

Winter 2012 • Volume 78-2

International Journal for Professional Educators

The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin

Diverse Learners



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Winter 2012 • Volume 78-2

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*The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International
promotes professional and personal growth of women
educators and excellence in education.*

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Call for Submissions

Members are encouraged to submit manuscripts for consideration by the *Bulletin* Editorial Board. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* accepts Action Research, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research, Annotated Bibliographies, Program Descriptions, Position Papers, Book Reviews, Viewpoints, Graphic Arts, Letters to the Editor, and Poetry for **print** issues (spring, fall) and **online** issues (summer, winter). Manuscripts should be focused, well organized, effectively developed, concise, and appropriate for *Bulletin* readers. The style should be direct, clear, readable, and free from gender, political, patriotic, or religious bias. For more detailed information, please refer to the Submission Guidelines on page 63 and the Submission Grid on page 64. Listed below are the suggested themes of upcoming issues.

Summer 2012 (78-4) Educational Technology (Online)

(deadline is March 1, 2012)

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) • Mobile Learning • Smart Technology • E-texts • Phones in School • Second Life Virtual World • W2 Internet Mobile Devices • Virtual Learning • Animation

Fall 2012 (79-1) International Learning (Print)

(deadline is June 1, 2012)

Schools for Africa • International Partnerships • Impact of World Fellowship-Sponsored Education • Student/Faculty Exchange • Global Standardization • Language Learning • Education Management • Adult Education Retraining • Language Development

Winter 2013 (79-2) Educational Research (Online)

(deadline is September 1, 2012)

Action Research • Qualitative Research • Quantitative Research • Mixed-Methods Research

Spring 2013 (79-3) Civic Engagement (Print)

(deadline is December 1, 2012)

Social Issues in Schools • National Challenges • Green Education • Partnerships with Business/Nonprofits • Service Learning/Volunteerism • The Politics of Education

Submit all materials to:

***Bulletin* Editorial Staff**

bulletin@dkg.org

From the Editor

Education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor in which one readily crafts experiences that will appeal to any and all students. Rather, the challenge and joy of teaching lie in attempting to meet the needs of diverse learners in the complex and fluid environment of schools and classes. Those whom we educate vary not only in age, gender, health, race, culture, ethnicity, and language but also in experiences, interests, values, beliefs, socioeconomic status, academic ability, social skills, readiness, motivation, and learning styles—to name but a few variables. Furthermore, on any given day, an individual student's needs may shift based on feelings, emotions, moods, recent experiences, and interactions with others. Dealing with diverse learners is thus a constant challenge for quality educators.

Of course, we as educators bring our *own* diversity into the teaching and learning equation as well. That is, as we work to meet the needs of diverse learners, our own characteristics, strengths, and needs come into play. Appropriately, our lead theme-based articles focus on self-awareness as a key to approaching diversity in the classroom. Shillingstad provides a review of a book and Web site that can help us understand ourselves as the first step to working successfully with others. Carlson Berg offers a unique research perspective by providing a self-study of her journey into inclusion and race. Maye and Day explore how teacher identities are critical in shaping culturally relevant pedagogy for students at risk.

On the practical side, Sylvester, Lewis, and Severance provide guidelines for conferencing with parents as part of Response to Intervention (RTI), a relatively new approach to identifying and addressing special needs. Novello interviews Dr. Susan Assouline, a leader in the field of gifted and talented education, regarding the best ways to meet the needs of this special group of students. Assouline briefly discusses *twice-exceptional* students—those who are gifted and also have disabilities—and Canillas Stein, Hetzel, and Beck further explore this unique concept in the context of English learners whose giftedness is masked by their language deficits.

Schaffer describes a program to help preservice educators learn to work with diverse and economically disadvantaged students in urban settings, and Baker provides insight to the special needs of potential high school dropouts. Finally, Reeves and Filce urge readers to meet the unique challenges of working with students who are chronically ill and at risk for *splintered skills* because of excessive absence.

The diversity of learners in our schools and classrooms is so great that it is impossible to address the full spectrum of talents, interests, and needs that we face as educators each day. Nevertheless, this issue provides a strong sampling of the many hues of diversity and clearly illustrates the challenges and joys that come from exploring, understanding, and appreciating diverse learners.

Judith R. Merz, EdD
Editor

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

The *lifelong learning* theme of the Fall 2011 edition of the *DKG Bulletin* spurred me to think about life minus some notable experiences.

- What if J. K. Rowling had kept the tale of Harry Potter to herself...?
- What if Oprah Winfrey had felt too shy to try a television talk show...?
- Suppose Annie Webb Blanton and her colleagues had not founded the Delta Kappa Gamma organization...?

But all of these ladies did share their considerable talents. And Blanton and the other founders **did** create the organization that connects us as women educators and enables us to promote education in a network throughout the world.

Whether you chose teaching or teaching chose you, you are in it now, and it is in you. Whether in the classroom or not, whether in our hometown or traveling, we educators tend to converse with others by way of questioning. We continue selecting our words and actions carefully so that they will give a good example to others. Our humanitarianism spills over into volunteer work with others and in our communities.

If we make students into **lifelong learners** as most schooling sets as its mission, then the world needs **lifelong teachers**. Purposefully and masterfully designed by our founders, Delta Kappa Gamma offers the opportunity to sustain and support us as lifelong teachers. In order to reach that ongoing goal, we must actively participate in our own chapters and beyond to share in and pass along the support of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society.

Betsy Kiker
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Book Review

Gratitude and Joy: A Foundation for Success and Productivity. A Book Review of *The Gospel of Joy*

By Merry Lewis

Gore, Amanda. (2009). *The Gospel of Joy*. Chatswood, NSW, AU: Head2Heart Pty Ltd. 297 pages. ISBN 978-0-9818794-1-3 (paperback)

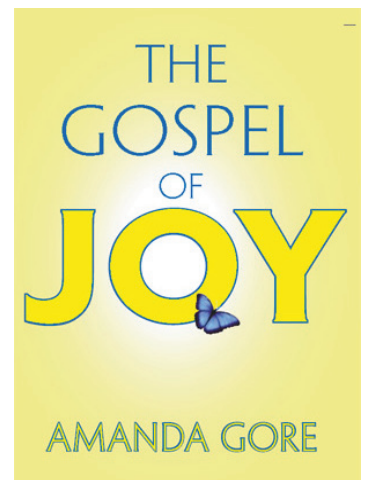
The Gospel of Joy, by Australian author Amanda Gore, offers the reader 12 chapters of thought-provoking lessons on eradicating fear and filling one's life with joy. In each chapter, Gore explores a pillar of joy that can be the foundation for improved leadership, relationships, and productivity. Gore further spreads the joy with the joyproject.com, which includes journaling, a joy university, and testimonies.

From gratitude to grace to generosity, *The Gospel of Joy* (Gore, 2009) takes the reader on a journey of daily steps that lead toward a life of happiness, health (both mental and physical), energy, and vitality. More than a self-help work, the book describes a series of principles that, once discovered, guide the reader to a way of thoughtful living. Applying the principles of the chapters to their daily work will help educators feel less stressed and more productive and energized.

Gore writes with the same liveliness and fervor that she lives. She is a recognized international motivational speaker for businesses such as IBM, Bank of America, Pepsico, and Avon and for professional organizations such as The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. Her passion and sense of joy are easily translated into an inspirational book.

The mission of the book is to eradicate fear. By removing fear, one can identify and connect with what is important in life. Gore describes a series of daily activities that teach readers to discover aspects of their lives that may be blocking joy. These activities, which do not have to be done in order, also show how to deal with blockages and how to create new habits that allow one to live and share joy with others.

From research in psychology and neuroscience, Gore has discovered that happiness, a major component of joy, precedes success. Joy, then, is a success factor in work and life and



increases creativity and connections between neurons. *The Gospel of Joy* examines 12 pillars of joy that create the foundation for happiness and productivity. Included, for example, are chapters on *Listening, Hope, Energy and Vitality, Forgiveness, and Love*.

Psychologist Herbert Gerjuoy said, "Tomorrow's illiterate will not be the man who

“The mission of the book is to eradicate fear. By removing fear, one can identify and connect with what is important in life.”

cannot read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn" (as cited in Toffler, 1984, p. 271), and Toffler (1984) stated, "By instructing students how to learn, unlearn, and relearn, a powerful new dimension can be added to education" (p. 414). Neuroscience teaches that individuals can rewire their brains at any time through focus, attention, repetition, and celebration. *The Gospel of Joy* is a step-by-step guidebook to recognizing and unlearning old patterns, learning new patterns,

and then creating new habits leading to a life that celebrates joy.

Readers are also encouraged to share their new respect and enthusiasm for joy and gratitude in a contagion that Gore labels *joy tribes*. Joy tribes are groups that come together to connect and serve in an effort to find peace and contentment.

Gore dedicates the book to her mother, who was her inspiration. Her mother had been unwell and unhappy, and Gore (who at that time was out of the country) suggested that she express gratitude for all the good in her life. Returning to Australia after the death of her mother, Gore found her mother's gratitude journal. This became the impetus for the first chapter in the book, *A Week of Gratitude*, with gratitude being the first step to achieving joy.

Gore says the book has changed her life. She recorded the book and lived it herself. She has initiated a *joy university* online and encourages participants to share their online journals. The *joyproject.com*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* are vehicles for participation. The online activities enhance the mission to eradicate the matrix of fear and replace it with one of joy by creating a global joy community one *tribe* at a time.

Although many of the activities reflect what is really common sense, by identifying them in concrete chapters, the author eases the reader into a way of thinking that is healthy and productive. As a result, the book is very upbeat. The activities can easily be applied to education and to business and can be shared with family and friends. With significant benefits to the readers, the book can and should be the choice of many book clubs. *The Gospel of Joy* will not stay on a bookshelf, as it will be read and reread because it encourages and enlightens one's very soul

References

Toffler, A. (1984). *Future shock*. New York, NY: Bantam.



Merry Lewis, from Tucson, Arizona, is a past state president of the Arizona State Organization of DKG. A 34-year member of the Society, she has been a Golden Gift recipient and a Golden Gift Special Stipend recipient and has served on the International Golden Gift Committee and the Educators Award Committee. Presently, she is her state organization's Finance Chairman and serves on the Rules Committee. merrysl@aol.com

Finding Your Unique Strengths: Book Review of *StrengthsFinder 2.0*

By Sandra L. Shillingstad

Rath, Tom. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup Inc. 175 pages. ISBN: 978-1-59562-015-6.

This article continues a series of occasional book or Web site reviews contributed by members of the Bulletin's 2010-2012 Editorial Board. The author provides a review of a book, linked to a Web site, that can help readers understand their own unique qualities in a diverse world.

Introduction

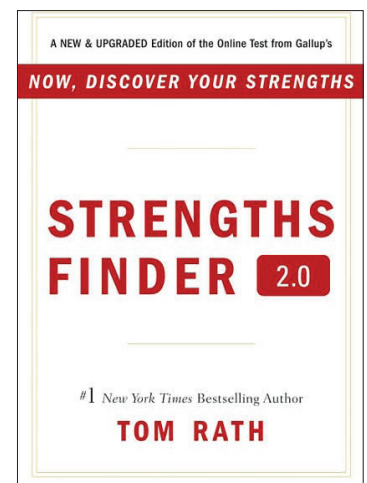
StrengthsFinder 2.0 is a book based on more than 40 years of research by Tom Rath and a team of scientists at Gallup, the renowned research-based, performance-management consulting company. In 1998 the researchers at Gallup created the first online Strengths Finder assessment. In 2001 Gallup included the first edition of Strengths Finder with the bestseller *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (Buckingham & Clifton). Building on the initial online assessment and language from *StrengthsFinder 1.0*, Rath and the Gallup organization released a new edition in 2007 of the assessment, program, and Web site that they titled *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. The intent of the book is to help people uncover their strengths and talents.

StrengthsFinder 2.0 – What's New in 2.0?

The book begins with a history of how the scientists at Gallup were interested in starting a conversation about *what's right with people* versus society's focus on *fixing our weaknesses*. Following the quick history, the book splits into two parts: Part I: Finding Your Strengths—An Introduction, and Part II: Applying Your Strengths.

StrengthsFinder 2.0 includes an extension and elaboration of what was discovered in *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001). The 2.0 version provides the reader with the latest discoveries of human strengths and talents and provides strategies for application in one's personal life or workplace.

The 1.0 version first introduced 34 themes of human strengths and talents. In the 2.0 version the themes have remained the same (e.g., *Achiever*, *Activator*, *Analytical*, *Belief*, and *Command* are a few examples of the 34 themes). Included with the *StrengthsFinder*



2.0 is a special one-time use only coupon code that allows the reader to take a detailed *Strengths Finder* assessment. The assessment takes about 30 minutes to complete. Having participated in the 1.0 online assessment, I readily noted that the 2.0 version of the online assessment was faster and the results yielded from the assessment provided a more in-depth analysis of my strengths.

“ Upon completion of the online assessment, the participant is provided with immediate results in the StrengthsFinder 2.0 Report. The respondent's top five themes are reported. The report is divided into three sections: Awareness, Application, and Achievement. ”

Upon completion of the online assessment, the participant is provided with immediate results in the *StrengthsFinder 2.0 Report*. The respondent's top five themes are reported. The report is divided into three sections: *Awareness*, *Application*, and *Achievement*. In the *Awareness* section, the participant's top five themes are described followed by personalized insights regarding the top five strengths. The second section focuses on the *Application* of the top five themes, followed by questions that assist the participant in applying these strengths. In the third section, the participant is provided with examples and quotations from people who share the same themes, followed by steps to help one utilize the discovered talents for *achievement*.

I completed the 2.0 online assessment, and my top five strengths included *Empathy*, *Discipline*, *Achiever*, *Connectedness*, and *Harmony*. The

StrengthsFinder 2.0 Report provides a shared-theme description for the top five strengths. My first strength, *Empathy*, was described as one who “can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives or others' situations.” My fifth strength was *Harmony*: “People who are especially talented in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.” Upon review of my top five strengths, I believe they were accurate descriptors. I am currently working on the *10 Ideas for Action* for each of my top five themes. Helpful tips and strategies are provided in the report that will assist me in applying my talents.



Sandra L. Shillingstad, EdD, is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. A member of Omega Chapter (NE), Dr. Shillingstad currently serves on the 2008-2012 DKG *Bulletin* editorial board. sshillingstad@unomaha.edu

StrengthFinder 2.0 helped me identify my strengths and talents. The most useful part of the book was the 18-page report, which provided me with strategies and ideas of how to utilize my strengths to be more successful in my personal and professional life. I recommend the book to anyone who is looking for insight to better understand his or her talents and how to maximize them.

Journeying into Inclusion and Race: My Self-Study as an Educational Researcher

By Laurie Carlson Berg

The author presents her self-study research journey into rethinking inclusion and the role of race in schools. She summarizes key readings that informed her journey and describes implications to her teaching, research, and community work.

In the 1980s, Schon (1984, 1995) launched a discussion on the importance of reflection in professional practice. Teacher educators often encourage their students to look at their behaviors and ideas intentionally and systematically in order to understand teaching practices and issues more thoroughly. A growing movement also exists among teacher educators to engage in self-study research into how they engage in teacher education (Dinkelman, 2003). As a member of Delta Kappa Gamma, I see the sharing of one's self-study research as a way to provide situational leadership, model self-study, and engage others in critical reflection. Like other types of research, self-study is also an important means of knowledge production (Dinkelman, 2003).

The Research Journey Begins

As with many journeys in life, it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint exactly when and where self-study begins. In my career as a professional educator, I have been a classroom teacher, a school psychologist, and now a professor in a faculty of education. Inclusive education, in the specific context of making the classroom a more comfortable place for children with diverse identities and experiences, has been part of how I think and do for quite some time. However, inclusion in terms of how race manifests itself in school communities is something I am only beginning to explore and understand. In this article, I explain how readings from a number of scholars have helped to challenge, reshape, and question continually my perspectives on race and inclusion. The aspects of the readings I share in this article are but a few of many sources I continue to digest, reread, and query, but they serve as examples of catalysts during my unfolding journey of self-study in teacher education. I share them as potential starting points for any individual's self-study research as an educator in a particular context. In this article, *inclusion* is defined as a coming together of individuals, each having complex and dynamic identities, around a coconstructed vision of what would be most beneficial to fostering meaningful and equitable participation of each member of a community of learners.

I am in the midst of an ongoing journey of critically examining my thinking about

inclusion that took some important turns when I began researching the experiences of newly arrived immigrants into schools in my home province of Saskatchewan, Canada. At the outset of the research, my orientation towards inclusive education was mainly focused on the individual experiences and learning of students. My focus was on identifying each student's strengths and needs and identifying how each student could be optimally successful, academically and socially. Although I still strongly believe in this approach, what I have becoming increasingly aware of are the larger societal and school structures and discourses and how greatly they impact on individuals and groups, advantaging some and disadvantaging others. The role of racial identity and racism in the schooling experiences of my research participants heightened for me the necessity of examining both the individual needs of each learner and the wider context that influences not only the learner but all those with whom he or she comes into contact. I realized that if I were to continue to focus principally on only the individual learner, I would be complicit in the racial discourses that marginalize some learners and privilege others. And so began my journey into inclusion and race.

Self-Study within a Larger Research Context

In 2008, I began interviewing families who had recently immigrated to Saskatchewan, Canada about their experiences of schooling in Canada and, more particularly, about their experiences of Francophone schooling in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is a Canadian prairie province with a total population of slightly under 1.1 million. English is the dominant language, and French, although an official language in Canada, is the mother tongue of a mere 2% of the population. In Saskatchewan, which has a surface area similar to Texas, small Francophone communities are scattered across the province. Francophones from Saskatchewan are known as the Fransaskois.

The goal of my research was to explore the educational experiences of new immigrant families and to identify challenges they faced in terms of integrating into their new Fransaskois school environment. Findings would inform my work with school-based partners to address and mediate the barriers to integration. The immigrant families in my research self-identified as Francophone and came from mainly African countries.

From the outset of my research, it became obvious how much issues of racism and racial identity were at play in the school community (Carlson Berg, 2010 a, b). Participants told me how the immigrants seemed to be on one side and the rest of the community on the other; how their children had asked them whether having brown skin was a sign of illness and had told their parents that they had heard people say, "Ça pue le noir (it stinks of Blacks)." I had anticipated that racial identity would play a role in their school experiences but was surprised by how overtly racism was manifesting itself.

This discovery caused me to shift my focus from inclusion of individual new immigrant students to overall group processes and issues. I realized I needed to learn more about

the role of race and racism in schools. Soon, I would become aware of how focusing mainly on individual progress, as I had been doing, was part of the problem in that I was not fully aware of larger overarching issues impacting on all students, including racism. Unconsciously, by viewing overt racism



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as more or less a thing of the past and focusing principally on *differentiated instruction*, I was reinforcing an idea of a presumed norm into which some students fit and others did not, thus necessitating *different* instruction. I was also thinking of school-based inclusion as more of a destination point than a fluid and ongoing process. Thus, I was unwittingly contributing to racial inequity by not fully acknowledging the role of race in education. As a teacher educator, I needed to reflect in order to understand more fully what I was bringing into my inclusive education class at the Faculty of Education where I teach.

My Part in Racial Inequity

I intuitively agreed with Nabavi's contention that "we are all part of the relationship between oppression and resistance" (Lund & Nabavi, 2008) but was not sure how to begin exploring my part in the latter processes. A scholar whose writings helped me name and understand my role in racism was Barbara Trepagnier. In her book *Silent Racism* (2006), she suggested that readers dismiss the binary categories of *racist* and *nonracist* because they are divisive and impede frank discussions of racism by polarizing the two categories and reinforcing an idea of racism as only consisting of derogatory terms and overt discrimination based on skin color. According to Trepagnier (2006), members of the White majority in North America may unconsciously be engaging in daily behaviors that serve to maintain the *status quo* and an inequality between people of various skin colors, and yet these behaviors are not necessarily perceived as racist. Trepagnier referred to such behaviors as *silent racism*.

“According to Trepagnier (2006), members of the White majority in North America may unconsciously be engaging in daily behaviors that serve to maintain the status quo and an inequality between people of various skin colors, and yet these behaviors are not necessarily perceived as racist. Trepagnier referred to such behaviors as silent racism.”

Sharing my new knowledge with my students, they readily shared examples of silent racism. For example, one student spoke of an experience of his roommate, an Aboriginal student. The roommate was out walking and saw a couple talking in a car. He noticed that they had a flat tire and wondered if they were aware of the flat. He knocked on their window to let them know and, before he began to speak, the couple told him they did not have any money to give him. The couple's assumptions about what would motivate an Aboriginal youth to tap on their window were clearly evident in their behavior. My students shared other more and less subtle examples.

Trepagnier (2006) proposed adoption of a racism continuum from *less racist* to *more racist* and suggested that

racially progressive Whites will welcome the suggestion of a racism continuum, knowing perhaps that without realizing it, they have racist thoughts at times and may act on them... The concept of silent racism gives well-meaning White people permission to explore their own racism. Instead of asking, "Am I racist or not?" progressive Whites will ask, "How am I racist?" (2006, p. 43)

Her writings gave me permission to acknowledge my own part in racism and to examine my ways of thinking.

Having thought of racism more at an individual rather than systemic level, I began to examine prevalent ways of thinking in my environment. One experience I recalled was a very tender exchange between my grandmother and me when she gave me a family ring as a special gift following an academic achievement. The family ring was meant to remind me of the hard work of my peasant forebears and of the wide-open possibilities ahead of me if I continued to work hard. My grandmother did not mention the logical corollary discourse that, if one does not succeed, then it is because she simply did not work hard enough. Nevertheless, I realized where such prevalent discourses as *If you work hard, you will succeed* can potentially lead and how they can result in some groups feeling entitled to their privilege and divorced from the challenges of others.

In subsequent discussions with my students and research partners, we identified many prevalent discourses that seem to go largely unquestioned. This was a good starting place to identify and own our part in racial inequity. The writings of Earick (2009) and Wise (2008, 2010) also provided varied examples of how racism manifests itself and how it is damaging to all people and thus a common challenge around which a group can potentially unite. Reflecting upon Wise's writings, I thought of how the cost of being a credible White had been, for many Francophones in Saskatchewan and elsewhere in Canada, the loss of their mother tongue. I thought also of the historic tension between Fransaskois and Métis communities—Canadian Aboriginal peoples whose ancestry is a mixed First Nations and European parentage—that is only now beginning to be discussed, and I also considered how an important factor in the rupture was skin color.

Searching for Direction for Community Consultation around Race and Inclusion

My readings continued as I searched for direction about how to continue my community consultation and research. By this time, I had conducted interviews with school personnel and had studied the social networks of students and found that students who belonged to a visible minority group were unlikely to be included in the friendship groups of their predominantly White peers. Thus, peer-based inclusion of visible minority students, immigrant and nonimmigrant, was related to racial identity (Carlson Berg, 2011).

Another scholar whose thinking informed my research and teaching was Kevin Kumashiro (2000; 2009). Reading Kumashiro enabled me to look critically at my research process, how I was interpreting and presenting my findings, the recommendations I was making for my school-based partners, and ideas I was developing for future research. Kumashiro talked about four types of *anti-oppressive education*. By this term, Kumashiro means "education that works against various forms of oppression" (p. 25). Kumashiro's work provided me with a framework to understand the current educational initiatives of my school-based partners as well as to rethink how I was conducting my research.

Education for the Other

Kumashiro (2000) called the first of the four types of anti-oppressive education "Education for the Other" (p. 26); it focuses on improving the schooling experiences of students who have traditionally been marginalized. Kumashiro referred to these students as *Other* than the mythical norm of the White, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual male. The aim of *education for the other* is to make school a safer place for the *Other* by addressing how some students are marginalized and by looking at ideologies, assumptions, and expectations that influence how educators treat the *Other*.

Much documentation exists about how schooling has harmed or alienated certain

groups (Earick, 2009). Examples of *education for the other* include antibullying initiatives to create a safe school place, gay-straight alliances that create an affirming space, culturally relevant pedagogy (Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995 a, b), and my own work with school partners around differentiated instruction. Through related inservice programs, teachers are made aware of the multiplicity of their students' identities and experiences and of the pedagogical consequences of ignoring differences among their students, assuming all students correspond to a dominant norm or thinking that students are neutral beings, without race, gender, class, or other markers.

According to Kumashiro (2000), the strength of the first type of anti-oppressive education is that it recognizes diversity in the student population and sensitizes teachers to various forms of school-based oppression with the understanding that teachers have the responsibility to teach all students and to work against oppression, because failing to do the latter would be to be complicit with the *status quo*. Limitations of this approach relate in part to the focus on the *Other* and their negative school experiences, which creates the perception of the *Other* as the source of the problem. This thinking can, in turn, lead to the perception that if the *Other* were not in school, oppression would not exist. Another limitation outlined by Kumashiro (2000) was that when creating safe spaces for the *Other*, educators risk making definitions of the *Other* that may create stereotypes, when in fact their identities, like all identities, are multiple, fluid, contextualized, and ever-evolving.

“Kumashiro talked about four types of anti-oppressive education. By this term, Kumashiro means “education that works against various forms of oppression” (2000, p. 25). Kumashiro’s work provided me with a framework to understand the current educational initiatives of my school-based partners as well as to rethink how I was conducting my research.”

Education about the *Other*

The second type of anti-oppressive education, according to Kumashiro (2000), is “Education about the *Other*” (2000, p. 31). In this approach, educators move their focus from the school environment to curricula and focus on what all students currently know and could also know about the *Other*. Two potential curriculum issues that can lead to harm of the *Other* are (a) the inclusion of only knowledge of the *norm*, which provides students with only partial knowledge; and (b) the inclusion of content about the *Other*, but in a way that is based on stereotypes or dominant ways of thinking about the *Other*.

Examples of *education about the other* in Canadian settings are development of courses about First Nations’ cultures, inviting members of marginalized groups to present to students, or reading McIntosh’s *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (1988) to learn about middle class White privilege. Contributions of *education about the other* include acknowledging the hidden curriculum—for example, culturally biased expectations of the *good citizen*. Potential drawbacks of these initiatives are that the *Other* becomes an object to be inspected as different from the norm, thus normalizing the dominant group and rendering the *Other* different or abnormal. Students may also develop an idea of the *definitive Other*, thinking that all people from a marginalized group think and act in the

same way as the guest speaker from that group. Thus, an old stereotype may be replaced by a new one and, instead of forging understanding and connections among students, the *Me/Other* dichotomy might be reinforced, thus heightening the distance between groups of students. Another drawback to *education about the other* is that students and teachers

may become convinced that they know all there is to know about a particular marginalized group, and so ongoing learning and new knowledge are discouraged. A drawback of limiting discussions to White privilege is that the dominant White group remains the focus of attention. It is important to be mindful of such potential pitfalls when engaging in the important work of *education about the other*.

“Thus, education that is critical of privileging and Othering examines the link between schools and other institutions and the dominant ways of thinking in a given culture or social class. It also presents other ways of knowing than detached reasoning.”

Reading Kumashiro (2000) and thinking about how I reported the initial findings of my research that described the schooling experiences of my participants in their new Canadian context, I learned how important it is to report findings in a way that does not reinforce stereotypes about the *Other* or render their perspectives as aberrant from the norm. I reexamined current debates

around inclusive education in Canada and could see similarities between ongoing debates and the perspectives of my research participants. I could also see how the energies of my school partners were firmly rooted in making the school environment welcoming of the *Other* and on gaining an understanding of the *Other*—and I could clearly see how their initiatives, while important and necessary, risked reinforcing the *Us/Them* dichotomy. We were in need of new ways of seeing and doing that would help us reexamine ourselves and begin to conceptualize collaboratively a new *Us*, accepting that this *Us* would consist of a multiplicity of ways of being in community and is ever-evolving.

Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering

Although the first two types of anti-oppressive education described by Kumashiro (2000) provided insights, it was the last two types that helped me to consider new ways of thinking and talking about inclusion and race. Kumashiro called the third type “Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering” (2000, p. 36). This type of anti-oppressive education goes beyond examining attitudes, treatment, and understanding of the *Other* to present the *Other* as a person or group that has historically been prevented from having power and to outline how the privileges of some groups have been rendered normal and widely accepted. These factors of power and privilege, then, create and maintain societal structures and systems that hold the *status quo* of racial inequity in place. Thus, *education that is critical of privileging and Othering* examines the link between schools and other institutions and the dominant ways of thinking in a given culture or social class. It also presents other ways of knowing than detached reasoning.

As my research progresses, I am now engaging with a group of high school students and their teacher in a process of critically exploring Francophone Canadian history and dominant societal discourses. A number of scholars will be joining with me to present to the students less well-known parts of history, including the historical diversity of the

Fransaskois population, the relations between Fransaskois and Métis peoples, and the history of Blacks in Francophone Canada. We will examine the phenomenon of *Othering* and how some groups of people became the dominant norm called *Us* and some groups of people became the marginalized *Other*. We will discuss our own experiences of inclusion and exclusion and ways of thinking and being around us that became *common sense* understandings of ourselves and others and how the world works. The students will be guided to question such dominant discourses as the *if you work hard, you will succeed* example provided earlier. The idea is not to replace old discourses with new ones but to see the tensions between various versions of Canadian history and *common sense* discourses and to consider that perhaps truths lie in the in-between spaces of such histories and ways of thinking and being.

The advantage of using an *education that is critical of privileging and Othering* framework is that students are taught about both oppression and about how a critical approach can help them reframe knowledge to examine diverse kinds of knowledge and ways of being in the world. As mentioned earlier, one potential drawback of such initiatives is that, depending on how the teaching is carried out, one could end up replacing one discourse of oppression with another. Oppression is not experienced by each person in the same way, and various contexts can influence who is oppressed and the nature of the oppression. During the process of critically exploring privileging and *Othering*, it is important to acknowledge feelings of guilt, anger, or resistance that students may experience when knowledge and ways of being that had perhaps been part of their strong foundation are queried.

From Self-Study to Action Research with High School Students

The conscientization students may experience can lead them to want to take action, which leads to the fourth type of anti-oppressive education, “Education that Changes Students and Society” (Kumashiro, 2000, pp. 38-39). This approach goes further than exploring how discourses are used to frame how we think, feel, and interact and how oppression manifests itself not only in what is said but what is not said; it moves toward acting to change dominant discourses by participating in developing and presenting alternative discourses.

Instead of being told to think in a particular way, students will be encouraged to think differently. Fransaskois students are often already familiar with at least two ways Canadian and Saskatchewan history can be told, that is from an English or French perspective. In my work with high school students, we will be examining discourses around their own identity (*What are your main characteristics and when are they advantageous or problematic?*), immigration (*Are all immigrants refugees?*), inclusion (*Describe a time when you felt included at school*), and skin color. Some discussion questions will be inspired by Derman-Sparks and Olsen-Edwards (2010), such as *When did you begin seeing yourself as having a racial identity? What name did you give this identity?*

Following discussions and the speakers series referred to earlier, students will be invited to identify a challenge to inclusion at their school and to develop a plan to investigate and begin exploring alternatives to address the issue. In this way, the students will be exploring ways to liberate themselves from exclusionary practices. In our work together, I hope the students will be able to move from seeing themselves in the *Other* to seeing themselves like the *Other*—and then move beyond the binary of *self* and *Other* to invent new ways of seeing and being. I am eager to begin dialoguing and reflecting with the students. As Kumashiro (2000) suggested, this way of teaching involves venturing into the unknown and acknowledging that the teacher is not in complete control of what the student takes

away from the learning situation. Both the student and the teacher work in the in-between places of teaching and learning.

Invitation to the Reader

In my field-based research and my work as a teacher educator, I will continue to engage in self-study and to encourage self-study in my research participants and university students so we can explore and critically examine our beliefs, guilt, resistance, and other thoughts and feelings as our work to understand inclusion and race in our particular contexts continues. Engaging in self-study research has reinforced for me the value of an ongoing and systematic questioning of my own thinking as well as that of my students, my research participants, and the wider community. I now question whom various beliefs advantage, whom they disadvantage, and how they came to be accepted truths or ways of being. It is my hope that sharing my insights will incite readers to reflect on their own beliefs and practices as educators and engage in their own self-study to enhance understanding of their responses to diversity.

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Teacher Identities: The Fingerprint of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Students At Risk

By Dutchess Maye and Barbara Day

This article presents relevant portions of a study that was designed for teachers to articulate their understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy and to identify lived experiences that support its practices. The researchers' conclusions are consistent with the prevalent literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. The researchers determined that teachers' ability to identify their own cultural identity and to relate life experiences influences stronger understandings and more effective practices of culturally relevant pedagogy. Such understandings have significant implications for improving instruction for students considered at-risk for academic achievement.

Introduction

With constant change in demographics, the population of America's public schools is growing increasingly diverse with each academic year. Much of this multiplicity is comprised of students of color, students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students from low income families (Howard, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Whitfield, Klug, & Whitney, 2007). Many of these student populations are labeled *disadvantaged* or *at-risk for academic achievement*. In an era when federal and state accountability demands are escalating and budgets are tightening, researchers agree that the most pressing issues in education are related to meeting the needs of culturally diverse learners who have not historically been educated well in the traditional sense (Smith, 2005). Researchers (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 1998) have proven that culturally relevant and responsive practices hold extraordinary potential for shaping positive academic outcomes for students considered *at risk*. The success of culturally relevant teaching appears to rest in how willing teachers themselves are to acknowledge who they are culturally and to understand the potential of their own identity, which impacts the way they carry out practices in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how teachers in high-poverty middle schools conceptualize culturally relevant pedagogy and how they identify their own lived experiences that support its practices. Additionally, we sought to discover how teachers identify and understand the contextual barriers that may hinder culturally relevant

practices. The findings presented here focus on two teachers and the influence their teacher identities seemed to have on culturally relevant teaching practices.

Literature Review

Teachers who apply culturally relevant practices tend to have a clear understanding of their own cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Liggett, 2008). This understanding of one's own cultural identity increases the teachers' potential to recognize their own relationship to socioeconomic inequities that exist in society and within schools. Successful teachers of culturally and economically diverse students are aware of the social construction of their identities and those of their students and of what these identities represent in the larger context of society (Ryan, 2006). Understanding one's own cultural identity is important because individual identity has "cultural orientations that shape the ways in which [one thinks] about values, beliefs, communication style (modes of politeness/formality), historical perspectives, art, music, family, rituals (graduation, sport team rallies), rites of passages (notable birthdays), and other social group activities" (Liggett, 2008, p. 397). This understanding of teacher identity and culture is important because schools are social locations that are not neutral but, like all social systems, afford greater status to some and offer different access to power to others. Pollock (2008) concluded that "classrooms are cultures too. They are regularly convened communities of practices where people's actions intertwine in patterned ways to shape outcomes for young people" (p. 370). In such communities where teachers have significant influence on the practices, teacher identities become dynamic factors.

It is not the teacher's individual identity that influences practices as much as it is his or her *acknowledgement* of identity. Ladson-Billings (1998) asserted that notions of *regularity* put particular persons in position of power and may cause unconscious posturing that prevents them from recognizing their own culture as *culture*. This regularity, specifically, is attributed to what Ladson-Billings described as the failure of White American teachers to associate the notion of culture with themselves. Culturally responsive teachers, however, acknowledge their own cultural identity. Such self-acknowledgement creates a cultural consciousness and builds cultural competencies that help teachers proactively form authentic relationships with students, deliberately plan responsive instruction, and actively

implement multiple ways of constructing knowledge (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

In addition to self-discovery, teachers' concepts of others is equally imperative to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Conceptions of others are not based on faulty assumptions but from real-time knowledge about students' family backgrounds, previous educational experiences,



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cultural norms for interpersonal relationships, and parental expectations for achievement, and about the ways individual cultures treat time and space (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003). Culturally responsive teachers appreciate students' hobbies and outside-school activities and creatively use these interests, concerns, and strengths to connect teaching and learning in ways that increase academic motivation. Teachers who are culturally responsive in their approach understand that students' previous educational experiences color current beliefs about school, and these teachers seek ways to demonstrate immediate and future implications of education (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Methods

The full study was designed to have teachers define their conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy and identify their own lived experiences that support its practices; therefore, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it could provide a more intimate portrait of the ways in which teachers see themselves and others and how they enact such culturally relevant pedagogy. Additionally, one goal of qualitative research is to explore perspectives that determine how social relations are affected by power differentials between different social groups (Bilken & Casella, 2007). This dynamic was critical, considering a main objective was to determine how teachers' understanding of their own identity impacts classroom practices for culturally diverse students and those at risk. For the purposes of this discussion on teacher identities, the results shared here will focus on only one portion of the study.

Setting and participants. The educational sites in the full study included one rural and one urban, high-poverty middle school located in one school district in North Carolina. Participants included a total of nine language arts teachers, five from the rural middle school and four from the urban middle school. Echoing the literature indicating the vast majority of America's teaching force remains predominantly White, middle class, and female (Hyland, 2009; Whitfield, Klug, & Whitney, 2007), all of the teachers who participated in the overall study were White, and the majority were female ($n=6$). This discussion will highlight the illustrative identities and practices of one female and one male teacher from the urban high-poverty school.

Data collection and analysis. Ladson-Billings' three broad propositions about culturally relevant teaching (conceptions of self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge) served as the conceptual framework for the study. Data were gathered by interviews and observations. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was based on questions used in Ladson-Billings' (1994) seminal work, *The Dreamkeepers*, and was validated by asking five teachers outside of the study each question to determine the extent to which they understood the questions. Each teacher participated in an individual introductory interview to describe his or her own childhood, schooling, and life experiences. Each interview lasted no more than 30 minutes and was conducted by the principal researcher.

We also constructed an observation protocol (see Appendix B) based on Ladson-Billings' (1994) conceptual framework of observable behaviors for culturally relevant pedagogy. Love and Kruger (2005) adapted these observable behaviors delineated in Ladson-Billings' work into a survey to measure how teacher beliefs correlated with student achievement. To ascertain the survey's internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each behavior using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The standardized alpha was .85 for items that reflected culturally relevant beliefs. Although Love and Kruger

(2005) admitted some correlations may be attenuated by skewed distributions, the strength of the alpha indicated that the observable items were perfectly acceptable for reuse. These same culturally relevant behaviors were the basis for the observation protocol, which was validated through practice in two classrooms prior to use in the study.

Classroom observations were critical for triangulating data about what teachers said in the interviews regarding their beliefs about culturally relevant practices and what they actually did in the classroom. To avoid any possible scripting or posturing by participants and create the most natural setting, the principal researcher simply informed participants that the purpose of the observations was to observe teacher interactions with students and instructional practices in the classroom. The principal researcher observed each participant interacting with and providing instruction to students during a 45-minute class period. Following the classroom observation, the principal researcher conducted a final 30-minute interview with each participant individually.

Results

The results shared here focus on the first of Ladson-Billings' (1994) three general propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy—conceptions of self and others. Teachers' conceptions of self and others were based on a subset of four behaviors: (a) acknowledging one's own cultural identity, (b) discussing the cultural diversity of students comfortably and respectfully, (c) exhibiting self-efficacy when working with culturally diverse students, and (d) seeing him/herself as a part of the community. Although the study examined data regarding all four subsets, this discussion focuses solely on teachers' ability to acknowledge their own cultural identity and how this identity impacts their use of culturally relevant practices. The discussion here represents two of the nine teachers who participated in the study and their acknowledgement of their cultural identity. These two teachers, identified as Kelly and Mike, both taught at the same high-poverty urban middle school. Of all the participants in the study, they had the strongest recognition of their own cultural identity in relation to their work with students and demonstrated a significant number of culturally relevant teaching practices as a result. Their stories thus illustrate the importance of understanding one's cultural identity when working with diverse students.

Kelly. A first-year teacher, Kelly was the only female in the study who expressed an understanding of her own cultural identity in direct relation to her interaction with students. Kelly described the cultural chasm between her and the students as a potential threat to productive teaching and learning. Growing up in a homogenous community, Kelly graduated from a high school with a 90% White middle-class population. Entering into a teaching environment in which more than half of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch and at least 65% were minorities, Kelly said she faced a number of challenges as a beginning teacher. Pointing out that many of the students she taught lived in poverty, she had no idea what that life was like. She said that she spent the entire first semester trying to "get into the culture" and understand what her students were experiencing at home.

Much like the research presented by Liggett (2008), Kelly illustrates the idea that "cultural orientations shape the ways in which [individuals] think about values, beliefs, communication styles (modes of politeness/formality)..." (p. 397). Kelly's cultural orientations, as she clarified, were quite different from those of her students. Believing she grew up in the "typical American family," Kelly said she was met with a number of surprises when she got her own classroom. For example, Kelly portrayed students' communication

styles as disrespectful and unbearable. She said she finally told students that they could not continue to just “yell stuff out” at her. Although Kelly’s cultural orientations were different from her students’, she recognized the implication that socioeconomic differences had the potential to impact the ways in which she and her students interacted in the classroom. These differences, according to Kelly, were causing them not to complete academic tasks.

The one thing Kelly and her students did share was an intense passion for pop culture. Thus, even as she spent the first semester establishing appropriate boundaries and elucidating procedures for appropriate school behavior necessary for successful teaching and learning, Kelly quickly made a habit of structuring learning tasks using examples from pop culture—common ground shared by Kelly and her students. Kelly was creative and resourceful, achieving a number of culturally relevant objectives. She employed the latest issues trending in film, music, sports, fashion, television, technology, and advertising to help students make personal connections and construct meaning from content material. Kelly’s use of various quick-fire strategies designed for students to relate their thoughts, perceptions, and opinions to relevant real-life examples increased her understanding of students’ cultural orientations. Additionally, Kelly and her students’ shared interests in media served as fertile ground for establishing the kind of relationships that underpin culturally relevant pedagogy.

Mike. A 4-year veteran teacher, Mike joked that he had no idea how he ended up teaching but reflected that he had always liked school. He liked learning, and school had always been easy for him until he entered the middle grades, when he began to struggle. Indicating a love for just about every subject, reading and math especially, he said he got extremely frustrated when he started struggling. With his anger increasing, he began to dislike school. Crediting good teachers who helped him through that phase, he discovered that he had his own learning style. Realizing that he needed to process information in a particular way rekindled his passion for learning, and as he expressed, “I fell in love again.” He believed that unconsciously he decided he wanted to do that for other kids—spark the passion for learning that seems to dwindle when kids enter middle school and adolescence.

Mike detailed growing up in a predominantly White community with lots of middle and upper-middle class families—of which, he made clear, he was not one. Mike described his family as “socially and economically challenged.” After moving to North Carolina, his father retired from the military, and, soon after, his parents divorced. Mike explained that growing up with a single parent who was trying to raise four children brought on a number of issues and challenges. He said even though he did not grow up in a community like his students’, he did grow up in similar circumstances.

Mike emphasized that understanding many of the circumstances his students might be encountering at home helped him recognize that what happens in schools must be both relevant and meaningful. Schooling has such long-range and seemingly abstract implications, especially to children living in poverty, but Mike helped students articulate their goals. He encouraged them and fostered academic confidence by concentrating learning on students’ personal goals. Mike said he was honest with his students: “Maybe you are not going to grow up and be a doctor, and that’s perfectly fine. I didn’t want to be a doctor either. What do you want to do and how can we get you there?” Mike made it clear that for many students the motivation for learning is how they can connect it to their lives. Emphasizing his own personal needs when he was a student, Mike concluded,

I know that my students know there is somewhere they want to go, and if they do what I tell them to do, they are going to get there. That’s the same thing, like I said,

when I was in school that I needed. I needed someone to say: *What do you want to do? I will show you how to get there. This is how you learn. Let's do it that way.* That's what I try to provide.

Understanding his own unique learning needs, Mike was able to help students identify their goals and concentrate learning in ways that targeted those goals. Additionally, teachers like Mike with high efficacy employ practices that provide greater academic focus and specific, detailed feedback. Mike deliberately tapped into students' interests, hobbies, and strengths to connect teaching and learning in ways that demonstrated how education has implications for future success (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Mike typifies Gay's (2000) assertion that situating knowledge within students' frame of reference and teaching to students' strengths help translate academic learning experiences to real-life skills.

Mike was the only teacher in this study who actually articulated the concept of privilege in the classroom. Furthermore, he identified that this privilege rested in the color of his skin. He clearly stated, "First of all, there are 27 students in here, and they're Black and I'm White. That is a huge barrier." He admitted that it took him 6 weeks at the beginning of the year to get students to want to complete any of his assignments. Believing he was the culprit because he was culturally different, he needed students to understand him and realize that his background was not so different from theirs just because he was White. Mike's understanding of his own cultural *difference*, developed through his lived experiences, helped him recognize Ladson-Billings' (1994) assertion that notions of regularity put particular persons in positions of power. Traditionally, it is the teacher who consciously or unconsciously projects these notions of regularity, which are then perceived by students. In this case, however, Mike's heightened awareness of how he might be perceived by students was a result of acknowledging his own identity.

Conclusions

Teachers like Mike and Kelly, who are aware of their own cultural orientations, are more likely to recognize the cultural orientations of their students. Culturally relevant practices seem to hinge on this type of self-awareness. It does not seem necessary that the teacher's self-identity match that of the students in order to implement teaching practices that affirm and respect the values and beliefs of culturally diverse students and those living in poverty. Although Mike's own childhood seemed to reflect the lifestyle of his students, Kelly described a typical middle-class childhood. It was actually through the differences between her and her students that Kelly became aware of her position of power in the classroom. In other words, teachers from *typical* middle class backgrounds who are teaching in culturally diverse schools often cannot help but recognize their own identity when they find themselves as the minority in their own classrooms. Under such circumstances they are confronted with the type of self-awareness that has the potential to result in recognizing positions of privilege and power. What they do with self-awareness has serious implications for improving achievement for children typically considered at risk.

Implications for Educators

Teachers' understanding of their own cultural identity influences and shapes the ways in which they view others. Additionally, the ability to recognize how their identity is viewed by the students they teach can help them eliminate notions of inherent power produced by ingrained and institutionalized norms about who is *regular* and who is *other*. In an attempt to facilitate teachers' conception of self, preservice teachers need opportunities for

autobiographical exploration, reflection, and self-analysis as part of their teacher preparation. Schools of education can increase teachers' understanding and readiness for working with culturally diverse students by providing coursework in which teachers examine the ways in which they view specific values, beliefs, communication styles, historical perspectives, music, art, family, rituals, rites of passage, and social group activities, as argued by Liggett (2008). Recognition of different cultural norms would assist in generating acceptance of divergent values in relation to these behaviors and life moments.

Furthermore, as the participants in the study often associated popular culture with culturally relevant pedagogy and defined culture in terms of its potential to be shaped and altered by the power of mass media and technology, preservice teachers need to understand the ways in which culture is constantly evolving and changing. Institutions responsible for preparing beginning teachers for practice in real classrooms must develop curricula that transcend one required course in multiculturalism. Throughout prospective teachers' course of study, multiple opportunities should exist for teacher candidates to connect their own cultural identities with the numerous possible identities and cultural orientations of their potential students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview 1: Introductions

Where are you from?

Where else have you lived?

How long have you been teaching? At this school?

How did you get into teaching?

Where else have you taught? For how long?

How is this community similar to or different from the one in which you grew up?

How would you describe this school and the student population?

Interview 2

How do you define culturally relevant pedagogy?

How do you think your life experiences have contributed to your approaches toward culturally relevant pedagogy?

Describe the kinds of culturally relevant practices, strategies, or methods you currently use in your classroom with your students.

Are there barriers to culturally relevant pedagogy?

What are barriers that prevent you from using more culturally relevant practices in your classroom?

Appendix B: Teacher Observation Protocol

School _____ Class _____

Teacher Pseudonym _____ Grade _____

Date _____ Time _____

Conceptions of Self & Others

- Exhibits self-efficacy when working with culturally diverse students

Social Relations

- Models positive and appropriate teacher-student interactions
- Demonstrates a connectedness with all students
- Encourages a community of learners
- Arranges physical environment to facilitate sharing, collaboration, etc.

Conceptions of Knowledge

- Differentiates instruction & uses a variety of instructional strategies
- Engages students in critical questioning of the curriculum, its content, and/or its validity
- Physical environment showcases a variety of culturally affirming and realistic representations
- Responds to real time concerns, questions, and interests of students

Educators Maneuvering the Challenges of RTI Conferences: Guidelines for Success

By Ruth Sylvester, Sally V. Lewis, and Jeri-Lynne Severance

As a result of response to intervention (RTI), a data-based approach to identifying children with learning disabilities, many teachers will conduct meetings that extend beyond the typical parent-teacher conference. In this article, we offer tips for facilitating constructive parent-teacher conferences. We provide an introduction to RTI, followed by an overview of the Ecological Model of Child Development and Invitational Theory of Practice that frame our guidelines to help teachers conduct professional and productive parent-teacher conferences.

Most teachers are required from their first year of teaching to hold parent-teacher conferences throughout the school year to discuss students' academic progress. However, according to the National Association of Directors of Special Education (2006), response to intervention (RTI) is being used, or planning to be used, by states as a comprehensive service delivery system that requires significant changes in how school personnel interact with parents to serve all students. In a 2007 survey of special education directors from all 50 United States and the District of Columbia, all "are either in the process of implementing RTI or are currently using this approach to meet the needs of struggling learners" (Hoover, Baca, Waexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008, p.1). Because RTI may be used as a prereferral or determination for disability identification, if mandated by state law (Council for Exceptional Children, 2007; The National Center for Response to Intervention, 2011), many teachers will now conduct conferences that extend beyond the typical parent-teacher conference to focus on varied interventions to help struggling learners. Yet, even in their teacher preparation programs, teachers receive little training or practice in the skills needed to conduct a successful conference (Flanigan, 2007).

Having a clear definition of RTI gives educators an understanding of their roles in providing interventions for *all* students in their classrooms. RTI makes provision for high-quality instruction, matching interventions to the needs of students, using frequent progress monitoring, and applying the data of student response to instructional decision making (Batsche et al., 2006; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006). According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006), one of the goals of RTI is to identify students at risk of having learning difficulties and then to plan early intervention instruction to prevent academic failure. RTI is thus "a multi-tiered system for struggling learners that provides increasingly intense levels of academic interventions and assessments" (Byrd, 2011, p 32).

Reflecting on our diverse past and current roles as classroom teacher, special education

teacher, resource compliance specialist, professional school counselor, school principal, and university professor, we recall instances where conferences or meetings were unproductive and unprofessional. In this article, we provide guidelines to help teachers maneuver through ongoing and new challenges of parent-teacher conferences. Preceding the guidelines, we provide an introduction to the components of RTI and the theory and research that frame our guidelines.

Theoretical Frame

Two theories inform our guidelines for conducting informative, collaborative, and sensitive conferences. The Ecological Model of Child Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) holds that child development is directly or indirectly influenced by four nested environment systems that incorporate the child's family, school, community, and culture. For example, when both parents must work to provide adequate food and shelter for their family, they may not have the time or energy to assist their child with challenging homework and, consequently, the child's achievement might suffer. The Invitational Theory of Practice (Stanley, Junhke, & Purkey, 2004) focuses on communicating caring and appropriate messages and has four interconnected assumptions: intentionality, respect, trust, and optimism. The following guidelines are grounded in these theories and are useful for conducting not only RTI conferences but any type of parent-teacher conference.

Knowing Parents

Despite difficulties experienced in the classroom, students are usually deeply loved by their parents. A feeling of loss is not unusual for parents when first notified about their child's academic difficulties and the possibility of assessment for special education. The

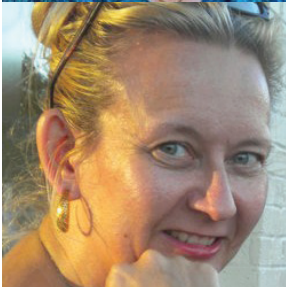
parents' sense of loss comes from the perception of losing their *dream* child (Taub, 2006). Similar to individuals experiencing the stages of grief, parents may be in denial and use humor as a coping mechanism when they are first notified of their child's learning issues. Perhaps this coping behavior is employed to deflect attention from the reality of having a child who struggles academically (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2011). Frequently, one of the parents shares in the conference that school was a personal challenge and attempts to brush off the news with a laugh. Parents of high school students who have struggled academically throughout school are typically more accepting of their teenager's academic issues and use more positive coping behaviors (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2011).



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Intentionality

Intentionality involves what teachers do to prepare for the conference (Stanley, Junhke, & Purkey, 2004). We recommend that the teacher create an agenda and then review it with the parents prior to the meeting to avoid surprising parents with unexpected issues. Then invite the parents to add any items they need to discuss to the agenda. Parents should be informed of everyone who will be attending the conference and their roles.

Most teachers attempt to create a positive learning environment in the classroom; likewise, teachers can create a positive conferencing environment. An inviting and intentional conference setting is parent-friendly, with adult-sized chairs, a conference table devoid of stacks of papers or boxes of materials, and space for all members to see and hear each other as equal contributors in the conference.

Attending a conference is an interruption in the busy day of a parent; therefore, educators need to be respectful of their time and their commitment to their children's education. Assigning the role of timekeeper to someone in the meeting ensures all are keeping to the agenda and redirects the conversation if it digresses from the scheduled topics.

Make sure introductions are made and that the roles of the various people represented are discussed and clarified for the parents. Do not include so many staff at the meeting that the parents feel intimidated as they enter the room. Do not expect everyone to contribute verbally, especially if their message repeats unpleasant information similar to that of other participants.

Respecting Parents

Studies indicate that parental involvement in learning is beneficial to a student's school progress (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parental involvement—and respect for that involvement—should start at the beginning of the RTI process. Parents will generally want to be part of the decision process and to know what interventions are implemented at school so they can institute them at home (Byrd, 2011). One way to assist their involvement is to provide information on the RTI process with a pamphlet and explanation of the process and terminology (Byrd, 2011). Parents are key to the process because they can share with educators their unique knowledge and insight about their children that can be beneficial to the RTI process (Byrd, 2011).

Essential to the meeting are taking time to explain the family's role and rights and defining throughout the conference any educational terminology the family will hear (Byrd, 2011). It is important not only to describe behaviors or areas of concern, but also to celebrate the successes and strengths of the child. These positive aspects of RTI are often the building blocks of the interventions themselves. A professional yet empathic tone and demeanor are key. Remarks such as "I have done everything I can, but your child just

An inviting and intentional conference setting is parent-friendly, with adult-sized chairs, a conference table devoid of stacks of papers or boxes of materials, and space for all members to see and hear each other as equal contributors in the conference.

cannot read” are disrespectful, counter-productive, and send a message that the teacher has given up on the child.

Many teachers enter a conference with years of experience and may assume they know what is best for the student without emphasizing to the parents that their input is essential and valued. This assumption derails respecting parents as contributors in the decision making. Actively listening to the parents and assimilating parental insights with their own classroom observations of the child will assist teachers in better understanding students’ needs (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

“In the conference, the focus of the discussion should be on specific behaviors and the ramification of the behaviors on the child’s learning (Montgomery, 2005). Although veteran teachers are typically adept at identifying causes of specific behaviors, they must not attempt to make a diagnosis, such as a child has ADHD or should see a therapist. These types of suggestion interfere with the purpose of creating interventions that will help the child be more successful.”

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Even as they are cautious about what they communicate verbally, teachers also need to be aware of their body language. When words and body language do not align, parents might distrust the words. Therefore, an awareness of movements that could send parents a negative message in an already uncomfortable situation is important to conducting a respectful conference. The following insights about body language were adapted from salespersons (Segal, 1994) and special education

teachers (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2011) to describe positive body language of teachers in a conferencing setting. Active listening skills include (a) looking at the one speaking, (b) leaning toward the parent to remove any distance and to show genuine interest in what they are contributing, (c) smiling, (d) nodding in agreement (yet without continual bobbing, which suggests one is tuned out), (e) maintaining relaxed posture with uncrossed arms, (f) gesturing warmly with the hands and particularly with palms up, and (g) taking notes.

Building Trust

Teachers must show acceptance and understanding in order to build trust (Schmidt, 2004). To establish trust, a teacher needs to establish rapport with the family. One simple way to do this is to communicate to parents that their participation in the conference is significant and then truly listen to what they contribute. Once trust is established, parents will feel they are important and valuable members of the educational team.

As stated earlier, to maintain rapport, teachers should provide layman’s definitions of educational jargon (Pena, 2000). Assuring parents that interventions will be in place to

meet their children's academic needs also builds rapport. Many parents may not be sure how to help their children and also may lack confidence that the teacher and the school can help. Before the meeting is concluded, teachers should ensure that parents understand and agree on the interventions and the outcome.

In order to promote trust, sometimes teachers must address parents' biases against school (Montgomery, 2005). Parents may have struggled as students and thus have negative memories of the entire school experience. Yet parents need to understand that, regardless of their personal experiences at school, the teachers and the school staff want to assist their children in overcoming barriers to success in school. Reassure parents that the RTI process is not easy for everyone, but it is necessary and beneficial when completed (Montgomery, 2005). It is important that, when decisions and strategies are made in the conference, the teacher feels equipped to implement the interventions in an approach that is not embarrassing to the child. The parents want their child to have a better school experience than they experienced, and educators need to help facilitate that desire.

Optimism

When meeting with parents, the teacher should be professional and optimistic. When expectations of creating a pathway for the child's academic achievement are in place, frustration is reduced and positive thinking is elevated. A cultivated attitude that seeks out collaboration with parents and other team members is beneficial. Because parents probably have the most information regarding the extent and history of their child's difficulties and the most knowledge of their children's home environment, it is essential for parents to be actively involved in planning and implementing interventions to maximize their effectiveness (Park, Alber-Morgan, Fleming, 2011). An attitude that there are no problematic individuals (parents, teachers, or students)—only problematic situations that require attention from the student, parents, and the school for the benefit of the student—is paramount for collaborating on possible solutions (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

Many parents may not be familiar with approaching learning problems from a problem-solving model. They may expect a meeting to generate a one-time decision rather than a series of decisions based on progress monitoring and the possibility of future meetings to discuss moving to the next tier in the model if their child is not responding to the current intervention. The RTI problem-solving model fosters hope and optimism for student achievement.

Conclusion

Researchers report a positive link between parental involvement and student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). Realizing that parent involvement can have a tremendous impact on students' success, knowing that parents' views of education may differ from the teachers' perspectives, understanding that many parents must overcome obstacles in order to attend a conference, and following the conferencing guidelines suggested here will enable teachers to meet the challenges of RTI conferences and, ultimately, to meet the needs of diverse learners.

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Interview

Meeting the Needs of Gifted and Talented Students: An Interview with Dr. Susan Assouline

By Janice M. Novello

This interview continues a series initiated by members of the Bulletin's Editorial Board. The goal of the series is to feature interviews conducted with Delta Kappa Gamma members or other educational leaders on a topic related to the theme of the issue. In this article, a leader in the field of gifted education discusses her career, philosophy, and thoughts about meeting the needs of diverse learners.

Introduction

Dr. Susan Assouline was a faculty member at the Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education (now the International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development) when I completed a fellowship at that center. Her dedication to students who were diverse learners was immediately apparent, and I have followed her career as a university administrator, professor, researcher, author, and champion of those who might not fit in a traditional learning space.

Dr. Assouline, you are the Associate Director at the Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Iowa. Please share how you became involved with the diverse learners that this Center serves.

I started at the University of Iowa (UI), as an undergraduate, 40 years ago!

Serendipity is the overall theme for my career as an educator, and there are four single, seemingly minor, decision points that had a major impact on the direction and focus of my career path.

First, as an undergraduate majoring in science, I filled out an application to be part of a National Science Foundation Summer Fellowship Program to introduce science majors to science education. The mentor assigned to me was a junior high teacher, and a few years later, my first teaching job was in that junior high school in the classroom right next to his.

Living and working in Iowa City, it seemed logical to start work in a graduate program. Because I started teaching right around the time that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (originally called Education of Handicapped Children Act) was passed, there was lots of energy in schools due to that new legislation. Therefore, I thought it best to take a class in the field of special education, and the class that fit into my schedule was one

on mental retardation (the book we used was *the book on mental retardation* by Halbert and Nancy Robinson, who are, of course, pillars to the gifted education community). The person teaching the class was an adjunct professor who was also a school psychologist. The class was terrific, and that was the class that began my journey toward a graduate degree in school psychology. Along the way, I was asked by a fairly new professor, Nicholas Colangelo, to be a teaching assistant for a summer program, a survey of gifted education that he taught for classroom teachers.

Dr. Nicholas Colangelo became the Director of the Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for gifted Education and Talent Development, correct?

Yes.

At the time, I was working on my doctoral degree, and when I finished, my family moved to the Washington, D. C. area, where my husband had a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health. I made a call (no email in those days!) to a professor at Johns Hopkins, Julian Stanley. Dr. Stanley was the founder and director of the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY), and I was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship with SMPY.

It was great ultimately to move back to Iowa where I could implement so much of what I learned at Hopkins. Shortly after I returned, we started the elementary student talent search and we developed the Iowa Acceleration Scale, which is a tool to help educators and parents determine if grade acceleration is an appropriate option for a particular student and which provides a basis for interactions between parents and teachers on the subject. The foundation for that work is respect for the theory of individual differences, one of the first lessons I learned in the class on mental retardation and equally applicable to precocious youth.

Those are the four instances of serendipity that led me *back* to UI and the newly-founded Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

Please share how your work with diverse learners was formed and how it came to fruition at Belin-Blank.

I mentioned the Iowa Acceleration Scale and the elementary student talent search. I was



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also fortunate to have so many gracious colleagues with whom I've worked.

Of course, there is Nick Colangelo, but also my fellow SMPY-postdoc, Ann Shoplik, coauthor of the book *Developing Math Talent* (the 2nd edition was published by Prufrock Press in 2011), and our SMPY colleague, Linda Brody, the current director carrying on Stanley's legacy at Hopkin's Center for Talented Youth. Dr. Stanley's work on acceleration was a centerpiece of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, which I coauthored and coedited with Nick and Miraca Gross in 2004. With the recent STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) emphasis, I feel as though that young science teacher from the late 70s has now come full circle.

The science-teacher-turned-school-psychologist has also come full circle with the center's work on twice-exceptionality. I've worked closely with two UI colleagues, Drs. Megan Foley Nicpon and Claire Whiteman, and more recently with postdoctoral student Alissa Doobay, who used UI data on twice-exceptional students for her research. I think that our work with students on the autism spectrum and with learning disabilities is important in the post-IDEA 2004 world.

Dr. Assouline, you are well known for your work with providing information and motivation for girls to take science and math courses. How did this interest develop?

In the early years of my career, there were very few women science teachers, so I was acutely aware of gender differences in science and math. At SMPY, I learned so much about gender differences as well as about extreme talent and how to discover extraordinary talent.

Briefly discuss the impact of the education of diverse learners in the world today and your vision for the future

Research on differences between groups informs best practice in education and psychology. However, talent isn't developed in groups: it's developed in the individual. Talented individuals are the outliers, and respect for individual differences within groups forms the core of best practice in the development of talent. On a practical level, the educator or psychologist who works with gifted learners must value the fact that individual differences reflect a degree of diversity that is unique to the American educational system, and our challenge is to discover the talent and develop it!

The theme for this issue of the *DKG Bulletin* is *diverse learners*, and as I mentioned above, the theoretical underpinning for my work is the concept of individual differences. With today's technology, we have no excuse for not tailoring curriculum for the individual learner. We've made much progress on barriers, but there is more to do. It has been a privilege to be part of the journey.

“Talented individuals are the outliers, and respect for individual differences within groups forms the core of best practice in the development of talent. On a practical level, the educator or psychologist who works with gifted learners must value the fact that individual differences reflect a degree of diversity that is unique to the American educational system, and our challenge is to discover the talent and develop it!”

Twice Exceptional? The Plight of the Gifted English Learner

By Jennifer Canillas Stein, June Hetzel, and Rachel Beck

This article, built upon individual case studies and an analysis of 3 years of district-wide data for a gifted and talented grant application, identifies the underrepresentation of gifted English learners in gifted and talented programs. The authors argue for (a) reviewing and revising identification procedures and criteria for gifted populations, and (b) professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators in the area of gifted education in order to better serve gifted English learners who are twice exceptional.

Introduction

Although a variety of definitions of giftedness exist in the literature, such as Robert Sternberg's Triarchic Theory (1985), Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (1993), or Heller, Perleth, and Hany's Munich Model of Giftedness (Sousa, 2009), Renzulli's Model of Giftedness (1978) describes the majority of gifted children with whom we have worked. Renzulli defined giftedness as high performance in nearly all intellectual and artistic pursuits, demonstrated in the intersection of (a) above average general abilities (e.g., processing information) or specific abilities (e.g., acquiring knowledge or performing an activity); (b) commitment to a task (e.g., endurance, focus, perseverance; special interest in a specific subject); and (c) creativity (e.g., flexible thinking, creative thought) (Renzulli, 1978; Sousa, 2009). Although giftedness exists in every group in society regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, identification and participation of students in gifted education from some groups, such as Hispanic/Latino, African American, and Native American Indian groups, occurs at a much lower rate than others, such as White and Asian populations, resulting in underrepresentation (California Association for the Gifted, 2006; Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). In the prevailing two theories on the causes of underrepresentation, one focuses on inappropriate identification procedures (Discrimination Theory) and the other (Distribution Theory) suggests that giftedness may indeed be unequally distributed due to certain causes that must be recognized and prevented, such as lack of resources (California Association for the Gifted, n.d.). Indeed, the most plausible theory may be a combination of both of these issues. Regardless of which theory is in focus, we have seen giftedness across our K-12 students over a course of 5 decades and have become increasingly concerned with students who *fall through the cracks* because the identification of giftedness is affected by an additional consideration or condition, such as poverty, a disability, or limited English fluency.

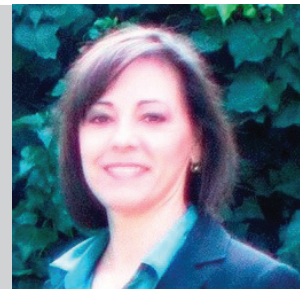
"The term *twice exceptional* was coined by James J. Gallagher to denote students who are both gifted and have disabilities" (Coleman, Harradine, & King, 2005, p. 5), and the

reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) addressed the child with disabilities who was also gifted. Twice-exceptional students may be capable of high levels of abstract and critical thinking that may be masked by a disability, making it difficult to identify and serve. The disability often takes precedence over other considerations, limiting students to one label. While the disability is being addressed, the giftedness may “eventually regress to the point where it is unidentifiable” (California Association for the Gifted, 2006, p.1). Similarly, developing English language proficiency often becomes the main focus of the English learners’ educational experience, and characteristics of giftedness can be easily overlooked, especially if standardized tests in English form the sole basis for identification. Limited English proficiency is certainly not a disability; however, when English learners are also limited to one label to the exclusion of other factors, English learners are being underserved, and it is unlikely that they will reach their true potential.

To illustrate this point, we present an example in the form of a brief case study regarding a former student of one of the researchers. Her name was April. She had been identified as an English learner upon entering the school system. She was an alert fourth grader who absorbed information like a sponge. An avid reader, gifted writer, and artist, she had a deep interest in history and, in particular, was fascinated with the western movement in U.S. history. For example, when asked to do a social studies report, April came to class with a written report, a lively oral presentation, and a video of authentic artifacts (i.e., wagon wheels, tools from pioneer days) that she had narrated in detail. Her performance far exceeded that of her peers, but because of her earlier limited English language proficiency, she carried the label of an English learner.

One evening, I enjoyed having dinner with her family in their home. Immigrants to the United States, they had worked hard to ensure a good education for their three daughters.

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The parents, although limited in their English, insisted that the three girls practice reading English books every night and dutifully complete all of their homework. They had a small set of English books at home that all three girls shared and read over and over again. April's parents had somehow succeeded in creating access to English literacy despite their own limited English skills. We enjoyed dinner together, had a tour of their home, and then April took us to her favorite place—the neighbor's backyard. There we found wagon wheels, pioneer tools, and all sorts of antiques from the 1800s. I had that *ah-hah* moment as a teacher when I suddenly discovered where April's total absorption in the westward movement was rooted. Because April was a gifted child and had strength in focus, she absorbed herself in every aspect of the westward movement, avidly reading, writing, and drawing everything she could that was related to this area and, in her free time, read *Little House on the Prairie* books to add to her enjoyment of this historical time period.

Observing April's giftedness over the first few months of the semester, I referred her to be tested for the gifted program. I was confident that she was demonstrating all three domains of Renzulli's model of giftedness (1978). Unfortunately, after the testing, the administrator informed me that April had missed being placed in the gifted program because she was short one IQ point. I quickly explained that April was taking these exams in her second language; however, the administrator would not make an exception for this gifted English learner. The test had masked April's ability to demonstrate her giftedness.

Research Questions

Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that English learners who take exams in their second language often perform poorly and are hence misclassified (Spinelli, 2008). Although the literature primarily focuses on the plight of students who may have disabilities, the purpose of this article is to focus on the gifted students whose giftedness is masked by where they are in the process of English language acquisition. In this article, we discuss the following questions:

1. How are educators serving (or not serving) gifted English learners, especially those from underrepresented groups?
2. What might district personnel do to intervene on behalf of gifted English learners?
3. What processes and practices will support gifted English learners?

To address these questions, we present information in the form of a case study from a small public school district located in southern California. In a review of data from 2004-2006 collected in order to complete a state application for gifted and talented education program funding, the administrative team confirmed that particular groups were underrepresented in comparison with the demographics of the district as a whole—and that another group was overrepresented. The data showed that, of the ethnic groups to be reported as required by the state, three main groups emerged in the district: Asian 43%, Hispanic/Latino 38%, and White 12%; a small percentage of students fell into other categories. In this district, 60% of students in Grades 4-12 were eligible for free or reduced lunch. If giftedness exists in every group in society regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, as stated earlier, then it stands to reason that the percentages of these groups in the district Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program should at least approximate the district demographics, assuming representative populations. However, this was not the case. Data for students identified and participating in the GATE program, which begins in Grade 4 and continues through Grade 12, are shown in the Table.

Table

Percentage of Students Participating in Gifted and Talented Education by Ethnicity Compared to District Demographics

School year	Asian		Hispanic/Latino		White	
	District	GATE	District	GATE	District	GATE
2006-2007	44%	73%	38%	13%	11%	11%
2005-2006	43%	67%	37%	17%	12%	13%
2004-2005	42%	72%	38%	13%	14%	13%

The data clearly show appropriate representation of White students, overrepresentation of Asian students, and underrepresentation of the Hispanic/Latino group. This incidence of underrepresentation among a particular population gives rise to the question of how this group could be served better, both in the identification phase and within the program. In regards to bilingual Hispanic students, Irby, Lara-Alecio, and Roldríguez stated that

...practitioners must learn how to alter identification procedures and programmatic services to respond to the characteristics of the specific population that they are serving. Curriculum and instruction cannot be discussed, developed, or delivered in isolation to the definition of giftedness and identification of the particular ethnic group being served. (n.d., p. 5)

In addition, although roughly 60% of district students in Grades 4–12 were eligible for free or reduced lunch, an indicator of socioeconomic status, only 9% of students in the GATE program met the conditions for free or reduced lunch. This again highlights the discrepancy between the population as a whole and those identified as gifted and talented.

In order to address the equity issue regarding how students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children of poverty are served in gifted and talented education programs, what can districts do to intervene, and what processes and practices can be implemented to support gifted English learners? Either the original assumption that *giftedness is equally distributed* is inaccurate, or the tools to identify the gifted are inappropriate or limited at best.

Commitment to Equity in Gifted Education

Educators and administrators must first be made aware of the inequities and be willing to investigate and make the necessary changes to improve identification of, assessment of, and service to gifted English learners (Castellano & Díaz, 2001). These efforts to reduce inequities may require resources in the form of funding for personnel and changes in programs. Educators must collect and analyze data to determine the specific areas to be addressed. Processes and research-based best practices for gifted education should be central to any plan for program implementation or improvement. Two areas must be included in this endeavor:

1. Policy makers and program administrators must review and revise identification procedures and criteria for the gifted populations in all categories of learners.
2. School districts must provide ongoing professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators in the area of gifted education in order to better service the gifted population in all categories of learners.

Administrators and professional learning communities must examine and adjust identification criteria and methods to account for English language proficiency levels,

socioeconomic status, and cultural diversity. Although many districts still rely on IQ tests for identification, alternative tools exist that are based on a multidimensional model of giftedness and are normed for a more diverse population, such as the *Gifted Rating Scale* by Steven Pfeiffer and Tania Jarosewich (2007). After a study analyzing the standardization sample, Pfeiffer and Jarosewich reported that results indicated no age, race, or ethnicity differences on any of the scales.

Educators need more tools such as this for identification of culturally and linguistically gifted students apart from the IQ test, especially in light of models that propose various types of intelligence, such as Howard Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences theory. When bilingual psychologists are available, the possibility of using a test in the child's native language also exists. Other more *culture-fair* measures consist of tests of nonverbal or visual-spatial abilities, such as *Raven's Progressive Matrices* and the *Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test* as described and recommended by Webb (Webb et al., p. 289). In their work on the development of a tool specifically designed to help identify Hispanic gifted students, the Hispanic Bilingual Gifted Screening Instrument, Irby, Lara-Alecio, and Roldríguez sought to identify some of the defining characteristics of Hispanic bilingual gifted students. They asserted that "this fundamental research does not make comparisons among other populations, minority or majority. Our belief is that to compare one ethnic group of gifted students to another ethnic group of gifted students is competitive, ethnically-biased research. Therefore, our research is focused only within the Hispanic ethnic group" (Irby et al., n.d., p. 5).

In addition to using appropriate instruments, educators must consider employing nontraditional methods of identification that take into consideration various aspects of giftedness for English learners, such as screening for the rapid acquisition of English language skills in comparison to peers (California Association for the Gifted, 2006). Other nontraditional methods for determination of eligibility for participation in gifted education that may increase the accuracy of identification procedures include using multiple sources of data, such as the recommendation of a team of educators with expertise, family members, and even the student making a self-referral.

Finally, professional development that helps teachers, counselors, and administrators more effectively identify gifted children plays a vital role in addressing the needs of gifted English learners. Training on various characteristics of giftedness in specific areas (e.g., the capacity for abstract thought, creativity, and unusually high performance in an academic or artistic pursuit) is essential. Gifted English learners may exhibit these traits, but they can go unnoticed due to limited English proficiency. It is interesting to note that although the school psychologist typically administers the traditional IQ test, it is the classroom teacher who completes the Gifted Rating Scale; that is, the teacher's observations of the student's characteristics in his or her classroom over time become the foundation for the determination of giftedness rather than a one-time, on-demand test. Teachers must receive training to look beyond language proficiency and design educational opportunities that allow gifted English learners to display their giftedness apart from the demands of written language. For example, alternative forms of assessment, such as projects, oral reports, models, artwork, songs, or other creative avenues, can reveal the depth of a student's knowledge on a given subject as well as or better than a written exam and can also increase motivation, especially when student choice is involved. The astute observations of a trained educator are essential and far weightier in identifying gifted English learners than many of the current tools being utilized.

Conclusion and Further Recommendations

For any child who is obviously gifted, such as April, to be unidentifiable, undetectable, or possibly regressing is simply unacceptable, clearly underscoring the plight of gifted English learners and issuing a clarion call to improve the system for our culturally diverse, truly exceptional students. In regards to the underrepresentation of Hispanic, American Indian, and African American children in most gifted programs in the country, Webb reported that

Considerable attention has been given to the possibility of bias in the measuring instruments, but more recently, the emphasis has shifted to the environmental disadvantages that some populations often have in our society. Social class factors, especially poverty, seem more important than ethnic background as causes for the misrepresentation of these populations. (2007, p. 289)

A diverse population requires diverse methods to identify gifted students accurately and to prevent such underrepresentation. More research should take place to assess the accuracy of tools currently being used to identify gifted English learners and to develop new ones. In addition to developing adequate tools for identification, research into the impact of poverty on potential giftedness is imperative to ensure that the intellectual capacity of the next generation is developed. Although it can be debated whether the label *twice exceptional* can be applied to gifted English learners, the tendency to rely on *one label* and to focus only on limited English language skills can be a contributing factor in the issue of underrepresentation, an undeniable error that must be addressed.

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Urban Immersion: Working to Dispel the Myths of Urban Schools and Preparing Teachers to Work with Diverse and Economically Disadvantaged Students

By Connie L. Schaffer

This descriptive research investigated the impact of a unique program that partnered an urban K-12 school district and an urban university. The goals of the program were to dispel common misperceptions of urban K-12 schools and to prepare preservice teachers to teach in diverse school settings. The program provided an authentic teaching experience for 35 preservice teachers, completely immersing them and their university instructors in urban schools, working and learning side-by-side with the K-12 teachers and students. Initial results indicated the program was successful in achieving its goals. The program assisted in reframing how preservice teachers perceived urban teaching opportunities and the challenges of teaching and learning in urban school environments, as well as increasing their confidence for teaching in urban schools. The program shows promise as a way to address the urgent challenge of recruiting effective teachers to teach in urban settings.

The Problem: Too Few Teachers with Too Little Preparation

The future population growth of the United States continues to be in urban areas (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2010). This will result in an increased need for teachers who are prepared and willing to meet the challenges and opportunities of working in urban school settings that often have great cultural diversity in their student populations and a high number of students who are economically disadvantaged. Urban schools often have a reputation of being difficult environments for teachers, particularly in light of accountability language and media attention that has labeled many urban schools as *failing* (Haberman, 2000).

Literature Review

Preservice teachers often report feeling unprepared or having low confidence in their ability to teach in urban schools (Burstein, Czech, Kretschmer, Lombardi, & Smith, 2009;

Whitney, Golez, Nagel, & Nieto, 2002). This sense of being *unprepared* is supported by additional research that indicates teachers are not prepared to meet the demands of the increasingly diverse populations of urban schools (Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 2001). This is concerning information for the education profession given that demographic trends in the United States indicate the future demand for teachers will be greatest in urban schools.

Teacher preparation programs recognize the need to prepare preservice teachers better to work in urban schools (Jacob, 2007). Approaches taken by institutions to prepare future teachers more effectively for success in urban schools have included initiatives to (a) increase the sociocultural competence of preservice teachers, (b) foster dispositions in which preservice teachers have high expectations for student achievement, (c) build the collaborative skills of preservice teachers, and (d) teach preservice teachers the instructional strategies that promote learning within diverse populations (Voltz, Collins, Patterson, & Sims, 2008).

Although such competencies can be taught on a university campus in teacher preparation courses, teacher educators believe the most effective way to learn these or any teaching competency or skill is to couple coursework with field experiences (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Field experiences are a part of nearly every accredited teacher preparation program (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008; Teacher Education Accreditation Council, 2010). In these experiences, preservice teachers observe, interact, and have teaching opportunities in K-12 schools. While participating in these experiences, preservice teachers can begin to challenge their existing and often highly ingrained perceptions and assumptions about schools, perceptions that have developed over the numerous years they themselves have spent as K-12 students (Lortie, 1975). Their participation in urban school experiences has the potential to address these perceptions and specifically those related to the teachers and students who work in and attend urban schools (Haberman & Post, 1992; McDermott, Johnson Rothenberg, & Gormley, 1999; Olmedo, 1997).

Regardless of the geographic setting of the school (urban, suburban, or rural), field experiences are most effective when they are attached to university courses and the preservice teacher participants are closely mentored (Darling-Hammond, 2005). It is not surprising that teacher preparation programs have looked to field experiences that take place in urban schools as a possible means to better prepare preservice teachers to work in these settings (Haberman, 1987; Foote & Cook-Cottone, 2004). The results of such efforts have been mixed (Mason, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). Urban-based field experiences appear most promising when the experience is tied to coursework and is closely supervised (Foote & Cook-Cottone, 2004; Mason, 1997; Olmedo, 1997). Ideally, the urban field experiences also should be extensive (a minimum of 30 hours) and should take place in high-quality urban schools in which preservice teachers can observe multiple models of effective teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005; Voltz et al., 2008).

In addition to tying urban field experiences to teacher preparation coursework, school-university partnerships also show promise in improving preservice teachers' ability to work in urban school settings (Sykes & Dibner, 2009). The recommendation for school-university

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partnerships is not new. Both the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and the Holmes Group made this recommendation in the mid 1980s (Sleeter, 2001.) Partnerships can enhance the quality of field experiences because feedback is more readily shared when the relationship between the school and university is strong (Dean, Lauer, & Urquhart, 2005).

Methodology

Purpose of study. The researcher gathered descriptive data based on a pre- and postexperience survey in which participants self-assessed items related to their perceptions of urban schools and their confidence to teach in an urban setting. The researcher investigated a number of elements that, in isolation, have shown promise in improving preservice teacher preparation relative to teaching in an urban setting. The purpose of the research was to examine changes in preservice teachers' perceptions of urban schools and their confidence in their ability to be effective teachers in an urban school after completing field experiences that were (a) located in an urban school, (b) a product of a school-university partnership, (c) extended in nature, (d) coupled with university coursework, and (e) closely supervised.

Participant selection. Participants were preservice teachers enrolled in teacher preparation courses that were part of the Urban Immersion Program at a large university in the midwest United States. The program was comprised of two courses: (a) Human Growth and Learning (HGL), and (b) The Art and Science of Teaching in Secondary Schools (ASTS). The preservice teachers in HGL were in their first course after being admitted to the teacher preparation program and had no previous field experiences. Twenty students were selected for HGL based on an established grade point average of 3.0 or greater and faculty recommendation. Preservice teachers in ASTS had completed approximately 75% of the teacher preparation program and more than 50 hours of previous field experiences. Fourteen preservice teachers were selected for ASTS based on a 3.0 grade point average and their subject area. In both courses, class size was limited in order to make certain the schools had adequate teachers to work with the preservice teachers.

One student in the program elected not to participate in the study. Thus, the final sample included 15 males and 19 females. Eight were elementary education majors, and 22 were secondary education majors. Four candidates were in programs that prepare preservice teachers to teach grades K-12. Participants were asked to categorize their community of origin as being rural, small town, suburban, or urban. Five candidates identified as being from a rural community, 12 from a small town community, 12 from a suburban community, and 6 from an urban community. One participant identified with two community groups.

Data collection. Participants completed a preexperience survey on the first day of the course. The survey consisted of 28 items that the preservice teachers rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The survey items were selected based on a review of the literature related to preparing preservice teachers to teach in urban settings. Items were reviewed by the faculty members teaching the courses and administrators in the partnering school district. A 4-point Likert scale prevented neutral responses and required participants to indicate level of *agreement* or *disagreement* for each item.

Participants then completed a 4-week course and corresponding urban-school field experience that was a partnership between the university and a large urban school district. The experience immersed the preservice teachers in urban school settings for more than 50 hours. Both course instruction and field experiences were delivered in K-12 urban school

buildings during summer school, thus allowing the preservice teachers to be in the schools for the complete summer school cycle and nearly the entire summer school day. HGL was delivered in an elementary school for 2 weeks and a middle school for 2 weeks. ASTS was delivered in a high school setting. The student demographics for these schools are found in Table 1.

Table 1
School Demographics

School	Enrollment	ELL rates	Free & reduced lunch rates	Mobility rates	Ethnicity rates
Elementary	700	65%	85%	14%	90% minority primarily Hispanic
Middle	300	2%	76%	36%	75% minority primarily Black, not Hispanic
High	2000	< 1%	63%	29%	75% minority primarily Black, not Hispanic
State average	-	6%	41%	12%	74% White, not Hispanic

Note. ELL = English Language Learners. Free & reduced lunch = low-income status.

This arrangement created extended experiences in which preservice teachers were immersed in a naturalistic urban school setting. Furthermore, as the university faculty members delivered on-site course instruction, the arrangement provided the faculty members the opportunity to supervise closely the field experiences of the preservice teachers who were enrolled in their courses and for the preservice teachers to debrief with their instructors and peers immediately following observations and interactions with the K-12 students and teachers.

After finishing the experience, the participants were asked to complete a postexperience survey that included the same items as the preexperience survey. Additionally, this survey provided the option for open-ended responses to prompts related to the most valuable aspect of the experience and suggestions for improving the experience.

Pre- and postexperience surveys were analyzed to provide data related to the following research questions:

1. To what extent did the Urban Immersion Program change preservice teachers' perceptions of urban schools?
2. To what extent did the Urban Immersion Program change what influenced preservice teachers' perceptions of urban schools?
3. To what extent did the Urban Immersion Program change preservice teachers' sense of their preparedness to teach in urban schools?
4. To what extent did the Urban Immersion Program change preservice teachers' desire to student teach or teach in an urban school?

Findings

General findings. The findings overwhelmingly support the existing research related to preservice field experiences. In addition, the data provide strong indication that candidates, regardless of progression in their preparation program, area of teaching interest, gender, or community of origin, were impacted by the program.

Preservice teachers who completed the Urban Immersion Program changed their perceptions of urban schools and of the teachers and students who work and learn in those schools. After completing the experience, their perceptions were less influenced by the media and to a greater extent based on their own direct experience. The participants, across demographic groups, felt more prepared to teach in urban schools and more interested in doing so.

Data analysis. Analysis of data included the examination of the aggregated data (see Table 2.) Data were also disaggregated by (a) course, (b) gender, (c) participant's community of origin as identified by the participant (rural, small town, suburban, or urban), and (d) program level (elementary, secondary, or K-12).

Aggregated data indicated the program was successful in changing the participants' perceptions of urban schools. Postexperience survey data confirmed that preservice teachers believed they had a much more accurate perception of urban schools. Prior to the experience, the average response to the survey item related to having an accurate perception of K-12 urban schools was 2.63 on a 4.0 scale. Following the experience, the average response was 3.47. Upon completion of the experience, participants also reported their perceptions of urban schools were more influenced by their own experiences and less influenced by the media.

In addition, participants reported an increased understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by both teachers and students in urban schools. The greatest change was found in relationship to understanding the opportunities for urban teachers.

The survey included 11 items related to participants' self-reported preparation for teaching in an urban school setting. On each of these items, participants reported feeling more prepared after completing the program. As one preservice candidate noted, "Being in class with an experienced teacher and the entire Urban Immersion Program gives me a comfort base that I hadn't had before." Particularly strong growth was noted in feeling prepared to (a) teach students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds; and (b) connect with the daily lives of students.

The preservice teachers expressed more interest in student teaching and teaching in an urban school on the postexperience survey than on the preexperience survey. In addition, after completing the Urban Immersion Program, preservice teachers believed their preparation program had better prepared them to meet the needs of students in urban school settings. Several preservice teachers indicated the Urban Immersion Program was the *best* preparation they had experienced in their programs. Comments from the preservice candidates indicated they valued the day-to-day experience as well as the opportunities to discuss their observations with their peers and instructors during the portion of the day when they were in their course sessions.

Few differences appeared between preservice teachers who were enrolled in HGL or ASTS. Participants in ASTS reported a greater change in their interest in student teaching or teaching in urban school settings. This may be attributed to their program progression: The preservice teachers in ASTS were typically within one or two semesters of student teaching. Those in HGL were typically within three to four semesters of student teaching.

Table 2
Pre- and Postexperience Scores on Survey Items

	Question	Pre	Post
1	I feel comfortable in K-12 school settings.	3.47	3.74
2	I feel comfortable in K-12 urban school settings.	3.00	3.62
3	I have an accurate perception of K-12 schools.	3.09	3.59
4	I have an accurate perception of K-12 urban schools.	2.63	3.47
	My perception of K-12 schools is most influenced by:		
5.1	my own experiences.	3.53	3.82
5.2	the media.	2.33	2.21
5.3	past college course work.	3.00	3.33
	My perception of K-12 urban schools is most influenced by:		
6.1	my own experiences.	2.68	3.53
6.2	the media.	2.61	2.24
6.3	past college course work.	3.03	3.18
7	I understand the opportunities for teachers in urban school settings.	2.76	3.62
8	I understand the challenges for teachers in urban school settings.	2.97	3.63
9	I understand the opportunities for K-12 students in the urban school settings.	2.76	3.54
10	I understand the challenges for K-12 students in the urban school settings.	2.94	3.66
	If I student teach or teach in an urban school setting, I feel prepared to:		
11.1	build effective rapport with my students.	3.18	3.74
11.2	teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds.	3.12	3.74
11.3	teach students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.	2.35	3.06
11.4	teach students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.	3.07	3.72
11.5	plan effective lessons	3.19	3.60
11.6	differentiate instruction	3.10	3.60
11.7	connect content to the daily lives of students	2.97	3.68
11.8	manage classroom behavior	3.00	3.47
11.9	positively impact student learning	3.32	3.79
11.10	communicate with parents	3.06	3.65
11.11	collaborate with colleagues	3.24	3.76
12	I feel my teacher preparation program has prepared me to meet the needs of students in urban school settings.	2.94	3.50
13	I would like to student teach in an urban school setting.	2.88	3.34
14	I am likely to apply for a teaching position in an urban school setting.	2.77	3.31

Note. All ratings on Likert Scale: *Strongly Agree* (4), *Agree* (3), *Disagree* (2), *Strongly Disagree* (1)

Female (n=19) participants showed greater change in perceptions and sense of preparedness than males (n=15). This was particularly evident in the responses related to feeling comfortable in urban schools. The ratings for males increased from 3.20 on the preexperience survey to 3.73 on the postexperience survey. The ratings for females increased from 2.84 on the preexperience survey to 3.52 on the postexperience survey. There were also greater changes for females than males on the items related to feeling prepared to teach students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Overall, the five participants who identified as being from rural communities experienced greater changes than their small town, suburban, and urban peers. The greatest changes for the rural candidates were in their reported understanding of the opportunities and challenges of teachers and students in urban schools and in their feelings of preparedness to teach students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The elementary, secondary, and K-12 participants did not demonstrate much difference in the changes reflected via the pre- and postexperience surveys. Elementary participants did demonstrate notable change, however, related to their understanding of the opportunities for teachers and students in urban schools settings. The average preexperience rating regarding the opportunities for urban teachers was 2.62; the average postexperience rating was 3.62. The average preexperience rating regarding the opportunities for urban students was 2.62; the average postexperience rating was 3.50.

K-12 participants showed a similar change related to their understanding of the opportunities for urban teachers. They also reported a notable change in their understanding of the challenges for urban teachers. The average preexperience rating for both items was 2.75; the average postexperience rating for both items was 3.75.

Implications

The potential for new and beginning teachers. Teacher educators must take action to design experiences of both depth and breadth that allow preservice candidates to experience the urban school environment. Traditional university lectures, anecdotal accounts, and limited observations do not afford preservice teachers the opportunity to disassemble their existing perceptions and rebuild new and more accurate perceptions based on first-hand experiences.

Programs that provide field experiences in an urban school coupled with on-site course delivery can provide preservice candidates not only the opportunity to retool their perceptions but to do so under the guidance of their course instructor. The course instructor is able to provide immediate and direct feedback to preservice teachers, helping them to connect what they are experiencing to what they have studied in class. Experiences and theory are no longer in isolation or loosely connected. Rather, they are immediately joined together, providing powerful learning opportunities—opportunities recognized by the preservice teachers and also by the students they will teach in the future.

The potential for urban schools. Beginning teachers may be drawn to financial incentives or loan-forgiveness programs that are tied to teaching in high-need urban schools. Although noble in their efforts, these programs may do little to recruit or retain teachers in these settings.

However, beginning teachers who are interested in teaching in urban schools and who feel prepared to do so will draw on both intrinsic as well as extrinsic rewards for teaching in these settings. Urban school administrators seeking to recruit and retain teachers may be in a much better position to do so if they can find ways to partner with teacher preparation

programs to provide extensive experiences in urban schools. Teachers who want to teach in urban schools and are confident in their abilities to do so have the potential to become the next generation of great urban teachers ready to meet the challenges they will face and capitalize on the opportunities presented to them.

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High School Dropout: Perceptions and Voices of African American and Hispanic Students

By Wanda L. Baker

The author reports on a qualitative study investigating the perceptions of African American and Hispanic students who dropped out of a large, diverse, suburban high school in southeast Texas. Specifically, the researcher used a case study approach in an effort to capture the informants' voices and the meanings they held, as students of color, about the experience of dropping out. Data analysis generated three major themes that influenced their decisions: (a) challenging home situations, (b) personal realities, and (c) school-related factors that reflected a lack of support systems. The findings suggest that although the school as an institution is not responsible or accountable for the family factors that contribute to students' decisions to drop out, it can provide systems of support to assist students in overcoming the causes outside of the school walls that contribute to their decision to leave.

Introduction

In spite of the agenda of recent school reform efforts to narrow or eradicate the achievement gap, ensure equity and social justice, raise achievement, and increase school completion rates, the school dropout problem continues to haunt educators and policy makers. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2007), across the United States, every school day, almost 7,000 students become dropouts. Overall, nearly one-third of all public high school students and almost one-half of all students of color do not graduate with their class (Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore, & Friant, 2010).

The dropout figures, however, are even more alarming when examined in light of ethnic and racial distribution, especially as it relates to African American and Hispanic students. The literature and the data reveal higher numbers of minority students dropping out of high school. On a national scale, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics's 2009 report, while the graduation rate for White students was 80.3%, the rate for Hispanic students was 62%, and for African American students, 60.3% (Stillwell, 2009).

The dropout rate among Hispanic students is just one indicator that the fastest growing ethnic group in U.S. public schools is not experiencing improvements in educational outcomes, especially as Hispanics represent the nation's largest minority group (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Vélez & Saenz, 2001). Findings from the literature

reviewed revealed how the ultimate achievement gap of dropping out of school perpetuates the under achievement of Hispanic and African American students and brings to light the disparities in academic success between White students and students of color.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined students' perspectives regarding factors that contribute to students of color dropping out from a diverse, suburban high school in a large school district in southeast Texas. The dropout problem reaches beyond the scope of this specific high school, affecting students, families, and schools at statewide and national levels.

Focus Areas of Study

- What are some experiences that led Hispanic and African American students at this high school to the decision of dropping out of school?
- What are the perceptions of Hispanic and African American students who dropped out of this suburban high school about systems, people, programs, and practices that impacted or contributed to their decisions to drop out?

Review of the Literature

The dropout problem reaches far beyond its impact on students who leave school and their families. This crisis affects their local community's economic health and the nation at large as individual consequences develop into increased costs on a national scale. The economic impact is reflected in the loss of productive workers, the reduction in earnings and revenues they would have generated, and the higher cost associated with increased incarceration, health care, and social services (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Burke Morrison, 2006).

The impact of dropping out of school clearly affects students' earning capacity. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) reported that the average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was \$17,299, while the average for a high school graduate was \$26,933, marking an average difference in income of more than \$9,000 each year. According to Barton (2005), in 2003 only 4 in 10 of the 16- to 19-year-olds who had dropped out of school were employed. Additionally, some were single parents who were in a welfare support system, and others found alternative sources of income in a sublegal economy. Most of these youth were headed for a life of sporadic employment and low wages (Barton, 2005). Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004) stated that in 2001 the unemployment rate for dropouts 25 years old and over was almost 75% higher than for high school graduates and that approximately two-thirds of all state prison inmates had not completed high school. Additionally, young women who drop out of high school are more likely to become single parents at young ages. Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin (2008) also reported that dropouts earn about one million dollars less over their lifetimes, are twice more likely to slip into poverty, are eight times more likely to be in jail, and are half as likely to vote.

Communities and society at large also pay a price as a result of young students dropping out of school. Sum et al. (2009) reported that the incidence of institutionalization problems

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among young high school dropouts was more than 63 times higher than among young 4-year college graduates. Their report stated that nearly 1 of every 10 young male high school dropouts was institutionalized on a given day in 2006-2007 as compared to fewer than 1 of 33 high school graduates (Sum et al., 2009). Furthermore, when we examine and disaggregate the prison population by ethnicity, the number of African American and

Hispanic inmates is alarmingly higher compared to White and other ethnic groups (Mauer & King, 2007).

Although it is true that the dropout problem is widespread and crosses racial and socioeconomic lines, it does affect some groups more than others, especially Hispanic and African American students. Statistics place Hispanic high school students at a higher risk of dropping out compared to their White peers. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) reported that in the 2003-2004 academic year, African American and Hispanic high school students were more likely to drop out than White students.

The predictors and the reasons for dropping out of school are usually multilayered and complex, especially for students of color. Schargel, Thacker, and Bell (2007) identified and sorted risk factors of dropping out into four categories: (a) previous school experience, (b) personal or psychological characteristics, (c) adult and family responsibilities of student, and (d) family background and cohesion.

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Burke Morrison (2006) listed in their findings the following five major reasons that students gave for dropping out: (a) a lack of connection to the school environment,

(b) a perception that school is boring, (c) feeling unmotivated, (d) academic challenges, and (e) the weight of real-world events. Their findings also revealed that dropping out of school was not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement initiated by attendance patterns.

More recently, Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore, and Friant (2010) released findings that revealed that the leading reason cited by students for dropping out was not seeing the connection between classroom learning and their own lives and career dreams. Nearly half the informants in their study cited their principal reasons for dropping out as (a) boredom and (b) classes not being interesting. The informants in this study did not see the value or relevance of some of their classes. Additionally, the authors reported that students expressed how they longed for better teachers who kept classes interesting and wanted more one-on-one instruction from teachers (2010). Another factor identified in their study was a difficult home environment or other responsibilities. According to the authors, "Many informants said that the accumulation of tough circumstances and other

“ Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Burke Morrison (2006) listed in their findings the following five major reasons that students gave for dropping out: (a) a lack of connection to the school environment, (b) a perception that school is boring, (c) feeling unmotivated, (d) academic challenges, and (e) the weight of real-world events. Their findings also revealed that dropping out of school was not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement initiated by attendance patterns. ”

barriers students face, rather than one particular problem, better explained many students' decision to drop out" (Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore, & Friant, 2010).

Although the dropout crisis is grave, it is not hopeless. According to Barton (2005), dropping out is not in some way preordained, and what happens in the school can overcome much. Rodriguez (2008) argued that individual risk factors are not necessarily deterministic and that research has shifted as a result of the examination of the impact that school-level dynamics have in mediating student dropout. As in so many other critical scenarios, prevention is key to reducing the dropout rate.

In an effort to reach the students who are at risk of dropping out, educators need to examine options that will broaden the opportunities for students to remain in school and successfully graduate. Although identifying and analyzing the reasons students drop out of school is important in order to address the diverse needs of students, school and district personnel must identify the specific and effective practices and programs schools can put in place to help students stay in school (Rennie Center for Educational Research and Policy, 2009). An effective way to accomplish this task is to study and measure the success of existing and recommended programs and practices and to capitalize on the lessons learned from effective interventions to keep students in school and reduce the number of students dropping out.

In 2008 the Texas Education Agency released a report of best practices in dropout prevention based on a report released by ICF International, in partnership with the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (Texas Education Agency, 2008). The study identified the most effective dropout strategies utilized to be (a) school-community collaboration, (b) safe learning environments, (c) family engagement, (d) mentoring and tutoring, (e) alternative schooling, (f) active learning, and (g) career and technology education.

Other findings from Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Burke Morrison (2006), based on their investigations, suggested the following systems of support to improve students' chances of staying in school: (a) improve teaching and curricula to make schools more relevant and engaging and to enhance the connection between school and work, (b) improve instruction and access to supports for struggling students, (c) build a school climate that fosters academics, (d) ensure that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school, and (e) improve the communication between parents and schools (2006).

Although they have no control over the challenging life circumstances of many students of color, school personnel can control and manipulate contextual factors related to the schooling experience. In addition to the above-mentioned findings, other significant components identified in the literature, and more specifically associated with preventing dropout by students of color, have been identified as school leadership, teachers, instructional practices, curriculum, and data-driven decision making.

Methodology

Through the use of a case study approach, the researcher intended to understand the experience of dropping out of school from the informants' perspectives. The objective was, through the dialogue resulting from interviews, to identify factors that determined and constrained the informants' worldviews. The researcher developed a semistructured, open-ended, 10-question interview protocol (see Appendix) that was used with all 12 informants. The interview questions were developed from themes discovered in the literature reviewed. The researcher conducted each interview and took notes while audio

recording. The researcher then transcribed each interview into text.

The purposeful sample in this study included students who had dropped out of this specific suburban high school, who were African American or Hispanic, and who were 18 years or older. The researcher randomly selected 30 students who met these criteria from a list of dropout students from the school. The researcher's goal was to contact and interview a total of 12 informants, with an equal representation of males and females. This task proved to be difficult because some information from school records was no longer correct. The final sample for this study included 12 informants: 7 Hispanic and 5 African American; 7 females, and 5 males. Four informants were Hispanic females, three were Hispanic males, three were African American females, and two were African American males.

The researcher selected the use of themes as the process to analyze the data obtained through the semistructured interviews. The interpretational analysis process selected for this case study was based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative approach to analysis. The researcher relied on triangulation, peer debriefing, and rich, thick description as methods to ensure validity of the findings and discussions resulting from the research.

Findings

The data analysis generated three major themes identifying factors to which informants attributed dropping out of school: (a) challenging home situations, (b) personal realities, and (c) school-related factors that reflected a lack of support systems. The theme labeled *challenging home situations* was associated with contributing factors emerging from the home life, home environment, or circumstances related to home and family life. *Challenging home situations* was divided into two sub themes: (a) financial challenges, and (b) family and personal problems that did not allow the student to concentrate at school (death, divorce, and family fights, among others).

The second theme identified from the analysis of the data was labeled *personal realities*. Under this theme, the students identified factors that were related to neither school nor home. They attributed these factors to themselves as students. Four subthemes were identified from this theme: (a) loss of hope that led them to give up and stop trying, (b) frustration or embarrassment for being too old to be in school, (c) emotional and physical health, and (d) juggling teenage parental and student roles.

The third theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was labeled *school-related factors that reflected a lack of support systems*. This theme included school-related factors associated with their decision to drop out of school and how these factors impacted them as students. This theme was further divided into seven subthemes: (a) academic difficulties, (b) teachers, (c) grade retention, (d) attendance issues, (e) law enforcement and discipline, (f) social issues at school, and (g) school administrators' attitudes and actions.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study captured the students' voices and what they perceived to be factors impacting their decision to drop out. These findings support those in the literature and in previous research about factors that students identify as significant causes for dropping out. Because *challenging home situations* was the strongest theme, one could argue that having social and academic systems of support at school might have made a difference in students' decisions to drop out or remain in school; such systems would also have a positive impact on their *personal realities*.

The second theme identified from the analysis of the data was labeled *personal realities*.

Although most of the factors within this theme were not necessarily the fault of the students, they still perceived them as factors or causes attributed to them as individuals. School- or home-related factors may have caused them to lose hope and give up, but the students' perceived that it was they who had given up and stopped trying. Most informants did not make a conscious connection between their sense of hopelessness and how circumstances beyond their control contributed to their frustration and despair.

The third theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was labeled *school-related factors that reflected a lack of support systems*. Valenzuela (1999) supported this notion by stating that academic success and failure are presented more as products of schooling rather than as something that young people do.

In combination with the literature and research reviewed, the data generated from the informants' voices and perceptions in the context of this study revealed students need systems of support to compensate for the challenges at home and in their personal lives and for their personal realities. These systems may include (a) culturally responsive and caring leadership, (b) mentoring programs, (c) well-trained, caring teachers, (d) a meaningful and relevant curriculum aligned with adequate assessment, and (e) best pedagogical practices.

The findings in this study reveal the diverse needs of students of color and the daily struggles the informants faced to stay in school and graduate successfully. The findings highlight a need for the development and funding of programs to provide coordinated services that address the needs of students of color in relation to challenging home situations. Additionally, educators need to consider funding provisions for the expansion of support programs such as mentoring, tutoring, and credit-recovery opportunities.

In the end, school dropout is the ultimate measure of how schools fail to meet the needs of all students, not just students of color, and it is the end result of the existing achievement gap. Although the needs of students of color have received more attention in the literature in the past few years, the achievement gap still exists, and students of color still drop out of school at alarming and disproportionate rates. School leaders play a crucial role because they can be catalysts—not only by challenging current systems and practices but also by advocating and influencing policy on behalf of students of color.

No easy, simple, or quick solutions exist in the quest to narrow the achievement gap and increase the graduation rate of students of color. New and better alternatives must be explored and developed to accommodate and meet the needs of what could possibly become a majority in the U.S. population in the near future. The policy, funding, and educational decisions that are made today will have an impact on the kinds of workers and leaders we prepare for tomorrow. As new political and economic changes shape the world,

“ . . . [S]tudents need systems of support to compensate for the challenges at home and in their personal lives and for their personal realities. These systems may include (a) culturally responsive and caring leadership, (b) mentoring programs, (c) well-trained, caring teachers, (d) a meaningful and relevant curriculum aligned with adequate assessment, and (e) best pedagogical practices. ”

policy makers, educators, and educational leaders must be in tune with the needs of all learners.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

High School Dropout: Perceptions and Voices of African American and Hispanic Students

Semistructured Interview Questionnaire Guide and Instrument

1. What do you consider the most important factor that contributed to your decision to drop out of school?
2. What other secondary factors do you consider contributed to your decision to drop out of school?
3. What had the strongest impact on your decision to drop out; people (teachers, administrators, peers) or systems (rules, policies, laws)? Explain.
4. If you had been thinking about dropping out prior to your final decision, was there anyone or anything keeping you from dropping out of school?
5. Before dropping out of school, was there anyone in school that motivated you to stay and graduate? Who? How?
6. Was the process of dropping out a sudden decision or was it a decision that you had been considering for some time? If so, for how long? Explain the process.
7. Do you feel there was a specific situation that pushed you to dropping out of school (an argument, a disciplinary action, a prolonged absence from school, etc.)?
8. What could any school staff member have done or said to make you change your mind about dropping out?
9. What programs or support systems could the school have had in place to motivate, encourage, and support you to stay in school?
10. If you could change one (or several) things about school that would help you stay in school and graduate successfully, what would it be?

Splinter Skills Do Not Make Students Sharper!

Meeting the Needs of Elementary Students with Chronic Illnesses and Absenteeism

By Stacy Reeves and Hollie Gabler Filce

*A*mong the diverse needs that educators must meet are those of students who face the challenge of chronic illness or considerable absence. This article considers the physical, psychological, and social-emotional issues that accompany excessive absence among elementary students and that impact their learning. The authors advocate collaboration among classroom teachers, instructional support team members, parents, the student who is ill, and the other students in the class. Specific suggestions for teachers, parents, and students clarify concerns such as making up work, accessing additional resources for teaching and learning, using technology, and facilitating understanding and belonging.

Although some children have perfect attendance for a semester or even a year, those children are unique. More often, children miss a day or two per year for minor illnesses such as colds or mild aches and pains, or slightly longer periods for illnesses such as the flu or the chicken pox. These children typically make up their work and are easily reintegrated into the classroom without long-lasting educational consequences. But what about children with more persistent absenteeism due to continual, or chronic, illnesses? Approximately 10.2 million (13.9%) children under the age of 18 in the United States have chronic special healthcare needs (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Medical advances and technologies are allowing these children to remain at home with their families and in school with their peers, instead of in hospital settings. Nevertheless, although medical improvements in treatments allow the children to live more normalized lives, they do have frequent, regular absences from school due to medical appointments, therapies, and periods of time in which their illness prevents them from attending school at all.

Approximately 40% of children with chronic illness will encounter difficulty with school attendance, academic progress, and social-emotional difficulties related to the

physical and emotional challenges of their illness (Thies & McAllister, 2001). Although some may have an individualized plan addressing their *medical* needs during the school day, most students with chronic illness are taught in general education classrooms without special plans addressing their *learning* needs (Filce & LaVergne, 2011). Like any other child, a child with chronic illness may have any range of cognitive abilities; but Filce and LaVergne (2011) researched children with average or above cognitive capabilities and chronic illnesses and found that it may take some time for the educational impact of the illness to become problematic enough to attract attention from teachers and parents because the children do a reasonable job of seeming to be caught-up, for short time periods, in their school work. Additionally, in an attempt to protect and nurture, some parents may overcompensate for their children's illnesses to maintain the appearance of normalcy for the child and family—making them appear less different and helping their child blend in (Ludman, Spitz, & Kiely, 1994).

The physical and psychological distress of illness can cause these children to miss time in school and have fewer opportunities to learn critical academic and social content. Children with special healthcare needs have absenteeism rates up to 50% higher than their healthy peers (Charlton et al., 1991), which contributes to slower academic progress in the long run (Carroll, 2010; Needham, Crosnoe, & Muller, 2004; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Shiu, 2001). Most health impairments are chronic in nature and last for extended periods of time. Students with chronic illness may fluctuate between periods in which the condition is well-managed with little impact on the school day and those in which they experience a recurrence of symptoms that require intervention or treatment. Few outward signs or pressing needs may be evident at any given time, giving the appearance that the individual does not need special educational supports (Best, 2005). However, at any point in time, the child's ability to learn may be damaged by physical pain or discomfort; fatigue; loss of appetite; side effects of medications, treatments, or therapies; limited stamina; and an inability to concentrate (Brandstaetter, Leifgren & Silkworth, 2005; Caldwell et al., 1997; Clay, 2004; Midence, 1994). Unfortunately, as children begin to struggle academically, they develop more short-term problem behaviors, demonstrate increased dropout rates, and are less likely to attend postsecondary education or to achieve successful occupational attainment as adults (Crosnoe, 2002; Miller 1998; Rosenbaum, DeLuca, & Miller 1999).

In addition to the physical challenges presented by chronic illness, social-emotional ramifications occur that can lead to learning difficulties over time (Thies, 1999). Children may exhibit anxiety, depression, or poor self-image due to their illnesses; negative shifts in family or peer relationships may occur; and personal or peer acceptance of the condition may be difficult (Brandstaetter et al., 2005; Caldwell et al., 1997;



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Midence, 1994). Chronic health conditions can have a perceived fear or stigma attached to them that can push children and adults to become secretive about the condition (Best, 2005). Interestingly, there is evidence that children who have milder forms of an illness may have less coping abilities than those with more severe or life-threatening conditions and may exhibit more problems with adjustment (Drotar & Bush, 1985; Perrin, MacLean, & Perrin, 1989). Therefore, assumptions about potential social-emotional impact cannot be made based on the severity of the condition at any given time.

Ultimately, the problem of absenteeism is difficult to grasp because academic achievement, or lack thereof, is not directly related to number of days missed or severity of the condition (Sexson & Madan-Swain, 1993; Thies, 1999). Some children may miss small but regular portions of the school day (for catheterization, insulin monitoring, and so forth), but the frequency of the absences combined with the repetitive nature of the effects of the illness can have a negative cumulative impact over time (Thies, 1999). This can lead to lower levels of knowledge and a decreased understanding of critical course content (Needham, Crosnoe, & Muller, 2004), which can be particularly problematic when the child is at significant points in academic development.

“When a child is chronically ill and misses instruction, teachers and parents may begin to see very uneven skill development and a lack of particular curriculum-based proficiency where skills are missing and gaps in learning have occurred. . . . [T]he uneven development of skills across areas is referred to as splinter skills.”

Splinter Skills

When a child is chronically ill and misses instruction, teachers and parents may begin to see very uneven skill development and a lack of particular curriculum-based proficiency where skills are missing and gaps in learning have occurred. The student is presented with new information without a solid foundation or a schema set on which to build the new information. Reported mainly in the disability literature describing autism spectrum disorders (Volkmar & Wiesner, 2009), intellectual disabilities (Gabbard, 2007), and learning disabilities (Wodrich & Schmitt, 2006), the uneven development of skills across areas is referred to as *splinter skills*. This phenomenon is manifested as weaknesses in one area that exist concurrently with average or above performance in other areas. For example, a child may be able to read words on an eighth grade level but only comprehend written passages at a first grade level. Although most children with chronic illnesses do not also experience cognitive disabilities, the cumulative effect of missing critical pieces of instruction may put them at-risk of falling behind academically over time. Teachers and parents must address the inevitable gaps in instruction and learning by these students in order to minimize the impact of absenteeism due to illness.

Teachers, Parents, and Students Working Together

Elementary students with chronic illnesses display a range of academic skills and abilities—as do all elementary students. One thing that sets these children apart is persistent absenteeism, which will likely continue throughout their educational careers.

Make Up the Work

Teachers can:

- Closely monitor the knowledge and skill attainment of students who miss school frequently.
- Provide all missed work in a timely manner; set realistic timelines for completion.
- Be creative in how to share missed information. Have other students write essays or record messages about the lesson for the student who is missing class.

Parents can:

- Ensure your child completes all work missed.
- Work with the teacher and your child to come up with a realistic timeline for completion.

Students can:

- Work with friends to find out what was missed.
- Have a positive attitude about completing work.
- Talk with parents, caregivers, and teachers about how to make incremental progress in ways that are not overwhelming.

Figure 1. Suggestions for making up the work.

Access Additional Resources

Teachers can:

- Provide supplemental materials that the student can use independently for extra instruction.
- Provide linkages to sources of tutoring, enrichment activities, and so forth that can help students recoup time missed.
- Critically assess if more work (especially worksheets) is necessary to learning or simply “busy work.”
- Ask other educators, parents, and students for ideas about other ways to learn the content.
- Join virtual or face-to-face communities that share ideas and resources.

Parents can:

- Find out if tutors (i.e., teachers, college students preparing to be teachers, and others) are available to assist your child.
- Ask the teacher or the textbook companies to see if there are extra materials that can be used at home. Choose those with high recommendations and that go further than paperwork.
- Make the home a “literacy rich” environment with lots of books, magazines, and other reading materials that build interest in many areas as well as develop literacy and numeracy skills.
- Choose summer camp experiences with an academic component.

Students can:

- Find a friend to be a “study buddy” and ask him/her to hang out. It’s always more fun to work together!
- Read, read, read! Get lots of books and magazines to help keep up and have fun!
- There are lots of accurate, exciting documentaries and educational programs that can teach while being entertaining too.
- Find fun things to do that will also encourage learning. Many camps and virtual communities can help you catch up on concepts you may have missed.

Figure 2. Suggestions for accessing additional resources.

These gaps in instructional time can result in *splinter skills*, as past learning may have been indiscriminate and future learning potentially problematic. At the beginning of any new term, and frequently thereafter, teachers and instructional staff should use both observational and psychometric procedures to determine strengths and weaknesses of the student (Wodrich, & Cunningham, 2008). Instructional staff should determine what necessary skills are missing for basic, foundational literacy and numeracy and begin there, working towards grade-level achievement. Wide and varied reading of informational and fiction texts will increase the child’s incidental and explicit vocabulary and comprehension as well as develop a plethora of other language skills and advanced competence in a wide range of fields (Reeves & Stanford, 2009). *Splinter skills* in numeracy may be identified using diagnostic assessments that show areas of weakness. For example, when a child does not recognize the concept of multiplication as a computation of repeated addition, then the teacher has knowledge of where to begin work with the student.

Teachers must collaborate not only with the instructional support team at the school, but also with parents, the student who is ill, and the other students in the class to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Teachers must not forget that the other students in the class may worry about the child who is ill and wonder if illness can happen to them, too! By attending to the learning needs of all the children and by building a supportive community, teachers can better ensure that the needs of the whole child are considered and addressed. Figures 1 through 4 provides suggestions for teachers, parents, and students that can benefit all learners in the class.

Conclusion

In today’s schools, there is little time to waste. Increased pressure to teach progressively

more complex content can drive schools and teachers to move more quickly through the curriculum. When a student misses time in school, he or she will miss important teaching and learning. Even when teachers and parents make concerted efforts to *make-up* missed work, the learning activity is not the same due to classroom factors that cannot be reproduced. Teachers must be aware of the impacts chronic illness and absenteeism can have over time, not only educationally but socially as well. By being aware of the both the physical and psychological consequences of illness and then addressing those educational and social needs, teachers can change the educational trajectory of children at risk of having skills splintered by the effects of illness. By being open, communicative, vigilant partners with parents, teachers can ensure that they meet the learning needs of these students and help identify and remediate any gaps in knowledge. *Splinter skills* can then become building blocks for new knowledge. The ways parents, teachers, children, and their peers begin communicating and cooperating will make the learning environment a more engaging, supportive atmosphere for *everyone*.

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Facilitate Understanding and Belonging

Teachers can:

- Learn about the child's condition. As the educational expert, teachers can help identify how the condition may influence the child's ability to learn.
- Talk to the parent and child about the ideas and get their input. Emphasize understanding, but also focus on educational needs.
- Weave information about illnesses into lessons and activities in an age-appropriate way. Focus on similarities and differences, "fact" vs. "myth." Foster empathy, but not "feeling sorry" for the child who is ill.
- Facilitate relationships among parents and students through the use of social networking or other resources.

Parents can:

- Provide enough information to the teacher and peers so that they understand the needs of your child. Accentuate ways to share information while still respecting the child's privacy.
- Encourage interaction with peers using technology such as email, social networking, and so forth. Be sure to monitor these interactions, particularly for young children.

Students can:

- Talk with parents about a comfortable sharing level; it is not always necessary to tell everyone everything about your illness until you feel safe to do so.
- Decide how much to tell teachers, friends, and other classmates. People who care about you will be concerned.
- Keep up with friends even if you miss a lot of school. They care about you and miss you when you are gone!

Figure 3. Suggestions for facilitating understanding and belonging.

Use Technology

Teachers can:

- Provide detailed information about daily lessons on a class Web page accessible to all students and parents.
- Record classes missed for students; use webcams to allow students to view classes when they must stay at home.
- Provide contact numbers so that parents and students can reach you via email, texting, and through other electronic media.

Parents can:

- Make sure your home computer is connected to the Internet and has the right tools (software, webcam, microphone, and others as needed) to access the resources provided by the teacher.
- Identify portable educational games (i.e., "apps", handheld games, virtual learning communities, and so on) that can provide learning knowledge, reinforcement, and extra practice for skills.

Students can:

- Work with teachers and parents to keep up with assignments using electronic media. Friends are helpful and easily accessible with Internet and other electronic methods.
- Use electronic methods (gaming systems, handheld devices, etc.) to learn. There are lots of games and "apps" that are fun but educational. Talk with your peers about which ones they like.

Figure 4. Suggestions for using technology.

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