

Luz de Cultura

Charter School Administrators Share Their Experience with Diversity

At the Charter Schools National Conference in Milwaukee, participants of the session *Serving Diverse Populations in Charter Schools* crowded into the conference room to hear working experience from the field. The panel included representatives from a collection of culturally diverse charter schools. Themes repeated during the session's discussion were recruiting, marketing the school, application of cultural competence within schools, absences, hands-on instruction and parent involvement. While most of the themes were not on diversity, the session revealed that the philosophy and values of a charter school merge with the practical matters of school management.

Mr. Richard Farias of the Tejano Center for Community Concerns, a non-profit organization in Houston, TX, serving a Latino population, described the comprehensive and holistic approach the Center practices with their programs. For example, they provide housing, a shelter, coordinate with Americorps for teacher aids, and facilitate an adult education program. At the TCCC's charter school, a staff member organizes parents to volunteer community hours at the school.

Mr. Farias outlined their approach at the TCCC including these "tips" for organizations providing services to a Latino population: 1) create an atmosphere of *La Familia*, 2) include a parent component, 3) include family literacy programs, 4) encourage teachers to go to homes of each child they teach 5) develop good self-esteem and self-confidence (he mentioned the challenge courses and adventure or R.O.P.E.S. curriculum—Refocus Opportunity Program of Education and

Service), 6) hire bilingual teachers 7) get involved in cultural events 8) incorporate cultural food in the cafeteria (like enchiladas) 9) always maintain and open-door policy.

Dr. Mark Sorenson, Principal of the Little Singer Community School, a primarily Navajo charter school, described their school's experience and success incorporating cultural awareness in the school by building compassion among students, getting students out in the community, and integrating traditional hands-on and oral experience into the classroom. He discussed how the school encourages and benefits from input by the parents about cultural awareness.

Similarly, Mr. Nakanishi from Hālua Kū Māna New Century Public Charter School in Hawaii explained the school's philosophy of promoting native Hawaiian integrity and tradition, incorporating more hands-on learning, thus affirming Dr. Sorenson's observations. Hālua Kū Māna employs a majority of Hawaiian teachers, and emphasizes the strength of the Hawaiian people. Mr. Nakanishi stressed the need for real-world curriculum: language, culture, values, and a sense of place, and he recommended viewing, *Pedagogy of Place: Little Singer Community School, Navajo Nation (2000)*, a video about Dr. Sorenson's school in Arizona.

Managing school recruiting and marketing was a pressing concern for the audience, and Mr. Dave DeBerry, Principal of the Milwaukee Urban League Academy of Business and Economics, re-

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Books and Articles Covering Stereotype Threat and Diverse Classrooms

Newly Discovered Websites of Interest!

Books:

California School of Professional Psychology Handbook of Multicultural Education, Research, Intervention, and Training, Elizabeth Davis-Russell. ISBN: 0-7879-5763-1, 2002

From the prestigious California School of Professional Psychology comes a definitive and indispensable resource. Drawing on the most current research and practice in the field, *The Handbook of Multicultural Education, Research, Intervention, and Training* is a comprehensive volume that addresses critical issues such as culturally responsive education, culturally infused clinical training, culturally competent faculty, qualitative research in multicultural studies, working with culture in psychotherapy, racial-identity attitudes, conceptualizing wellness in multicultural populations, and many other key topics in the on-going effort to create educational, social service, and mental health systems which truly reflect our society. Of special interest to educators is Ch. 3, *The Vicissitudes of Cultural Competence: Dealing with Difficult Classroom Dialogue*, by Gale Young and Elizabeth Davis-Russell. The article recommends step-by-step practices for educators dealing with difficult conversations and students' emotions in the classroom.

Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms, Gloria Ladson-Billings, <http://www.wiley.com/cda/product/0,,0787950017,00.html>
ISBN: 0-7879-5001-7

From the Inside Flap: *Crossing Over to Canaan* tells the story of eight novice teachers working in urban, elementary school settings. It details their struggles and triumphs as they confront challenges in the classroom and respond with innovative strategies that turn cultural strengths into academic assets. Gloria Ladson-Billings offers a model of teaching that focuses on academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness. Drawing from her own experiences as a young African-American teacher working in Philadelphia, she successfully weaves together narrative, observation, and scholarship to create an inspirational and practical book that will help teachers everywhere as they work to transcend labels and categories to support excellence among all students.

Articles:

"Thin Ice: 'Stereotype Threat' and Black College Students," by Claude M. Steele, *The Atlantic Monthly*

<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99aug/9908stereotype.htm#bio>

Stereotype threat is "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype," such as the stereotype that women perform poorly in math. Steele explains that some students try to escape stereotype threat by disidentifying with the part of life in which the stereotype originates, such as race or ethnic identities. The article defines what an academic community can do to reduce or completely eliminate stereotype threat - increase the degree of racial trust, or the assurance of racial fairness in assessment.

Preparing Teachers for Multicultural Classrooms, by Ines Marquez Chisholm
<http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/jeilms/vol14/chisholm.htm>

Despite much rhetoric and research, a fundamental question in preservice teacher education continues to elicit much debate: What do teacher candidates need to become effective teachers? The answer to this basic question is as varied as the myriad of philosophical and epistemological perspectives that span the history of pedagogy. Although there may be no definitive answer to this fundamental question, just as there is no one best teaching model or one kind of student, there is a professional area of knowledge and skill that should permeate all preservice education programs--multicultural education. This field which prepares teachers "for the social, political and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters" is as essential to teaching as nurturing is to human development.

The Center for Cultural Fluency
<http://www.culturalfluency.org>

The Center for Cultural Fluency was created to provide classroom resources and professional development for teachers about issues of cultural diversity. In particular, our aim is to enable teachers to become culturally fluent and to develop cultural fluency in their students. The Center for Cultural Fluency has developed a collection of essential, compelling resources for educators everywhere who wish to add multicultural perspectives to their curriculum. The website includes and excellent vendors section for purchasing videos, books, posters, art, and other multicultural education materials.

Rethinking Schools Online,
<http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.html>.

Rethinking Schools began as a local effort to address problems such as basal readers, standardized testing, and textbook-dominated curriculum. It remains firmly committed to equity and to the vision that public education is central to the creation of a humane, caring, multiracial democracy. While writing for a broad audience, Rethinking Schools emphasizes problems facing urban schools, particularly issues of race.



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1. In literature related to cultural diversity, the term “cultural competence” is often used. How would you define ‘cultural competence’?

In the most simple way, it is for developing your identity through understanding who you are. I think that it is deeply connected to learning how to speak and write one's language, but also includes an understanding of one's personal cultural history and the ability to see how this fits in with the rest of the world. It is also an action, the act of being in and participating in one's culture. We promote a bicultural curriculum, one that focuses on cultural competence in one's own culture but also seeks to provide exposure and competence to the mainstream culture. We try to do this in a way that raises students' consciousness about both of these worlds. We talk to them about the need to wear two hats. We do not try and get them to turn in their “rez” hat when they develop skills needed to survive and thrive in the dominant culture. It is a reality of modern life that to thrive they will need to understand both worlds. We want to help students do this with a critical understanding of history which can inform and support their future.

2. What is your vision of what cultural competence can do for U.S. students?

Research for Native American students shows that it is key to their achievement, their ultimate success, and the success of their communities. That I suppose is the tip of the iceberg as we feel as a school that it can also promote strong sovereign communities for Native Americans and that this is key to survival. The students we serve come from communities which are challenged by hundreds of years of disruptions from outside forces. I think that a strong sense of cultural identity can be the first step towards healing the community. This is necessary for not simply survival but moving beyond that to strong healthy communities. For a long time the Federal Government tried to erase cultural differences by mainstreaming Native Americans into the dominant culture through education. Rather than promoting cultural competence, there was out and out cultural genocide going on through schooling. This was incredibly damaging to Native American people. Hundreds if not thousands of distinct tribes managed to survive this period with their languages and cultures intact. In this story, we see our school working to heal this for local tribal communities by overtly focusing on “cultural competence”, to help students rediscover what has been hidden and taken away, and to teach them to draw on these things for strength and making meaning of the world around them.

3. What are some of the greatest challenges that face K-12 educators who are integrating cultural competence into their curriculum, and what advice would you give them?

I think that a lot of times each culture is given only a moment of attention in the classroom and that this is not enough. Regular diverse public schools have a lot of different cultures within their school. I think that this forces a focus on the dominant culture as a common culture unless the school works very hard to do something else. This focus has the inevitable result of making those from diverse cultures feel that something is wrong with them.

There are also many pressures, pressures from accountability and testing programs, the mainstream media, television. Testing programs force the focus onto a limited scope of learning, this can make it difficult to find time to create meaningful amounts of time for learning language history and culture that is not going to be on the test (and for certain, it won't be on the test).

Mainstream media strives hard to create a common consumer culture that is devoid of distinct cultural identities. Music by Native Americans is not on the best seller list so our students rarely see their culture reflected on radio stations or MTV. Movies about Native Americans are rare and when they are produced they tend to tell a story that is palatable to the average American. These images do not reflect a healthy sense of identity and community which our students can relate to.

There are dozens of challenges, I think these are the most prevalent.

4. What kind of network do charter schools have to access resources? How culturally competent do you feel these resources are?

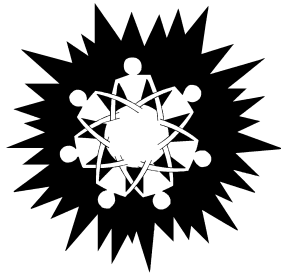
There are a lot of resources available to charter school people. They are mostly accessed through the state and federal government, professional organizations and personal networking. However, I would say that there is no “cultural competency focus” to any of these resources. We do not only rely on the typical resources such as the state or federal government, instead we look to the community from which our students come. It is rich with resources. We have worked with the various departments on the Tohono O'odham Nation and this has provided rich support for our programs and students. We are beginning to work with the Pasqua Yaqui Nation as our enrollment from that community grows. We also work with the U of A to provide access to Native student programs and organizations for our students. We also move beyond institutions, whether they are Native or not and reach out to individuals in the community. We also try to set up programs that allow reciprocity between our school and the community in terms of resources. For instance, our Wellness program works to help provide diabetes prevention by going to various

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sponded to the issue. He underscored his success in recruiting African American parents using an intimate one-on-one approach. He explained how he frequents outdoor festivals and visits homes door-to-door to speak to potential parents. Communicating directly with parents was part of another popular theme of the session - encouraging parents' involvement in the school. Mr. DeBerry said the school develops programs for "effective Black parenting", incorporating parenting success; similar to what Mr. Farias did with his program in Texas.

Overall, the session provided solid examples of how culture is important, and what role it can play in the success of a school's mission. Each panelist provided first-hand accounts of how they met specific challenges to the school's success by managing recruitment and marketing along with maintaining a philosophy of valuing culture.

For more information on how to contact panelists described in this article, please contact Robin Southern at rsouthern@luzsocialservices.org or (520.882.6216).

