Growing up in the suburban United States of the late twentieth century, large portions of my long-term memory are filled with ditties from a video series known as Schoolhouse Rock. Shown during Saturday morning cartoons, the series included such memorable pieces as “Conjunction Junction,” “Interplanet Janet,” “I’m Just a Bill,” and “the Great American Melting Pot.” The latter two videos were specifically commissioned as part of the American Rock series which coincided with U.S. bicentennial celebrations in 1976. At the time, I remember the series as being socially progressive and, like other shows on public television, emphasizing the value of diversity and awareness and respect for differences. Fast forward over 30 years later, and I decided to be more intentional about addressing diversity issues in my course on the Columbian exchange between Europe and the Americas in the 1600s, so I began to delve into the literature. As an historian, I had never had formal training or preparation in diversity issues and was surprised to find how much this dynamic field had changed in a relatively short period of time. I learned, for example, that the “Great American Melting Pot” had become a very outdated concept and that my childhood nostalgia had given way to the Great American Salad Bowl, a metaphor for the cultural mosaic theory at the forefront of much contemporary thinking about diversity and diversity education both inside and outside of the United States.

The Salad Bowl theory suggests that rather than squashing cultural differences together into one homogenous whole, that the various parts retain their original flavor, so to speak, but come together into one appealing dish. There are clear resonances between this idea and that of
educational constructivism, which suggests not one pathway to learning, but rather multiple trajectories that allow students with different interests, backgrounds, and talents to work together in a common classroom environment. Each of the contributions in this issue of *MountainRise* seek to bring these concepts together as the authors deal with questions related to diversity, from teaching to multicultural audiences to raising awareness of multicultural issues.

For James Davis and Lori Oxford, the challenge was to use Spanish language education to help overcome cultural resistance. Based on their experience teaching in rural southern U.S., they hypothesized that the desire to learn a second language might go hand in hand with appreciation for the culture for which the language is native. In which case, if students had a better understanding of Hispanic culture, it would stand to reason that they might become more motivated to improve their second-language communication skills. They chose to use experiential learning to bridge the two, establishing a program in which their students worked directly with Spanish-speaking elementary school students. In their analysis of the outcomes of the program, however, they did find clear gains in cultural awareness and appreciation but, surprisingly, these did not translate into increasingly positive attitudes towards second language acquisition. As they suggest, perhaps this relationship is more complex than we might think.

For Deborah Pattee and Tom Lo Guidice, the challenge was to provide diversity training for pre-service teachers and to prepare them for managing multicultural classrooms. Recognizing “unreadiness” for such classrooms as a national trend, the instructors chose to develop several real-life inspired scenarios in order to gain an understanding of the level of cultural sensitivity among their students and to suggest constructive solutions to the “unreadiness” issue. Students responded to scenarios based on race, gender, sexuality, age, religion, ability, and appearance. They were then given focused instruction on these issues and the scenarios repeated and a
reflection component added. In the end, the researchers found that diversity education produced some noteworthy gains, but not across the board. Gains in awareness of racist and homophobic behavior and behavioral interventions were evident for example, but the scenario concerning ableism produced less clear-cut results. The study demonstrates that there is real value in integrating diversity education into teacher preparation, but the issues are complicated by the environment and context in which they take place.

For James Hand, Chad Betters, Michael McKenzie, and Himanshu Gopalan, the cultural context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) presented a particular challenge for student learning and retention. Noting the established link between engagement and reflection, the faculty in Motorsports Management at Winston Salem State turned to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to devise a creative means for increasing student engagement across the NSSE categories. The result, an undergraduate research showcase, produced successful results for student but also for faculty, who found their own interest in research renewed by the mentoring experience. Their experience suggests that as complicated as environmental challenges can be, it is possible to meet them through intentional practice.

Tamara Walzer’s contribution to this issue is not overtly about cultural diversity but it does address educational constructivism. The piece is an action-research based study on one instructor’s move from using scoring rubrics to a scaled system. At the onset, she hoped that the new system would better facilitate high standards, fairness, and student motivation. The results of her study showed that this was indeed the case and that both the instructor and the students recognized these values in the new system. While not directly addressing diversity, the instructor did move away from “melting pot” standards she perceived as stifling innovation to a new system
that allowed for greater and varied responses while still upholding high standards of academic rigor.

As these essays collectively show, cultural diversity and educational constructivism go hand in hand, but there are few clear cut recipes for success and, in fact, perhaps this is not the goal. Instead, the process of taking these issues and tossing them into the ‘salad’ of higher education may be worth examining in future issues. Faculty centers, as Ed Nuhfer’s book review suggests, may be major players in leading these broader changes. All in all, it could be said that we are in our ”salad days,” or highpoint of awareness, sensitivity, and openness to issues of diversity inside and outside of the classroom and the results of this are resounding in classrooms everywhere.

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