, and data collection. Chapter III includes two sections, detailing the results of the study. The first section presents the survey results. The second section analyzes the relationship between those results and individual student profiles. Chapter IV discusses implications of the study for teachers and suggests directions for further research.
CHAPTER I
LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Diversity

While diversity is probably one of the most-discussed issues in current higher-education literature, it is also one of the least clearly defined and, as Richard Caple (1990) argues, one of the least understood. Writers rarely attempt to define the term explicitly, and all too often the meaning a writer assigns to diversity must be inferred from her discussion of other issues—remediation, multiculturalism, gender. Those that do attempt definitions tend, as May Lou Santovec (1992) does, to offer only vague explanations: "Diversity is that rich mixture of race, age, religion, disability, gender, and ethnic background essential to the quality of campus life...[I]t is the spice that adds to the quality of life and culture" (p. 1). A "rich mixture of race, age, et cetera" certainly sounds good, and it fits well with popular conceptions of diversity. What do such definitions really mean, though? Why, for example, are these particular factors the ones that define diversity and the "quality of campus life"? How do they relate to one another, and to the issue of diversity in general? What is the role of diversity in the classroom, on campus, in society as a whole (other than adding "spice")? Although there seems to be a general sense that diversity is somehow akin to variety or multiculturalism, there seems to be no clear-cut or generally agreed-upon definition of diversity within either the education or composition literature. Indeed, despite almost three decades of discussion, it remains so ill-
defined that, as Charles Bryan remarks, it sometimes "seems as though it means anything the speakers want it to mean" (Santovec, 1992, p. 33).

As a number of critics have pointed out, the very vagueness and abstractness of the term has allowed for a broad range of uses. Within the English composition and community college literatures, diversity has been applied to discussions of difference within and among student populations, institutions, programs, faculty, academic theories, and subject matter. Within the literature on student populations alone, the term has been variously used to refer to students needing special remediation (academically underprepared, nonpersisting, and learning disabled students); to student populations requiring special funding channels or programs (commuter, part-time, transfer, and occupational students); and to "individuals from diverse backgrounds" (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991, p. 367) (female, minority, disabled, homosexual, culturally diverse, international, disadvantaged, and adult students). On the whole, the term diversity, as applied to students, seems to be a convenient shorthand used to describe any student who does not fit the model of the mythical "traditional student"—that is, any student who is not a full-time resident in a traditional degree program; any student who does not intend to continue straight through a program from freshman year to graduation without opting out, stopping out, or dropping out; any student who is not a white Euro-American Protestant male, eighteen, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, and academically inclined.
Approaches to Diversity

Despite the current and historical discussions of the needs of diverse students, then, the concept of diversity itself has remained fairly vague. Never clearly defined, but still generally accepted as a central educational issue, its application seems less influenced by any sort of coherent theoretical base than by the individual theoretical and political agendas of various writers, and by changes in the general political, social, and educational climates. The diversity literature of the 1970s, for example, tended to focus much more heavily on remediation and institutional/administrative definitions of diversity, echoing the concern at the time with meeting the practical needs of populations which were then relatively new to higher education. Current literature, on the other hand, especially that published since 1990, echoes both the political activism of non-traditional student groups and the recognition that American education should reflect the pluralism of American society. This literature tends to focus more strongly on “political” forms of diversity, most notably race, ethnicity, and gender, which are often grouped together under the rubric “multiculturalism.” Given the general ambiguity of the concept of diversity, it is worth considering some of the major current and historical approaches to diversity—the administrative, the pedagogical, and the political—what they imply for teachers, and how they might apply to a (re)definition of the concept and its implications for the classroom.
The Administrative Approach

The administrative approach to diversity has historically been an important strain of the diversity literature. Writers who take this approach tend to be primarily concerned, not with the personal characteristics (age, gender, race, et cetera) of the students themselves, but rather with the paths those students take through the institution. The types of diversity addressed by this literature, then, tend to group students by special institutional needs or tracks: transfer students, occupational students, part-time students, students with discontinuous enrollment patterns (among them recurrent, drop-out, and stop-out students), nonpersistent students, and academically underprepared (remedial, marginal, or developmental) students (e.g., Cohen & Brawer, 1989; Knoell, 1973; Santovec, 1993; Warren, 1989).

Although students are sometimes grouped according to personal characteristics under this approach—usually age, gender, ethnicity, primary language, physical disability, and/or veteran status—administrative diversity literature is much less concerned with the political or social ramifications of difference than the other two strains of the literature. Although the groups of students under consideration are often determined by the political and social atmosphere (the needs of veterans, for example, were much more commonly addressed in the literature twenty years ago, immediately post-Vietnam, than they are today), and although these writers do not pretend to ignore the social and political questions raised by changes in the student population, their primary concern is with the programmatic needs of these students. That is, discussions of, for example, adult students tend to focus not on classroom management or
empowerment, but rather on enrollment patterns, retention, and special needs for support, aid, or remediation (e.g., Kasworm, 1990; Knoell, 1973; Long & Blanchard, 1991)—members of the adult student population are defined less by their learning needs or their social/political concerns than by their part-time and discontinuous enrollment, their relatively low need for career counselling, their concentration in occupational fields, and their relatively high need for special support programs to help them balance multiple responsibilities (Bulpitt, 1973).

The focus of the administrative diversity literature is, then, discovering what students' program and support needs are and how to go about meeting them. Administrative diversity asks: if these groups are different from the traditional student--fresh out of high school, attending full-time in an academic program, with few outside obligations--how do we convince them to attend? How do we convince them to stay? What do we have to do to make sure they keep up? Can we assume that the academic environment may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar to them; if so, what support can we give them? The reasons behind these concerns are sometimes difficult to interpret. Chaplin (1988) suggests that the tendency to focus on remediation and special support programs stems from fears that the increasing diversity of student populations might lead to an erosion of academic standards, hence the tendency to classify new populations as "remedial," "marginal," or "developmental" (p. 54). Other writers have suggested that funding is a key motivation; in an era when traditional enrollments are declining, it becomes increasingly important to attract and retain new populations--part-time students, occupational students, adults, women, minorities--to keep enrollments high. Equally important, though, are probably the democratic urge to avoid any suggestion of elitism and
the sense, especially in community colleges, that the institution has an obligation to serve all students equally.

The Pedagogical Approach

The pedagogical approach to diversity tends to focus on describing student groups perceived to have special learning needs, and on defining classroom management methods to meet the needs of these groups. In a sense, the pedagogical approach might be considered a special case of the administrative approach’s focus on remediation, since the two approaches seem to share a conviction that student groups who are markedly different from traditional students automatically have special needs and qualities that “normal” students do not. Student populations considered by writers using this approach vary widely; even a brief survey of composition, higher education, and community college literature of the past ten years reveals pedagogical diversity articles on a wide range of topics. An admittedly incomplete list would include gender (Flynn, 1988; Peterson, 1991; Twombly, 1993), race or ethnicity (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Cheung, 1984; Dean, 1989; Glau, 1990; Gomez & Grant, 1990; Kaplan, 1990; Phelan, 1991; Purves & Purves, 1986), sexual preference (Baker, 1991), age (Grosset, 1991; Kasworm, 1990; Pomereneke & Mink, 1987), socio-economic status (Galis, 1993), social background (Rotkis & McDaniel, 1993; Schonert, 1991), physical disability (Bryant; Kelly), learning disability (Martin, 1991), personality type (Jensen & DiTiberio, 1984), learning style (Claxton & Murrell, 1987), educational objectives (Bers & Smith, 1991), primary language (Clark, 1986;
Rodby, 1990; Roy, 1984), and writing ability (Bizzell, 1986; Hairston, 1984; Haswell, 1988; Rose, 1988).

The pedagogical approach tends to focus largely on describing and defining the unique learning needs and behaviors of particular student groups, explaining the reasons for these behaviors as fully as possible (one of the underlying convictions of this approach is that the more information a teacher has about a group of students, the more effectively she can teach them), and in most cases recommending teaching techniques to meet these unique needs. Both the descriptions of student groups and the recommendations for teaching, geared as they are for day-to-day application in the classroom, tend to be—unlike most of the administrative literature—quite specific. (Interestingly, most of the advice on classroom management varies remarkably little from writer to writer, and much of it could be described as basic good teaching—providing a supportive environment, allowing students frequent unevaluated practice, focusing on rhetorical rather than surface features in student writing, delivering information in more than one form, providing clear rationales for classroom activities, being flexible and patient, using relevant course material, preserving student dignity.) Judy Martin's 1991 article on learning-disabled (LD) college writers is representative of the concerns and approach taken by the pedagogical literature—a lengthy discussion of the types of learning disabilities and their effects on student needs and behavior, a list of twenty-five classroom management strategies designed to help meet these needs, and an overall emphasis on the power of the teacher (despite the lack of academic or administrative interest in LD students) to meet the needs of her students.
The pedagogical approach seems to arise largely out of the same types of concerns that underlie the administrative approach—concerns about the needs of student groups that are new to higher education or that have heretofore received little consideration in the academic literature. Like the administrative approach, it is less concerned with the politics of empowerment and sensitivity than with day-to-day management of student needs, and it shares with the administrative approach the conviction that the role of the educator is to meet as fully as possible the needs of all students. The major difference between the two approaches is the focus of their concerns. Where the administrative diversity literature is primarily concerned with student differences as they relate to institutional programs and funding channels, the pedagogical literature is primarily concerned with student differences as they relate to classroom management. It is defined by its emphasis on the power and responsibility of the individual instructor—rather than the institution or the society—to meet the diverse needs of her students, and by a corresponding focus on student behaviors within the bounds of individual classrooms.

The Political Approach

Like the other two approaches, the political approach to diversity focuses on defining and describing groups of students who do not meet the "traditional" model; unlike them, however, it is primarily concerned with issues of dominance and subordination, and consequently also with sensitization of the group defined as dominant and the empowerment of the group defined as
subordinant. "Traditional" students are usually identified as the dominant group, whether they represent an actual majority in the classroom or not. They are considered to represent the hierarchy and values of the "traditional" classroom, and are often characterized as the keepers and defenders of (depending on the writer's political leanings) Westernism, patriarchy, or upper-class privilege. The subordinate group or groups (non-traditional students—women, the poor, people of color, homosexuals, the disabled, the aged, the colonized) are defined against this dominant group, often as representatives of some suppressed or undervalued culture, tradition, or value system—ethnicity, matriarchy, social or political revolution.

Historically, this approach has largely tended to relate diversity to socioeconomic class, with the dominant group the privileged middle and upper classes, the subordinate group the poor. The class argument holds that the culture of the academy is tied to the culture of the middle and upper classes, but foreign to students raised in the culture of the lower classes. Leon Galis (1993), for example, argues that in order to succeed in college, "one must have habits of mind and conduct [deference, obedience, and the ability to postpone gratification, process information, and handle large workloads] of which class is a greater determinant than race, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation" (p. 95). Admitting students who have not developed these habits of mind and conduct—the children of illiterate mountain people in Appalachia, say—requires that either the student change through a process of acculturation, or that the values of the institution itself change radically. Proponents of the class argument often argue for the latter change, arguing that the primary goal of education should be individual empowerment and (in the case of writers like Paolo Freire) social-
political liberation, not the acculturation or homogenization of culturally
different students.

The class argument was probably strongest during the flowering of
academic Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s, and it remains important in certain
areas of the political diversity literature, particularly in educational
anthropology, but since the 1980s it seems to have lost ground to
multiculturalism and gender-related arguments. The political diversity
literature has increasingly turned from the problem of class oppression to that of
what might be termed cultural oppression, perhaps as a result of increased
political activism on the part of women, minorities, and other non-traditional
student groups, perhaps partly as a result of the influence on academic theory
and politics of poststructuralist interest in the effects language and culture on the
construction of social systems. In the recent literature on political diversity,
there is an almost universal tendency to equate diversity with multiculturalism-
a term almost as vague as "diversity," especially given the current tendency to
apply the word "culture" so broadly that it subsumes any number of other issues,
among them gender, sexual preference, disability, and age. On the whole,
though, this literature tends to focus most heavily on gender, race, and ethnicity
(or as Maurianne Adams (1992) puts it, on "the culture of all women and
nonwhite male students" (p. 2)). Certainly the diversity defined by race, gender,
and ethnicity is the diversity which currently drives many college and university
programs. Among the schools whose teaching development programs focus on
these issues are University of Colorado at Boulder, Harvard, University of
Hawaii, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, University of Missouri at
Columbia, Ohio State University, Stanford, and University of Tennessee at
Knoxville (vom Saal, Jefferson, & Morrison, 1992). Many texts on diversity, likewise, equate fostering diversity with a focus on gender, race and ethnicity—among them the Spring 1992 issue of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *Teaching for Diversity*, whose editors remark that it "speaks more to the issues of race, gender, and ethnicity" than any other concerns (Border & Chism, 1992, p. 2); Milton J. Gold’s *In Praise of Diversity: A Resource Book for Multicultural Education* (1977); Richard Pratte’s *Pluralism in Education: Conflict, Clarity, and Commitment* (1979); and Barbara Astone and Elsa Nunez-Wormack’s *Pursuing Diversity: Recruiting College Minority Students* (1990).

One of the clearest markers of this strain in the diversity literature is its overt politicism. Although writers using this approach often make recommendations for institutional programs or classroom management, their major interest is clearly in large-scale social change, in altering the power structures of the classroom, the institution, and the society as a whole. This is evident in their characterizations of existing classroom structures and in their tendency to condemn or dismiss the social and behavioral norms of the "traditional" classroom. Where writers in the pedagogical camp are often content to fine-tune current teaching methods—as Gregory Glau (1990), writing about the acculturation problems of Native American students, does when he suggests the use of collaboration, mentoring, and culturally relevant classroom materials to help Native American students become bicultural—writers using the political approach are more likely to suggest wholesale overthrow of existing academic structures. Julia Ferganchick-Neufang (1993), for example, argues that the composition teacher has an obligation to "work against the current of phallogocentric hegemony in writing" in order to help students achieve
"social, psychological, and linguistic androgyny" (p. 194-195). Kathleen Manning and Patrice Coleman-Boatwright (1991), likewise, argue that the hegemony of white patriarchal Protestant culture in academia is openly hostile to "people of color, women, international students, physically challenged students, homosexuals, lesbians, and others who represent diverse perspectives" (p. 369) and that substantial changes in "power relationships, role definitions, and priorities...both in a revolutionary and evolutionary sense" (p. 371) are therefore necessary.

The Influence of the Diversity Literature

These three approaches to diversity—the administrative, the pedagogical, and the political—are the strongest strains in both the current and historical literature on student difference. Certainly they differ widely in many respects—they are concerned with different groups of students, have differing institutional focuses, and often have widely divergent goals. Their conceptions of the ideal relationship between institution or instructor and student vary markedly, from the administrative literature’s focus on helping the student adjust to the institution, to the political literature’s focus on helping the institution adjust to the student. Disagreements on what constitutes diversity, how student differences should be managed, even what the word diversity means, are common. What these three divergent strains share, however, is their concern with, and their respect for, student difference. If they disagree on the best approaches to diversity, they still agree on its importance.
One of the benefits of this concern with diversity is the fact that it has stimulated both education researchers and practitioners to see students in less monolithic ways, and in the process has led to significant changes in institutional programs, in teaching techniques, and in education theory. It has emphasized the variety of needs, experiences, and expectations that exist within student populations. It has put forth a strong argument for recognizing and accepting the needs of students who are in some way “diverse”—for accepting part-time and intermittent enrollment as valid paths through the institution, for broadening the discussion of “acceptable” learning processes to include some not traditionally valued by academia, for validating the beliefs and behaviors of student groups for whom the culture of academia may be relatively foreign. And it has encouraged the development of institutional changes designed to meet these needs. The introduction of special retention programs for minorities, adult students, women, and other populations; the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered classrooms; and the introduction of multicultural curricula and women’s and minority studies programs all owe something to the growing concern with student diversity. In many ways, then, the diversity literature may have contributed to what many researchers refer to as a democratization of higher education—the encouragement of a pluralism within the college classroom designed to echo the pluralism of American society.

Problems in the Application of Diversity Research

If the diversity discussion has helped us to move beyond the shortcomings
of the nineteenth century "factory" model of education, however, it has also raised new questions about the nature of and most appropriate approach to student difference. Common to all three strains of the diversity literature is a tendency to discuss student difference in terms of the general qualities of large populations—the discourse patterns of female students, the learning needs of minority students, the culture of low income students. One of the primary questions critics have raised about this literature has been, not the accuracy or validity of such classifications and descriptions, but rather the extent to which they can be applied to daily classroom practice. If research suggests, for example, that female students tend to be less aggressive in classroom discussions than male students, to initiate fewer questions and comments, to interrupt other students less often, to make fewer strong statements of opinion, what does this tell a classroom teacher about her own students? What assumptions, based on these conclusions, can she make about the individual students in her class? How can—and how should—these results inform her daily practice?

Uses of Large-Scale Patterns of Diversity in Classroom Management

Certainly knowledge about large-scale patterns of difference can provide useful information for the classroom teacher. The populations or cultures to which a student belongs constitute part of her experience and knowledge, and provide part of the context for her life. This context is likely to be shared, at least in part, by other members of the same population—one of the factors that allows us to identify large-scale patterns of difference is that members of particular
populations share, to some extent, experiences and knowledge that help shape their behavior and attitudes. Given this, it would be unrealistic for a teacher to assume that such social/cultural forces as age, gender, or ethnicity would have no defineable influence on a student’s attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. The differences in the attitudes toward writing and classroom discourse of a student schooled in an American classroom during the boom of reform and experimentation in the mid-1970’s and those of a student educated in the regimented and competitive atmosphere of a traditional Japanese school, for example, would almost certainly owe something to the social/cultural backgrounds that shaped their respective educational experiences.

Understanding the shared experiences and attitudes that form populations, cultures, and social groups may help us to understand the forces that have shaped the lives and behaviors of individual students in our own classrooms.

The Problem of Individual Variation

This understanding is only a starting point, however. A number of critics have argued that applying information on large-scale patterns in the classroom is problematic, not because this information is inaccurate or invalid, but rather because it tends to value the general over the particular, the qualities of the group over the qualities of the individual. Both researchers and practitioners would probably agree that generalizations about large populations do little to describe the experience of individual students; what we say about populations may be only partially true for individuals within that population, or not true at
all. All female students will not necessarily feel threatened by the "phallogocentric hegemony" of the writing class; all working class students will not necessarily feel uncomfortable with language and discourse; all minority students will not necessarily feel alienated by the culture of the classroom. As Marten Shipman (1985) observes, "Individuals persistently become exceptions to the laws put forward to explain their behavior" (p. 1). Any description of the qualities of a large population, no matter how detailed or careful, will fit individual members of that population imprecisely at best. This is precisely the problem teachers face—the daily practice of teaching requires them to deal, not with the generalized qualities of large populations, but rather with the infinite individual variations that exist within those populations.

One of the reasons behind the level of variation that exists within any large population—and one of the primary difficulties in applying information on these populations in the classroom—is that no pattern of difference exists in isolation. In both the classroom and the lives of individual students, any single pattern exists in relationship to a multitude of other factors—among others, students' cultures, ages, genders, experiences, personal relationships, personalities, motivations, values. These other factors can influence the ways in which a pattern will manifest itself—even whether it will manifest itself—at the local level of the classroom or in the behavior of an individual student. The primary problem for the practitioner is determining how large-scale patterns relate to the context of the classroom and the lives of individual students—how they interact with other forces in students' lives, how important they are (or are not) in determining students' behaviors and attitudes, how they affect students' interactions with their classmates.
The influence of these other forces is likely to lend to an immense level of variety within any given population. A nineteen-year old woman attending community college because she couldn’t find a job and couldn’t decide what else to do, and a woman returning to school at age forty-five to earn a promotion both fall into the population “female students.” And because gender roles are strongly defined by culture, it is likely that two women in the same culture may share some gender-related experiences and attitudes. But gender is by no means the only force shaping their knowledge and experience of the world—perhaps not even an important factor. Though they share one quality, gender, these two women have very different lives, shaped and defined by differences in experience, age, employment, motivation, personality, and attitude—forces that may be as or more important than their gender in shaping their classroom behaviors and attitudes. One problem teachers face in applying the diversity literature, then, is that of placing large-scale patterns in the context of individual classrooms and individual students’ lives, determining where these patterns fit into the complex local world of the classroom in relation both to the experience of individual students and to other patterns at work in the classroom itself.

Complicating Our Conception of Diversity

The fact that large-scale patterns of difference become complicated on the local level does not invalidate them. I would argue that the answer to the question of how we should best negotiate their place in the classroom environment is not, as some critics have suggested, ignoring them, but rather
modifying the ways in which we talk and think about them. To more effectively apply the diversity literature in the classroom, we need to talk not only about how patterns of difference look on the large scale, but also about how they look in the classroom itself. We need a more situated idea of diversity, one that takes into account not only the generalized qualities of large populations, but also the ways in which those qualities may manifest themselves on the local level.

In this thesis, I would like to begin complicating our conception of diversity. Specifically, I will examine some of the ways in which a large-scale pattern of difference in a community college student population relates to other patterns present in the population, and to the experience of individual students in the study group. What relationships exist between particular patterns of difference? Between the large-scale patterns and the perceptions, attitudes, and motivations of individual students? What do these relationships tell us about how large-scale patterns might manifest themselves on the local level? This study will by necessity be limited to a very few interactions; the classroom is an immensely complex social environment, and an exploration of every possible interaction and relationship between populations and types of diversity is well beyond the scope of this work. Instead, I would like to explore here ways to develop a more complex--if less definitive--way of talking and thinking about the student populations that make up our classrooms.
A review of the literature shows a need for research in the composition classroom that will help us to understand more clearly the relationship between individual variations and larger patterns of difference. While a full exploration of individual and large-scale diversity within the classroom environment is almost by definition beyond the scope of any study, I would like to explore in this these the patterns that may exist within a single aspect of the classroom environment. Specifically, I would like to ask what patterns of diversity emerge in student attitudes, expectations, and motivations in community college writing classes, and how these patterns may relate to one another. What is the range of difference a composition teacher may expect to see? How do the attitudes and expectations of individual students relate to the larger patterns of difference? Do these individual and large-scale patterns offer the writing instructor any guidance for classroom practice? The primary questions guiding this research were:

- Are there initial differences in sense of control, writing apprehension, and collaboration between male and female students in the six study classes?
- Are there initial differences in sense of control, writing apprehension, and collaboration between traditional and non-traditional (age 22 or older) students in the six study classes?
• Between the beginning and the end of the term, are there any significant changes in any one of these groups' sense of control, writing apprehension, or collaboration?

• How do these patterns of difference relate to each other? Are there significant age x gender interactions?

• How do these patterns of difference relate to the experience of individual students?

In the Fall of 1992, I conducted a study of student expectations, motivations, and attitudes toward writing and writing classes in six community college freshman composition classes. I chose to focus on community college students because student diversity has traditionally been considered a much greater challenge in community college classes than in senior institutions, simply because community colleges tend to draw on a broader and less "traditional" student population. I chose a survey study to reveal the broadest possible range of student differences. While the information yielded by surveys is shallow in comparison to ethnographic or case studies, this methodology has the advantage of breadth. I hoped that the addition of classroom observation and open-ended questions to this would help the study retain some sense of an ethnographic or case study approach in allowing me to draw on individualistic, "deep," and emergent data, without compromising the breadth of the survey, and I recognize that more in-depth work should at some point follow this study.
Description of the Study Group

The study group consisted of 107 community college freshman composition students, 69 of whom completed both pre- and post-semester surveys (due to attrition, absences, section changes, and late adds). These students were enrolled in six writing classes at three Iowa community colleges—two classes each at Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls, an extension campus of Des Moines Area Community College in Boone, and Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids. Of these six classes, three were evening courses (both classes at Kirkwood and one at Boone) and three were day courses (both classes at Ellsworth and one at Boone). The average class size was 12 students, but class sizes ranged from 8 to 18 students.

The sample population, like the populations of the community colleges themselves, was predominately female and non-traditional. 51 female and 18 male students participated in the entire survey; their ages ranged from seventeen to well over fifty. The modal age bracket for the population was 18-21, but the majority of the students, 41 of 69, were non-traditional (22 or older); only 28 were traditional students (18-21). The women in the study group tended to be older than the men—the average age for women was in the 30-39 age bracket, while for men it was in the 22-29 bracket (see Table 2.1).

The students were assigned to the six study classes through their respective colleges' enrollment processes and were not screened in any way. Study classes and instructors were chosen to provide a fairly representative selection of community college course environments (equal numbers of classes from each school, equal numbers of evening and day classes) from lists provided
Table 2.1. Distribution of student ages and genders within the study group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 or above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Gender</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by the individual colleges; all instructors had previously indicated a willingness to participate in the study, but no other screening methods were used.

Students participating in the study group were asked to read a short explanation of the study and to sign a consent form before participating (Appendix A). No students in the six study classes declined to participate. In order to ensure that the rights and welfare of the members of the study group were protected, the study was reviewed by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Iowa State University. The Committee gave approval for the use of human subjects in this study. Department heads and/or deans of instruction at the three participating colleges were also informed of the study and all gave permission for it to be conducted on their respective campuses.

Study Environments

The three colleges in the study were selected to represent a fairly broad cross-section of Iowa community college students--rural, small-town, urban; white-collar, blue-collar, farm; pre-four year, vocational, technical.
Ellsworth Community College

Enrollment demographics  Ellsworth Community College is a small community college located in Iowa Falls, a semi-industrial town of just over 6,000 in north central Iowa. Its enrollment as of the date of the study (Fall 1993) was 835, with 606 students attending full-time. Nearly all the students (95%) were Iowa residents, and most were local. Students from Iowa Falls and the surrounding communities (Eldora, Ackley, Alden, Hampton, Hubbard, and Dows) represented just over half (52%) of the school’s total enrollment.

Ellsworth’s service area is primarily rural, and the college considers “enhancing and preserving the cultural heritage and economic well-being of...rural Iowa” a central part of its mission. Not surprisingly, given the school’s location, the student body is predominately white (93%); only 5.5% of the student population is black, and the remaining students are Asian or Native American. Women constitute a slight majority (54%) of the population, and tend to be significantly older than male students (average age for men is 21.2 years, for women 26.0 years). Most students (about three-quarters) are in arts-sciences transfer programs; the remaining quarter are in vocational programs. Just over half (55%) continue to four-year institutions.

Enrollment trends  Like most community colleges, Ellsworth has faced significant changes in the last twenty years. Both the average age and the number of non-traditional students have increased, especially since the inception of the school’s nursing program seven years ago. Total enrollment, however, has dropped; Associate Dean of Student Services Phil Rusley remarks
that part of the reason may be the depressed local economy, which has contributed to decreased mobility in Iowa Falls and the surrounding counties, and to decreased turnover in Ellsworth's student population (personal communication, May 17, 1994). The local economy has also contributed to what Rusley refers to (in what he calls an "undocumented observation") as the loss of the "middle ground" in Ellsworth's enrollment (personal communication, May 17, 1994). The declining rural economy, combined with an open admissions policy, mainstreaming programs which encourage learning-disabled (LD) students to go to college, and the increased selectivity of the military, has led to an increase in the enrollment of lower-quartile students. Ellsworth's average entering ACT is now 19. The college has begun actively recruiting scholarship-level students (ACT 23 or above, GPA 3.0 or above), but Rusley says the result has been an increase in the number of upper and lower-quartile students but a decline in the number of average students—Ellsworth's student population, he remarks, "is not a bell curve" (personal communication, May 17, 1994).

**Composition program and study classes** The composition program at Ellsworth remains fairly conservative. The syllabus is department mandated and concentrates largely on the modes (modes of discourse, as defined by Alexander Bain in 1866 and still used in many contemporary textbooks: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation). Instructors do have freedom within these boundaries to choose readings, class format, and (to a certain extent) writing assignments. Both Ellsworth instructors in the study chose to follow the department syllabus fairly closely, although their approaches differed. One instructor in the study, who also teaches in the history
department, seemed to prefer a discussion-oriented class based on a semi-Socratic method and some rather difficult essays (on one of the days I observed, he worked his class through Plato’s “Parable of the Cave”). The other instructor, head of the English department at the time of the study, had a teaching style which seemed to provide a fairly even balance between lecture and small-group work. She generally chose readings from modern American and European authors (Lindberg, Angelou, etc.), and although she focused on the modes, she also added several “real-world” writing assignments to the syllabus, among them a resume-writing exercise.

**Boone Campus, Des Moines Area Community College**

**Enrollment demographics**

Boone DMACC is an extension campus of Des Moines Area Community College, a large community college of about 11,000 students. DMACC has several campuses, most in Des Moines proper and its suburbs, but some, like Boone DMACC, in smaller towns at some distance from the central city campus. Boone is a town of about 12,600 in central Iowa, about 35 miles north of Des Moines and 15 miles west of Iowa State University at Ames. Boone DMACC has an enrollment of about 1,150, though enrollment has declined slightly in the past few years—a sign, according to admissions counsellor George Silverhorn, of an improving local economy (personal communication, May 17, 1994). (Enrollment has tended to rise in the past when local companies have laid off workers). The majority of Boone students—about two-thirds—attend full-time, and most are drawn from communities within a twenty-five mile
radius. About 20% of students taking classes at Boone are also enrolled full- or part-time at Iowa State University or the University of Northern Iowa; this number climbs to 30% for summer programs. The enrollment is divided evenly between vocational and transfer students, though vocational programs, especially health care and office technology programs, appear to draw large numbers of students. Women make up close to 60% of the student population, and the average student age (also the modal group) is between 28 and 29 years. Ethnic minority students make up a relatively high percentage of the enrollment—about 8%. Most of these students are international students, and the majority of these have ties to Iowa State University—Iowa State international students often take classes at Boone DMACC, and the spouses of international graduate students at Iowa State often enroll in vocational programs at Boone DMACC.

Composition program and study classes  The composition program at Boone DMACC tends to be geared toward transfer, particularly toward transfer to Iowa State. The specific approaches of the two instructors I observed at Boone, however, differed widely. The day course was a computer section (the only one in the study) using the St. Martin’s Guide and its accompanying computer program, both of which are strongly process-oriented. The instructor in the course balanced lecture with time spent on small-group work, workshopping, and the St. Martin’s prewriting activities; she was also the only instructor I observed who devoted considerable class time to discussion of grammar and mechanics. The instructor of the evening section, by contrast, had a far less structured and traditional teaching style. Although the syllabus appeared to be
centered on the modes, the class itself seemed to be built largely around literary analysis. Class discussions were generally lively, and tended to range widely and casually over the texts (primarily short stories), writing in general, the instructor's and class members' personal lives, politics, and whatever other topics interested the class.

Kirkwood Community College

Enrollment demographics Kirkwood Community College is a large community college in Cedar Rapids, a town of about 120,000 in eastern Iowa. Like Boone DMACC, it operates in close proximity to a large regents' institution, The University of Iowa, 30 miles away in Iowa City, as well as two private four-year insitutions, Mount Mercy and Coe College, both in Cedar Rapids. As of the date of the study, Kirkwood had an enrollment of 9,664 students, 5,185 of whom were taking classes full time. The majority were Iowa residents (94%); 2% were out of state students; a further 2% were nonresident aliens. Most of Kirkwood's resident students are drawn from the school's seven county service area (Benton, Linn, Jones, Iowa, Johnson, Cedar, and Washington Counties). As of Fall 1993, women made up slightly more of the student population (58%) than men (42%), and tended to be slightly older. Although the modal age group was 18-19–2,700, or roughly 30%, of Kirkwood students were in this age group—the average student age was 25.7 years, and the population included a significant percentage of non-traditional students. As of Fall 1993, age distributions for non-traditional students were as shown below(Table 2.2). Roughly two-thirds (6,052 students)
Table 2.2 Age distribution of Kirkwood Community College enrollment, Fall 1993.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>4,634</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>1,258</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and up</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of Kirkwood students were in arts-sciences transfer programs; the remaining third (3,612 students) were in vocational or technical programs.

Enrollment trends Like Ellsworth, Kirkwood has experienced significant changes in student populations and enrollment over the last decade. These changes, however, are almost opposite to those at the smaller school. The average age of Kirkwood students has fallen over the past eight years, from 28 to 25.7, and overall enrollment has risen. Breakdowns of enrollment figures for the past eight years point to a number of significant trends: enrollment in the arts and science has risen 74%, while enrollment in applied sciences has risen more slowly (28%); enrollment of returning students is up 70%, while the number of new enrollees has risen only 34%; part-time enrollment has risen 87%, while full-time enrollment has risen only 32%. Tom Svboda of Kirkwood’s Admissions Office suggests that layoffs in area industries and the generally competitive economy of the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City area may be reasons for these trends (personal communication, March 18, 1994). The
relatively swift growth of the returning and part-time populations reflects the need of area workers to upgrade their skills in order to maintain a competitive advantage in either their career or the job market; a significant proportion of Kirkwood’s student population does not graduate and does not intend to. Along with this shift towards a more heavily part-time enrollment, there has been a shift toward off-campus programs and distance learning. According to Svboda, off-campus enrollment has risen 247% in the last eight years. “We now have people completing degrees who have never been on campus,” he remarks (personal communication, March 18, 1994).

Composition program and study classes The Kirkwood composition program seems geared largely toward transfer and professional writing. One instructor, a technical writer for Rockwell-Collins, taught an evening section of Freshman Composition II primarily—but not exclusively—geared for the college’s nursing and health-care students, who made up about 90% of the class. The syllabus focused on general principles of professional and technical writing, with some focus on writing in the health care professions. The second class I observed was a Composition I section taught by a staff writer for the Cedar Rapids Gazette’s education section. This instructor is closely involved with the educational community and very aware of new trends and research in pedagogical theory, which she applies consciously in her classroom. Two of her stated teaching goals are breaking down barriers between her students and making her students more independent as writers. To these ends she has adopted a teaching style that focuses strongly on discussion and group work.
Data Collection

Data collection was carried out over the course of Fall semester 1992. Students completed three surveys over the course of the semester, the first in the first or second week of the term, the second at midterm, and the third in the last three weeks of the term. Classroom observations were carried out at these times, with at least two additional observations for each class over the course of the semester. Data collection and analysis procedures for classroom observations and Classroom Attitude Surveys are discussed below.

Questionnaires

Students completed three questionnaires over the course of the term, designed to monitor changes in attitudes, expectations, and motivation as the semester progressed (Appendix B). The pre- and post-semester questionnaires included both an attitude survey and individual response questions; the mid-term questionnaire included only the individual response questions. The attitude survey questions remained the same on pre- and post-semester questionnaires; the individual response questions were altered slightly for successive questionnaires to provide a better match to students' experiences at various points in the term. The surveys were administered by the researcher during normal class meetings. Both the instructor and the researcher were present when the surveys were administered; students returned completed surveys directly to the researcher. Students were informed prior to each survey.
that the instructor would not see their responses until final course grades had been assigned to reduce student concerns that their responses might affect their evaluation in the course.

**Demographic information** On all three surveys, students were asked to supply demographic information. This information was designed to provide a basic profile of the general demographics of the study group, particularly in terms of several "types" of diversity that might influence attitudes, expectations, and motivation--age, gender, previous experience (specifically with college composition classes), and outside obligations (jobs or other courses). Because of the relative cultural and racial homogeneity of the study group, race/ethnicity was not included as a demographic measure.

**Attitude survey** The attitude survey consisted of a series of closed questions designed to provide a general measure of student attitudes toward writing and composition classes. This portion of the questionnaire measured student attitudes in four domains, each comprising a separate subscale (See Appendix). The *collaboration* domain, which measured student attitudes toward working with others, asked students to agree or disagree with such statements as: "When I have a writing assignment, I like to talk to someone about it before I write" and "It's a waste of time to talk to other students about my writing." The *control* domain, which measured the student's sense of control over his or her writing and success as a writer, asked students to agree or disagree with such statements as: "When I write, I never know if what I write says what I mean" and "My major concern when I begin a paper is coming up with enough things
to say." The writing apprehension domain, which measured the student’s level of ease with writing, asked students to respond to such statements as: “I avoid writing,” “I enjoy writing,” and “Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.” The final domain, teacher authority/student agency, which measured the student’s level of preference for a teacher-centered classroom, asked students to respond to such statements as: “What the teacher thinks about my work is more important than what fellow students think about it,” “Teachers should always control class discussion,” and “I feel uncomfortable when other students question what the teacher is doing or saying in class.”

The question format consisted of a statement about writing or classroom interaction to which the student responded on a Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” through “Agree” and “Disagree” to “Strongly Disagree.” (A “neutral” or “uncertain” response was purposely not provided; some students, however, chose to manufacture one by circling both “Agree” and “Disagree,” usually adding a note—or sometimes a complaint—in the margin explaining their decision). A score ranging from one to four was assigned to each response: high levels of perceived competence in each area (high preference for collaboration, high levels of comfort with writing, high sense of control over writing) were indicated by a score of four, low levels by a score of one. Total scores for the four subscales could range from 4 to 16 for the control subscale, from 5 to 20 for the writing apprehension and collaboration subscales, and from 6 to 24 for the teacher authority/student agency subscale.

The closed questions are based on two different surveys. The writing apprehension questions are a subset of the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Scale (Daly & Miller, 1975). This subset was informally identified by Palmquist.
and Young to be as reliable as the full survey (1992). The control, agency, and collaboration questions are subsets of a survey developed by David Wallace (1995); the control and collaboration questions have been found to be reliable across several different populations of students (Wallace, personal communication, July 20, 1995). The teacher authority/student agency questions were found during the course of the study to be unreliable; results from these questions are therefore not included among the study results.

**Individual response questions**  The individual response section of the survey consisted of open-ended questions designed to provide a more specific and individualized sense of student attitudes, expectations, and motivations and a clearer sense of attitudinal change over time than the closed questions could. There were four open-ended questions on each survey, each question focusing on a different area of student expectations. The first question on all three surveys focused on level of experience and perceived gains in experience over the course of the semester: on the pre-semester survey students were simply asked to indicate any past college-level writing experience; on the mid-term and post-semester surveys, they were asked “What, specifically, do you think you have gained from this class so far?” The second question on all surveys focused on student goals and expectations for the course: on the first survey, students were asked, “What, specifically, would you like to get out of this class?”; on subsequent surveys they were asked whether their expectations for the class had been met. The third question on all surveys focused on motivation: on all surveys students were asked to rate how important it was for them to do well in the course (“Not very,” “Somewhat,” or “Very”) and to explain why. The fourth
question focused on student concerns about writing and composition courses: on the first two surveys, students were asked, "What most concerns you about this course?" Since this question was not particularly applicable on the post-semester survey, the fourth question on that survey asked students instead to reflect on how their overall attitudes toward writing or toward the class changed over the course of the semester.

**Classroom observations** Information about individual students obtained through surveys was supplemented by classroom observation. Over the course of the semester, each of the six classes was observed four to six times. The researcher acted strictly as a non-participant observer in all cases, and observed for the entire class period (ranging from fifty minutes for day classes to three hours for evening classes) for each visit. These observations were designed to provide informal data on the behavior patterns and classroom demeanor of individual students and on the dynamics of each class as a whole. Observations focused on general behaviors (note-taking, seating patterns, gestures, facial expressions) and interactions (with other students and with the instructor) of individual students which might reveal the ways in which these students acted on their attitudes toward the course and coursework. The researcher made note of both general patterns of behavior and specific incidents which might lend to a fuller portrait of the six classes and individual students within them than the surveys alone could provide. No attempt was made to count, classify, or otherwise quantify classroom behaviors and interactions. The purpose of the observations was simply to provide a general—and informal—sense of individual
personalities and behaviors, to round out the survey data with some sense of the individual students behind it.
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

Research Questions

This study was designed to examine both the large-scale patterns of
diversity in student attitudes, expectations, and motivations that exist within
community college classrooms, and their relationship to the experience of
individual students. The primary questions guiding this research were:

- Are there initial differences in sense of control, writing apprehension, and
collaboration between male and female students in the six study classes?
- Are there initial differences in sense of control, writing apprehension, and
collaboration between traditional and non-traditional (age 22 or older)
students in the six study classes?
- Between the beginning and the end of the term, are there any significant
changes in any one of these groups' sense of control, writing
apprehension, or collaboration?
- How do these patterns of difference relate to each other? Are there
significant age x gender interactions?
- How do these patterns of difference relate to the experience of individual
students?
Patterns of Difference Within the Study Group

Attitude Survey

The purpose of the attitude survey was to provide a measure of student attitudes toward writing and composition classes in four domains—teacher authority/student agency, collaboration, control, and writing apprehension—as well as a measure of changes in those attitudes over the course of the semester. The teacher authority/student agency domain was found to be unreliable and results from this domain are not included this discussion. The scores were sorted by age (students under 22 were defined as traditional students, those 22 or older as non-traditional students) and gender. These two categories were chosen partly because age- and gender-related differences in attitudes and expectations remain important issues in the community college literature, and partly because the existing literature suggested that they would probably yield significant initial differences in student attitudes. To analyze the survey results, I conducted three 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVAs (SYSTAT), one each for collaboration, control and writing apprehension. Each ANOVA compared seven sets of means using three between subjects comparisons and four within subjects comparisons. The between subjects comparisons compared average pre/post scores by age (traditional compared to non-traditional students), gender (men compared to women), and interaction of age and gender. The within subjects comparisons compared pre and post scores for all subjects, the interaction of age groups with pre/post scores, the interaction of gender groups with pre/post scores, and the interactions among gender groups, age groups, and pre/post scores.
Table 3.1. Average pre-semester and post-semester scores for entire study group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Apprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre survey</td>
<td>14.42</td>
<td>9.08**</td>
<td>13.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post survey</td>
<td>14.36</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td>13.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This difference is statistically significant, $p < .05$.
** This difference is statistically significant, $p < .01$.

Attitude Survey: Overall Results

The average scores for the entire study group for the attitude survey section of pre- and post-semester questionnaires are included here as a point of comparison for the scores sorted by age and by gender (see Table 3.1). It was expected that, no matter what the initial average scores, the writing course would, in general, have a positive effect on student attitudes—that students would become less apprehensive about writing, feel a greater sense of control over their own writing, and become more comfortable with collaboration. Over the course of the term, average control and writing apprehension scores both rose as expected, indicating, respectively, and increased sense of control over the writing process and product, and increased confidence in writing abilities. The average collaboration scores remained about the same.

---

1In my scoring of the writing apprehension scale, higher scores indicate greater comfort with writing. This is a procedural, not a substantive, departure from Daly & Miller (1976) and Palmquist & Young (1992), both of whom scored the writing apprehension scale in the opposite direction (a high score equals high writing apprehension).
Collaboration Control Apprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Apprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F n=51</td>
<td>M n=18</td>
<td>F n=51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre/Post</td>
<td>14.64</td>
<td>13.68</td>
<td>9.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>14.65</td>
<td>13.77</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This difference is statistically significant, \( p < .05 \).

**Attitude Survey: Gender**

A number of researchers, among them Daly and Miller (1975) and Jeroski and Conry (1981), have found that women tend to be less apprehensive about writing than men (Daly, 1985). Since female students are also generally supposed to be less competitive in the classroom, more verbal, and more comfortable with written expression than male students, I expected that female students would have higher levels of comfort with collaboration, lower levels of writing apprehension, and a greater sense of control over their writing. Since a number of researchers have indicated that students tend to gain confidence in writing and comfort with collaborative work with practice, I anticipated that both male and female students would make roughly equal gains in these areas over the course of the term.

Pre-semester and post-semester scores considered together indicate that in general female students were, as expected, less apprehensive about writing and more comfortable with collaboration than male students, but that male students—unexpectedly—felt a greater sense of control over their writing. Only the difference for apprehension, however, was statistically significant (see Table 3.2).
The initial scores for both groups echo the overall pre/post pattern. Like the pre/post scores, initial scores indicate that female students began the term with less apprehension about writing and a greater sense of comfort with collaboration than male students—their initial collaboration scores were nearly a point higher than men’s, and their initial writing apprehension scores over two points higher. Their initial control scores, however, were unexpectedly lower than those of male students, indicating that male students, despite being markedly more apprehensive about writing, still felt a greater sense of control over their writing processes and products than female students. (See Table 3.2.)

Patterns of change for the two groups echoed general trends (cf. Table 3.1). As expected, both groups increased their sense of confidence and control over their writing processes and products—writing apprehension and control scores rose for both groups. The gap between men and women in control scores remained relatively constant over the course of the term; however, male students seemed to make slightly greater gains in writing apprehension than female students—the gap between male and female students dropped by over half a point. However, these differences were not statistically significant. Collaboration scores for both male and female students remained stable over the course of the term. (See Table 3.2.)

Attitude Survey: Age

Because older students are more likely than traditional students to have spent some time—often several years—away from the classroom environment,
Table 3.3. Average pre-semester and post-semester scores sorted by age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Apprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trad n=28</td>
<td>Non n=41</td>
<td>Trad n=28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre/Post</td>
<td>14.04</td>
<td>14.64</td>
<td>9.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>14.07</td>
<td>14.67</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>14.61</td>
<td>9.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This difference is statistically significant, p < .05.
‡ The interaction among these four means is statistically significant, p < .05.

and because they often tend to be initially lacking in self-confidence (Pomerenke & Mink, 1987), I expected that they would initially show greater writing apprehension and a weaker sense of control over their writing than younger students. I also expected that, because non-traditional students tend to have longer and more varied work histories than traditional students, and because collaborative work is integral to many jobs, that non-traditional students would have more experience with collaborative work and a greater sense of comfort with the process of collaboration than younger students. While both groups were expected to show gains in all three domains over the course of the term, I expected that non-traditional students, who tend to be more highly motivated and to invest more effort in their work (Pomerenke & Mink, 1987), would tend to make greater gains in writing apprehension and control than traditional students.

When the students’ pre and post scores are considered together (see pre/post line of Table 3.3), they indicate that non-traditional students did, as expected, seem to be more comfortable with collaborative work than traditional students; their average collaboration scores were more than a half point higher.
than those of traditional students. Further, this pattern remains consistent when the means are broken down into pre-semester and post-semester averages (see the pre and post lines of Table 3.3). However, none of these differences is statistically significant. Contrary to expectation, non-traditional students reported a greater sense of control over their writing, as well as less writing apprehension. Their averaged pre/post scores for control and writing apprehension are higher than those of traditional students, and the control difference is statistically significant (see the pre/post line of Table 3.3). Initial average writing apprehension scores were the same for both groups, and non-traditional students had slightly, though not appreciably, higher average initial control scores than traditional students. (See Table 3.3).

Patterns of change for both groups echoed general trends (cf. Table 3.1). Both groups became less apprehensive (i.e., raised their writing apprehension scores) about writing and gained a greater sense of control over their work; both groups, likewise, showed slight losses in their level of comfort with collaboration. Although both groups showed the expected growth in confidence and control over the course of the term, non-traditional students do appear to have made slightly greater gains in both areas. Non-traditional students seem to have become slightly less apprehensive about writing by the end of the term than traditional students, although this difference was not statistically significant. Non-traditional students did, however, make significantly greater gains in their sense of control over their writing process and product than traditional students (see pre and post lines of Table 3.3).
Table 3.4. Average pre-semester and post-semester control and writing apprehension scores sorted by age and gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Writing Apprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Nontraditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=17</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre/Post</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>9.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** The differences among the four pre/post means for writing apprehension were statistically significant, p < .01.

Attitude Survey: Age x Gender Interactions

One of the major problems in applying such information in the classroom, a number of critics have suggested, is that none of the large-scale trends described in the research—women's greater confidence, non-traditional students' greater sense of control—exists in isolation. Any given classroom contains multiple populations, just as any given student may be a member of multiple populations, and every population is marked by its own patterns of difference. The question arises, then, of how the qualities of any given population relate to the qualities of other populations present in the classroom. In the case of this study, for example, where do the populations defined by age and those defined by gender intersect? How do trends in the survey responses of their members relate to one another? Does the intersection of the two sets of groups—age, gender—reveal divisions within the groups? Are there significant differences between traditional men and traditional women, non-traditional
men and non-traditional women? Between traditional and non-traditional men, traditional and non-traditional women?

Because adding factors to an analysis tends to increase the complexity of the results, I expected that examining the interactions between age and gender patterns would reveal patterns of difference within both the gender and the age-group populations, and this was in fact the case. Results in the control domain were initially found to be significantly affected by age (see Table 3.4); examining the interaction between age and gender using the students' averaged pre/post control scores revealed no statistically significant differences. Examining these means, however, suggests some patterns that may provide useful information for classroom practice. There were initial differences in control scores between the two genders in both age groups; in both age groups male students had higher initial control scores than women, a pattern that was strongest among non-traditional students—initial scores for non-traditional men were over a point higher than those of non-traditional women. Although the ANOVA I used did not directly compare these means, the size of the differences suggests that age may not be the only influence on students' sense of control—gender may also have a minor effect. (See Table 3.4.)

Likewise, writing apprehension was found to be significantly affected by gender when the students' averaged pre-semester and post-semester scores were compared by gender. A clearer pattern emerged when age was added to this comparison. As the writing apprehension means in the pre/post line of Table 3.4 indicate, non-traditional students did not differ much in terms of their writing apprehension when their pre-semester and post-semester scores were considered together. Among traditional students, however, female students
seem much less apprehensive about writing than male students. Indeed, the nearly three point difference between male and female traditional students' average scores accounts for most of the statistically significant interaction among the pre/post writing apprehension means.

The picture becomes even more interesting when the students' pre- and post-semester scores are examined separately. Among female students, the initial writing apprehension scores of traditional students were 1.35 points higher than those of non-traditional students. Among male students, however, the initial writing apprehension scores for non-traditional students were 1.67 points higher than those of traditional students. In both gender groups, non-traditional students made greater gains in confidence than traditional students—non-traditional women gained .47 points to traditional womens' .23, and non-traditional men gained about 2.19 points to traditional mens' .18 over the course of the term. These results suggest that, for the students in this survey, both a student's initial level of confidence and his or her gains of the course of the term are related to age as well as gender—regardless of initial scores, non-traditional students of both genders, but most especially non-traditional men, tended to make the greatest gains in confidence over the course of the term.

Examination of age x gender interactions, then, suggests a number of patterns—or patterns-within-patterns—that are not readily apparent from gender or age results alone. In writing apprehension, for example, the age-related effect within gender groups is unexpected, particularly the differences between traditional and non-traditional men— in a gender-based analysis of writing apprehension scores, the relatively low scores and low gains of traditional men, and their relatively large numbers compared to non-traditional men, may tend
to obscure non-traditional men's higher initial writing apprehension scores and significantly greater gains. Examining the interactions between populations or trends, then, helps to complicate our descriptions of larger patterns by revealing places where trends intersect or where those large patterns can be subdivided. Studying these intersections may help us to understand that any large-scale pattern, no matter how well-defined it seems, should be regarded as a complex factor in a complex environment--not only do these large patterns of difference exist in relationship to other patterns in their environment, but those relationships also tend to lend to significant levels of complexity and subdivision within large populations.

Patterns of Difference and Individual Variation

A number of critics have suggested that descriptions of large-scale patterns of difference are--while useful for the purposes of administration, understanding the needs of large groups, or forming initial hypotheses about student behaviors--of limited use in classroom practice. Because such descriptions focus on the generalized qualities of large populations, they often fail to describe completely the qualities or experience of individuals within those populations. Since teachers deal largely with the qualities and experience of individual students--not with the generalized qualities of large populations--it may be useful to consider the role of individual variation within these large patterns, both as a way of thinking about the ways in which these patterns may be manifested at the
local level of the classroom, and as a way of considering what descriptions of large-scale patterns might mean in daily classroom practice.

**Individual Student Profiles**

The individual student profiles were designed to provide both a sense of some of the individual variation within a single population, and a sense of the relationship between students' own perceptions of their experience and their experience as described by their attitude survey scores. Profiles of five individual students in the study group, all within a single population, non-traditional women, were constructed from classroom observations and from individual answers to attitude surveys and individual response questions. (For comparison, attitude survey scores for non-traditional women are shown in Table 3.5.) These five women were selected because they are all members of a single population, non-traditional women; because they represent a range of scores within the writing apprehension and control domains; and because their responses to the individual response questions were complete enough to analyze and represented a relatively wide range of attitudes and concerns.

Table 3.5. Average pre-semester and post-semester writing apprehension and control scores for non-traditional women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apprehension (Pre)</th>
<th>Apprehension (Post)</th>
<th>Control (Pre)</th>
<th>Control (Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>13.77</td>
<td>8.97</td>
<td>10.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shirley. Shirley is in her mid-40's, a full-time student (5 classes), unemployed, in a reading- and discussion-oriented day section of composition at Ellsworth. She is quiet and attentive in class, usually sitting near the back of the classroom with another non-traditional woman; although her instructor encourages discussion, she rarely volunteers comments in class. However, in small groups, usually with the three other non-traditional students in her class, she seems more comfortable and is more vocal, making frequent contributions to the discussion. She has no previous experience with writing classes, and is initially motivated to do well in this class because she "needs to find a good paying job." She reports being nervous about the class and about writing, and her initial attitude survey scores reflect this: her writing apprehension score is 9 (low), and her control score is 4 (very low). By midterm, though, she has gained interest in the class: "I've learned to look at reading as having fun, it is not boring, he [the instructor] made it interesting;" and her reported motivations for succeeding, despite the fact that she is still unemployed, have become more internal: "I like to do well in whatever I do." By the end of the term, she has raised her attitude survey scores substantially--her final writing apprehension score is 16 (high average), her final control score, 9 (average). This change is reflected in her self-reported attitudes toward the class--primarily increased confidence in her own skills and abilities: "I've learned to think about what I have read....I've learned to write and express my feelings....I became more positive and confident." Overall, her self-reported attitudes seem to reflect a shift from an initial sense of nervousness--taking a class out of necessity even though it intimidates her--to a growing sense of mastery in the subject. Her
attitude survey scores reflect both the average trends for the group and the shift in her own self-reported attitudes.

**Chris.** Chris is in her mid-20's, a nursing student at the end of her degree program, taking a technical-writing based evening composition course at Kirkwood. During the study term, she is taking two evening classes and working a 45-47 hour week. She is unresponsive in class, seeming to be either tired or bored; she sits in the back row, takes few notes, and sometimes talks through lectures to the student beside her. Her initial expectations and motivations for the class are low—her main goal is to get a C in the course, and her primary concern is the workload: "too much reading and homework." Although her initial control score (9) falls in the average range (one standard deviation above or below the mean for her group), her initial writing apprehension score (5, very low) seems to reflect something of her attitude toward the course. Unlike Shirley, Chris shows little change in attitude over the course of the semester. At midterm her goal remains a C, and she complains that her instructor is "boring." By the end of the term her attitude has only declined--she reports that she "hated it [the class] even more" as the term progressed: " Didn’t like it. Thought it was a waste of time." Her final attitude survey scores remain relatively stable and relatively low—her writing apprehension score is 6 and her control score, 9. Chris’ scores, like Shirley’s, seem to reflect her self-reported attitudes toward her class.

**Jane.** Jane is in her 30’s, a full-time student (8 classes) who is initially unemployed but who has by midterm taken a part-time job (15 hours/week).
She is in a reading- and discussion-oriented day composition class at Ellsworth. She is neither particularly active nor particularly inactive in class discussions—she sits toward the middle of the classroom and responds readily when called upon, but does not volunteer comments or questions. Like Shirley, her initial self-reported motivation for succeeding in the class is job-related: "I do a lot of writing in my profession." And like Shirley, she is initially intimidated by the course and the prospect of writing. Unlike Shirley, however, Jane’s initial fears are not reflected in her initial attitude survey scores—her writing apprehension score is 17, her control score, 14 (both high). She reports significant gains in confidence by mid-term: "This class is easier than what I thought it would be. I was terrified of writing." Her initial fears seem to be a strong motivating force for her—she reports wanting to do well “to show I can write and not be scared of writing.” At the end of the term, she regards her gain in confidence as her most important achievement in the class, writing that she learned "how not to be scared to right (sic) your thoughts and feelings down....I enjoyed writing more.” Interestingly, Jane’s final attitude survey scores, writing apprehension 18 (high) and control 11 (average), though relatively high, are also fairly stable relative to her initial scores. The attitude survey scores alone might seem to indicate that Jane has been fairly confident in her writing abilities over the entire course of the term; from her own perspective, though, she has progressed from a "terror" of writing to a sense of mastery and enjoyment in writing.

Amy. Amy is in her late 20’s, toward the middle of her degree program, taking two courses and working over 40 hours a week. She is taking a reading- and discussion-oriented evening section of composition at Boone DMACC. The
class is quite small (8 students) and the instructor values intense, wide-ranging discussion; like most of the other students, Amy has a collegial relationship with the instructor, participates actively in discussions, and generally displays a sense of humor and ease in her comments. Her pre-semester attitudes toward the class indicate concerns about balancing her desire to do well in the course with her outside commitments: “This is the first class that I’m worried about. I want to keep my grade average up. I feel I don’t have enough time outside of work and family to write....I wonder if I have the time and effort it takes to finish the course and create intelligent, well-thought essays.” Her initial attitude survey scores fall squarely into the average range—writing apprehension 15, control 8. Despite her strong initial motivation to succeed in the course, by the end of the term Amy reports a drop in motivation and enjoyment, and her comments seem to reflect a growing sense of frustration and burnout: “I started out motivated but as the semester went on--it became less....It became more of a task than a pleasure to write.” Her final attitude survey scores do not reflect this frustration—her writing apprehension score remains relatively stable, dropping one point to 14 (still in the average range), and her control score actually rises, to 10. Like Jane, Amy’s attitude survey scores do not entirely reflect her own perception of her experience in her class. While her attitude survey scores seem to indicate that she is basically no more apprehensive about writing at the end of the term than she was at the beginning, she now considers it a “task” rather than a “pleasure” to write.

Jeri. Jeri is in her early 40’s, a second-semester freshman in liberal arts, a full-time student (3 classes) with a part-time job (10-15 hours a week). She adds
her class, a day section at Ellsworth, a few weeks into the term. She usually sits in the front row, and is active and vocal in class and small-group discussions, frequently volunteering comments or questions. She has a collegial relationship with the instructor, and frequently stops after class to clarify a point, continue a discussion, or talk about her writing. Like Shirley and Jane, Jeri’s self-reported experience in her class seems to have been one of an increasing sense of confidence. Unlike the other two women, however, Jeri regards her primary growth in the course as personal, not writing-related. She considers college a “new adventure” and is fascinated with the whole process of learning. She considers that the class has broadened her perspectives; at midterm she writes: “I realize how sheltered I have been over the years. I became aware of racial problem (sic) not just Black but other ethnic groups. I’ve learnt (sic) how women are discriminated against. I have also learned while going to school to have more than one direction in mind.” She also seems to be undergoing a sort of personal transformation: “I’ve got in touch with myself. I’ve learned I have some talents hidden. It’s easier for me to be me and be more honest & open....I have discovered a new person in this body, which is coming alive.” Her final attitude survey scores reflect a very high degree of confidence (her final writing apprehension score is 20) and an average sense of control over her writing process (her final control score is 10). Jeri’s own perception of her experience in the course, however, seems little concerned with writing—she only mentions writing once in her responses, to say that she has “learned to express” herself—and far more concerned with her own emotional growth.
Analysis

Average scores for non-traditional female students seem to indicate a general trend for non-traditional women to gain in both confidence and control over the course of the term. The experience of the five individual students profiled here indicates, as expected, that the general trend in fact encompasses a wide range of attitudes. More interestingly, the profiles indicate the existence of a variety of relationships between students' own perceptions of their experience in their respective classes and their experience as described by their attitude survey scores. In some cases, the student's self-reported attitude and her scores echo one another: Chris' apathy and hostility seem related to her exceptionally low writing apprehension scores, Shirley's growing confidence in her ability seems to be echoed in her increasing writing apprehension and control scores. In other cases, however, the scores and the students' self-reported attitudes seem to bear little relation to one another. Jane and Amy, for example, both begin the term with relatively high or high average attitude survey scores, and they maintain those scores over the course of the semester. Yet both women report significant changes in their attitudes toward writing--Jane an increase in confidence, Amy a growing sense of frustration and burnout--which are not reflected in their scores. Still other students report concerns, attitudes, and perceptions which seem to indicate that their primary concerns in the course do not relate to the domains measured by the attitude survey--Amy’s primary concern in the course seems to be less writing than the pressure of meeting her outside obligations; Jeri, despite her confidence and very high writing
apprehension scores, is far more concerned with her personal growth than her growth as a writer.

These profiles suggest something of the limitations of the attitude surveys as a tool for describing diversity—not only do such broad instruments fail to describe completely the individual diversity that exists at the local level, but they may also fail to capture both students’ personal priorities and their own perceptions of their progress. For the classroom teacher, then, discussion of the experience of individual students, and the relationship of those students’ experience to larger trends, may provide valuable information about how such trends are likely to be played out in the classroom—what range of responses may exist, what other forces may be at work in students’ lives, and what other concerns and attitudes may influence student progress.
Summary of Results

Attitude surveys suggest significant age- and gender-related differences in students’ writing apprehension and sense of control for students in this study. Gender appears to have a significant effect on writing apprehension scores; female students tended to be initially less apprehensive than male students, and to remain less apprehensive over the course of the term, though both groups gained in confidence and the semester progressed. Age appeared to have a slight but significant effect on control scores; non-traditional students began the semester with a greater sense of control over their writing process and product than traditional students, and made greater gains in their sense of control over the course of the term. Examination of age x gender interactions and of individual student profiles suggests, however, that these trends do not completely describe student diversity in the study classes—the results suggest that such large-scale patterns become increasingly complex and difficult to define when examined in relation to other patterns of difference or to the lives of individual students.

Examination of age x gender interactions suggests the existence of patterns that are not evident from the age or gender data alone. Writing apprehension, for example, appeared to be affected by age as well as gender—non-traditional women were initially more apprehensive than traditional women, and non-
traditional men were initially less apprehensive than traditional men. Furthermore, non-traditional students of both genders made greater gains in confidence over the course of the term than traditional students, and non-traditional men made the greatest gains of all four groups. Examination of students' behaviors and individual survey responses suggests that, not only do large-scale trends encompass a wide variety of attitudes and motivations, but also that the relationship between a student's perceptions of her experience and the experience as described by survey scores is highly variable. Survey results may, in many cases, reflect students' attitudes and perceptions imperfectly at best, and may fail to capture the numerous forces at work in an individual student's life—her outside commitments, motivations, attitude toward the subject, relationships with classmates and instructor. Although this study is only a preliminary investigation into the nature of student diversity, then, it does suggest that the nature of diversity may be more complex than studies of large-scale patterns of difference have typically suggested.

Limitations

This is a preliminary, descriptive study, the purpose of which was primarily to complicate the concept of diversity. The age- and gender-related results of this study probably cannot and should not be generalized even to the populations of the study colleges, much less to larger populations. The sample was relatively limited—small, not particularly random, and racially and ethnically fairly homogeneous. Since statistical results were based only on those
students who completed both the initial and final survey, the results do not reflect the attitudes of students who may have added late or dropped the course part-way through the semester. (Common sense would suggest that students who dropped might have experienced greater frustration or apprehension, or had less of a sense of control than students who did not.)

An additional limitation of this study is one inherent to any study of this type—the real world is infinitely more complex than the tools we use to study it. As ethnographer Frederick Erickson points out (1984), both the nature of our research methodologies and the complexity of social interactions require that the pictures we produce of the world are at best caricatures (p.56), with details selectively reported. A portrait that includes everything, every force acting on the social environment and the individuals within it, is perhaps an impossibility. This is both because of the number of forces acting in any complex social situation and because seemingly trivial initial conditions and events can have enormous final effects—as any teacher knows, a single chance remark by a student or the fact that the students' desks are bolted to the floor can shape the classroom dynamic as surely as the larger forces of age, race, gender, class, or personality. As yet, we have no good way of talking about this sort of complexity, even though we navigate, more or less by instinct, social situations as complex as the classroom every day. This study shares the limitations of most in this regard—the student diversity presented here is still only a small part of a much larger and constantly changing picture, a caricature of the reality of the six study classrooms. The primary value of these results, then, is not that they can be generalized to large populations, nor that they fully describe the complexity of
any individual classroom, but rather that they illustrate something of the local and individual complexity that exists within large-scale patterns of difference.

Implications

These limitations, as well as the results of the study itself, suggest that the most significant implications of this study may be related, not to any specific age- or gender-related trends, but rather to how we define, discuss, and manage diversity, both in our research and our practice. Both the individual variations within the age- and gender-related patterns, and the intersections of those patterns suggest that descriptions of large-scale patterns of difference may fail to describe completely the ways in which those patterns are likely to be manifested in the individual classroom and the experience of individual students. To understand more fully how large-scale patterns may operate in our classrooms, then, we need to look more closely at describing, defining, and managing student diversity at the local level of the classroom and the individual.

Implications for Practice

The results suggest two large-scale age- and gender-related trends: women may be significantly less apprehensive about writing than men, and non-traditional students may have a greater sense of control over their writing process and product than traditional students. The results, however, also suggest
that there is likely to be a significant level of individual and local variation and complexity within these trends that would make applying them in either teaching or writing practice problematic. However valid the trends are, it is likely that they will describe particular groups of students, particular classrooms, particular individuals incompletely at best. As George Gadda argues (1993):

We can't restructure our classrooms or curricular expectations to match what we suspect our students' backgrounds may be. Such changes would not be possible even if all our students came from one ethnic or national group, one socio-economic class, and one educational background--as of course they don't. The individual differences... would...render such a plan useless... (p. 225).

This is not to say that descriptions of large-scale patterns of difference such as the age- and gender-related trends described by this study are necessarily inaccurate or invalid, merely that it is important that both teachers and administrators recognize the limitations of such patterns as a foundation for practice.

Given these limitations, then, how do we best apply generalized conclusions about large populations in the complicated world of the classroom? Clearly we cannot simply ignore large-scale patterns of difference--as I have said, such patterns may yield useful information about the needs and experiences of student populations. But just as clearly, we cannot apply such information without regard for the variations in the population we are likely to find in our colleges and our classrooms. The results, then, suggest the need for a type of practice that allows instructors and administrators to build bridges between the useful but limited information provided by descriptions of trends and the variable, changeable nature of local populations.
A particularly effective tool for applying information about general trends on the local level may be reflective practice, a model of practice advocated by several researchers, among them Donald Schon, Nancy Barnes (1992), Howard Tinberg (1990, 1991), Linda Flower (1994), Louise Phelps (1991), Lawrence Stenhouse, and Patricia Harkin (1989). Reflective practice—also commonly referred to as theory building—is based on a process of continual observation, reflection, and theory-building within the practice environment. Essentially, reflective practice asks practitioners to become ethnographers, observing students' classroom and writing behaviors, reflecting on those observations, then using those reflections as the basis for hypotheses about students' learning needs, hypotheses which can then be tested and refined through further observation and reflection. It results in active teaching—continuous adjustment of one's perceptions of a particular class or student, and continual refinement of course materials and methods—based as strongly on local knowledge as on theory. This process, of course, resembles closely the less formal methods most people use instinctively to navigate complex social situations; reflective practice simply urges teachers and administrators to use the process more consciously, acting as theoreticians in their own schools and classrooms. Its advantage over other models of practice for applying diversity research is that it is flexible, adaptive, and local by nature, so seems ideally suited to dealing with the complexity of local environments.

In this model of practice, then, generalized descriptions of large populations would best serve, not as direct guides for practice, but rather as initial hypotheses about students' behaviors and learning needs—hypotheses that must be continually refined, through the process of observation and reflection, to
meet local conditions. Thus, an individual instructor taking as the basis for an initial hypothesis one of the results of this study—for example, that female students may be less apprehensive about writing than male students—might use reflective practice to theorize about if and how that generalized trend might manifest itself in her classroom, and about the most effective methods of acting on that knowledge with her own students. She might ask students to reflect on and write about their own attitudes toward writing; she might reflect on the writing of individual students in her class, their styles, their strengths and weaknesses; she might use conferences or workshops to talk to individual students about their fears and concerns; she might observe students as they write, noting how they write—whether they write quickly and easily, sigh in frustration, stare at the wall, whether they edit as they write or turn out clean copy, whether they outline their thoughts or plunge straight in. From her own observations, she would then ideally be able to hypothesize about her own students’ level of writing apprehension, the nature of and roots of that writing apprehension, and effective methods of intervention—hypotheses that she would test with further observation as the semester progressed. Working from the initial hypothesis, that female students are likely to be less apprehensive than male students, she would form her own theories about the nature of diversity in her classroom. Reflective practice, then, allows practitioners to develop situated theories of diversity, theories based in knowledge of the general characteristics of large populations, but carefully adapted to and built on existing local conditions.
Implications for Further Research

The results of the study suggest that large-scale patterns of diversity are likely to become complex and unpredictable at the local or individual level. One focus for further research, then, might be discovering what forces are at work in the classroom environment on the local level, and in the behavior and attitudes of individual students. How are various large-scale patterns—age, gender, ethnicity, motivation, ability—likely to intersect with one another on the local or individual level? What is the nature of the relationship between such patterns and the experience of individual students? What forces shape student diversity on the local level of the classroom—institutional goals; community needs and ideals; the experience, attitudes, obligations, abilities, races, genders, of individual students; the instructor’s attitudes and methods; the physical space in which the class meets? How, in short, are large-scale patterns of difference likely to look in the individual classroom?

Another area of study might focus on the ways in which teachers and students currently manage diversity, and on ways it might be managed more effectively. Many capable and experienced teachers seem to navigate the complexities of the classroom almost by instinct. How do they perceive student diversity? How do they see their own role in the classroom? How do their perceptions influence their methods—interactions with students, teaching strategies, evaluation? What tools do they use to manage student differences and create a productive class dynamic? What role does a teacher’s outlook, personality, and pedagogical and theoretical stance play in her management of diversity? Likewise, how do students perceive diversity within the classroom,
and how do their perceptions affect their classroom behavior and their interactions with the instructor and with other students, especially those students see as being significantly different from themselves?

Finally, further research should focus on the problem of (re)defining and describing student diversity in a way that reveals its complexity, taking into account such factors as individual variations, change over time, and the relationships and intersections that exist among various patterns of difference. This is not to say, of course, that the large-scale patterns of difference on which diversity research has traditionally focused are invalid, merely that they only reveal part of the picture and should be reconsidered in relation to local and individual variations. One challenge will be finding ways of talking about diversity that allow us to consider both the broad patterns and the variations within those patterns, particularly finding research methodologies that will allow us to represent more faithfully both the large-scale patterns and the localness, relative unpredictability, complexity, and constant change that are inherent in the classroom environment.


Bryant, D. G. The composing process of blind writers. Dissertation Abstracts International 45, 11A.


APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Classroom Attitudes Study

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this study is to build a better understanding of how students’ expectations for and attitudes toward writing classes affect learning processes. The study is especially concerned with the differences, if any, between traditional and nontraditional students, and with how these differences affect learning and classroom interaction. The study is exploratory in nature, so there are no hidden manipulations, no experiments, and no control groups. Instead, the study is descriptive, asking what kinds of patterns student attitudes and expectations follow, and how those patterns affect writing, classroom interaction, and learning processes.

Data Collection
The investigator will collect two kinds of data throughout the semester. First, you will be asked to fill out brief questionnaires at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. The questionnaires will be completed during class time. Second, the investigator will observe and audiotape the class four times during the semester.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Although the participation of the whole class will strengthen the study, you may choose now or at any time to decline to participate. Your instructor will not know which, if any, students have declined to participate. If you decline to participate, you will still be asked to fill out the questionnaires; however, your responses will not be used in the analysis or in reporting the results of the study.

Protection of Anonymity
If you agree to participate in the study, your anonymity will be protected. Neither your name nor any other identifying information about you will be revealed in reporting the results of the study. Also, your instructor will not see any of the data until after your final grade has been turned in. If you feel uncomfortable about any aspect of the study or have any questions about how the data will be used, please feel free to speak to the investigator about them.

I consent to participate in this study of classroom attitudes. I understand that my anonymity will be protected and give permission for data about me to be used in this study and in articles and presentations reporting its results.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------
Print name

---------------------------------------------------------------------------
Sign Name

---------------------------------------------------------------------------
Date
Classroom Attitude Survey
This survey focuses on the different attitudes and expectations people bring to their college writing courses. Please respond to the following statements by circling the appropriate letter(s) to indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers; answer honestly in terms of your own opinions and experiences.

SA = Strongly Agree  A = Agree  D = Disagree  SD = Strongly Disagree

1. SA A D SD When I have a writing assignment, I like to talk to someone about it before I write.
2. SA A D SD I avoid writing.
3. SA A D SD My major concern when I begin a paper is coming up with enough things to say.
4. SA A D SD What the teacher thinks about my work is more important than what fellow students think about it.
5. SA A D SD It's a waste of time to talk with other students about my writing.
6. SA A D SD Writing is a lot of fun.
7. SA A D SD I feel uncomfortable when other students question what the teacher is doing or saying in class.
8. SA A D SD Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.
9. SA A D SD Teachers should always control class discussion.
10. SA A D SD When I write, I never know if what I write says what I mean.
11. SA A D SD Telling a friend about my ideas for writing helps me write better.
12. SA A D SD Students' contributions to class discussion are just as important as teachers'.
13. SA A D SD A teacher's main job is to encourage students to think for themselves.
14. SA A D SD People can give me useful advice about what I'm going to write.
15. SA A D SD When I start writing an assignment, I have no idea if I will succeed in saying what I mean.
16. SA A D SD I feel comfortable asking questions when I don't understand something.
17. SA A D SD I enjoy participating in class discussions.
18. SA A D SD I'm no good at writing.
19. SA A D SD When I have a problem writing, I like to bounce ideas off other people.

20. SA A D SD I feel comfortable contributing to class discussion.

21. SA A D SD I feel comfortable voicing complaints about a class to the teacher.

22. SA A D SD I waste a lot of time when I write because I don't know what to say.

23. SA A D SD I enjoy writing.

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Biographical Questionnaire

Gender (circle one): M F  Number of Semesters in College (including current semester): ___

Age (check one):  ____ under 18;  ____ 18-21;  ____ 22-29;  ____ 30-39;  ____ 40-49;  ____ 50 or above

How many courses are you taking this term (including this one)?  ____

How many hours a week do you work?  ____

Please respond briefly and candidly to the following questions:

1. Have you taken any college writing courses before this one? (circle one) yes  no
   Which course(s) have you taken?

2. What, specifically, would you like to get out of this class? (information? skills? experience?)

3. How important to you is it to do well in this course? (circle one) Not very  Somewhat  Very
   Why?

4. What most concerns you about this course?
Biographical Questionnaire 2

Gender (circle one): M  F  Number of Semesters in College (including current semester): ___

Age (check one): ___ under 18; ___ 18-21; ___ 22-29; ___ 30-39; ___ 40-49; ___ 50 or above

How many courses are you taking this semester (including this one)? ___

How many hours a week do you work? ___

Please respond briefly and candidly to the following questions:

1. What, specifically, do you think you have gained from this class so far?

2. Have your expectations for this class been met so far? Why or how?

3. How important is it to you to do well in this course? (circle one) Not very  Somewhat  Very Why?

4. What most concerns you about this course?
Biographical Questionnaire 3

Gender (circle one): M  F  Number of Semesters in College (including current semester): ___

Age (check one): _ under 18; _ 18-21; _ 22-29; _ 30-39; _ 40-49; _ 50 or above

How many courses did you take this semester (including this one)? ___

How many hours a week did you work this semester? ___

Please respond briefly and candidly to the following questions:

1. What, specifically, do you think you have gained from this class?

2. Were your expectations for this class met? Why or how?

3. How motivated were you to do well in this course? (circle one) Not very Somewhat Very
   How did this affect your attitudes toward the class?

4. How did your attitudes toward this class or toward writing change over the course of the semester?
APPENDIX C: MISSION STATEMENTS

Ellsworth Community College Mission

Ellsworth Community College is a friendly place that looks toward the future rather than the past. We believe that people learn best if they feel good about themselves. Thus, it is part of our mission to help students develop self-confidence and pride. We believe that most people want to improve the quality of their lives and that it is never too late to learn something new.

Our students, many of whom come from small towns in rural Iowa, make Ellsworth Community College the exciting place it is. They are products of a rural heritage which values hard work, honesty, ingenuity, perseverance, and respect for others.

Some of our students know what they want to do; others do not. Some students have a specific career in mind; others are still looking. Some students know how to study when they come to us; others do not. Some have difficulty, while others sail through. We try to help them all.

The faculty and staff are highly qualified and deeply committed to helping each individual. The College sees itself as part of rural Iowa, contributing to its cultural life and providing needed services.

The College has become more accessible for persons with handicaps and is continually searching for ways to improve on what has already been done.
Ellsworth Community College is dedicated to helping those whose needs are great: single parents, minority groups, farmers, disadvantaged students, and displaced workers.

Ellsworth Community College helps people solve problems; it helps them clarify their options, broaden their horizons, and build on their strengths; it helps people set achievable goals. We believe that the will to succeed is as important as the talent—maybe more so.

We aspire to help individuals enjoy life's experience to the fullest: To enjoy membership in families, friendships, and communities, and to be positive participants in local, state, and world affairs. We want their lives to be both meaningful and rewarding. We are dreamers as well as doers.

As such, we are dedicated to the challenge of keeping Ellsworth Community College an effective institution for enhancing and preserving the cultural heritage and economic well-being of those who would live their lives in our service area—rural Iowa. For, as those who have gone before us, we must have the courage to recognize the challenges, must put forth the required effort, and must risk the opportunities and uncertainties of change.
Kirkwood Community College Mission
Kirkwood Community College identifies community needs, provides accessible quality education and training, and promotes opportunities for lifelong learning.

Des Moines Area Community College Mission
The mission of Des Moines Area Community College is to offer quality programs and courses to meet the different community interests, student abilities and personal objectives of citizens of all ages and levels of education, for the purpose of improving the quality of life, the economic conditions, and the public welfare of the state. DMACC has become an integral part of Iowa’s business and industry community as a result of its role in preparing Iowans for meaningful employment through the provision of personalized liberal arts curricula and high-tech vocational education.