



BY REQUEST...

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
PRACTICES FOR
STUDENT SUCCESS:
A Regional Sampler



JUNE 2005

NORTHWEST REGIONAL
EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

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BY REQUEST...

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS: A REGIONAL SAMPLER

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Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Portland, Oregon

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PREFACE

This booklet is one in a series of “hot topics” reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. This particular issue is a joint publication of NWREL’s Equity Center and the Office of Planning and Service Coordination. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, how Northwest schools and programs are addressing the issue, selected resources, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet gives practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators from around the Northwest are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success. The goal of the series is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

The purpose of this issue of *By Request* is to introduce pre-K-12 educators to the topic of culturally responsive educational practices—practices that can be defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). The booklet pertains to the unique experiences of teachers and school administrators in the Northwest and Pacific regions, and provides a starting place for educators to consider as they develop culturally responsive practices in their schools and districts.

We briefly review practices that research indicates can contribute to the academic success of students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Then we take a closer look at how Pacific Northwest and Hawaiian state organizations, districts, school leaders, and school staff are responding to the needs of their diverse student populations. We describe the challenges and successes of these educators and provide examples of their culturally responsive strategies. Finally, we identify some resources for further reading on the subject. In addition, an annotated bibliography of research studies will be available on our Web site.

This booklet was peer reviewed by internal and external reviewers. The external reviewers met qualifications for technical, content, and practitioner reviewers. Those reviewers are listed in the acknowledgments section.

Another NWREL publication, *Classroom to Community and Back: Using Culturally Responsive Standards-Based Teaching To Strengthen Family and Community Partnerships and Increase Student Achievement* will be published online in December 2005.

A NOTE ON TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Many terms are used to describe culture, and how it relates to increasing student achievement. In this booklet, we take an inclusive view of culture, as described by Edwards, Ellis, Ko, Saifer, and Stuczynski:

Culture can be defined as a way of life, especially as it relates to the socially transmitted habits, customs, traditions, and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people at a particular time. It includes the behaviors, actions, practices, attitudes, norms and values, communications (language), patterns, traits, etiquette, spirituality, concepts of health and healing, superstitions, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. Culture is the lens through which we look at the world. It is the context within which we operate and make sense of the world and its influences on how we process learning, solve problems, and teach. (2004, p. 9)

Although culture often tends to be associated with ethnicity or race, Ruby Payne and other researchers have identified significant cultural differences between children in poverty and their middle class and wealthy peers—differences that have important implications for teaching and learning.

The term cultural competence entails “mastering complex awarenesses and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills that taken together, underlie effective cross cultural teaching” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 5). This term has recently gained increased attention as state education agencies and legislatures throughout our region work to develop

standards and indicators of cultural competence, to ensure that teachers and school leaders have the skills and knowledge to effectively educate students of diverse cultures.

Because this booklet focuses on specific ways that schools are responding to the needs of culturally and socioeconomically diverse students, rather than the knowledge and skills they may be drawing from, we have chosen the term culturally responsive to describe these practices. As defined by Nieto, “culturally responsive education recognizes, respects, and uses students’ identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments” (as cited in New England Equity Assistance Center, n.d.). Being culturally responsive is more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. Accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realized, are what make a difference (Gay, 2000).

The dynamic nature of the word “responsiveness” suggests the ability to acknowledge the unique needs of diverse students, take action to address those needs, and adapt approaches as student needs and demographics change over time. Cultural responsiveness is the term most frequently cited in the research we reviewed, and the way in which the majority of educators interviewed described their own practices.

IN CONTEXT: A GROWING NEED FOR CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Cultural and social diversity is certainly not a new issue facing us humans. It has always existed, and we remain challenged by it. However, the burgeoning complexity of our times calls upon us as educators to face this challenge more directly, to value diversity, honor it with integrity, and to preserve the cultural dignity of our students.

— Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2005

Classrooms today do not look the same as they did a decade or even a few years ago. Major demographic shifts have led to increasing numbers of culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students in our schools. At the same time, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the resulting requirement that schools report disaggregated data have focused a spotlight on the achievement gaps that have persisted for years between children of color, children in poverty, and English language learning (ELL) students and their mainstream peers.

While recent reports indicate that some progress is being made in closing the gaps, significant inequities continue to exist for a wide range of educational indicators including grades, scores on standardized tests, dropout rates, and participation in higher education (Education Trust, 2004; NCES, 2001; Viadero & Johnston, 2000).

One explanation for these gaps is that disparities in achievement stem in part from a lack of fit between traditional school practices—which are derived almost exclusively from European

American culture—and the home cultures of diverse students and their families (Cummins, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995). According to this theory, children whose cultural background is European American have an innate educational advantage, while children from other backgrounds are required “to learn through cultural practices and perceptions other than their own” (Hollins, 1996). This “cultural mismatch” is often a result of widely divergent worldviews about such fundamental concepts as human nature, time, the natural environment, and social relationships (Sowers, 2004).

Related to this argument is the idea that an education system rooted in the dominant culture is inherently biased. When one set of beliefs is held up as “right” or “normal,” the values of other cultural groups are treated as less valid, and children from those groups can be perceived as culturally deficient.

Evidence of this attitude can be found in statistics reflecting higher rates of discipline and suspension among children of color, particularly African American boys, and disproportionate numbers of minority and ELL students in special education. At the same time, these students are sharply underrepresented in gifted and advanced placement classes. By adopting culturally responsive school practices, educators seek to address issues of educational inequity and confront institutional bias and discrimination.

The need to effectively address cross-cultural differences was less of an issue when classrooms were more homogeneous and teachers and students shared common cultural traits. While today’s classroom—whether in an urban, rural, or suburban setting—is more diverse than ever before, the majority of school personnel continue to come from middle class, European American backgrounds (National Collaborative on Diversity

in the Teaching Force, 2004). Many educators are now struggling to connect with a completely new set of learners, with cultural backgrounds distinctly different from each other and from their teachers. Across the country and throughout our region, educators are embracing the notion of cultural responsiveness as a means of helping all students reach high standards.

Data from NWREL’s Regional Needs Assessment (Barnett & Greenough, 2004) indicate that a large percentage of principals in high-poverty schools in our region want to devote more effort to addressing disparities in performance among students based on race, ethnicity, language, disability, and poverty. Principals and teachers also want to put more effort into incorporating a variety of classroom practices to meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

NWREL’s Equity Center, which provides training and technical assistance in the areas of race, gender, and national origin, has seen a significant increase in districts’ requests for professional development in cultural competence, key components of educational equity, and instructional strategies for ELLs. NWREL’s English Language Learners unit has also received many requests for assistance that relate to developing a culturally competent school staff.

Closing the achievement gaps and correcting educational inequities are compelling reasons for schools to become more culturally responsive, but they are not the only reasons. Proponents of culturally responsive practices point to the importance of taking cultural context into account in order to teach the whole child (Gay, 2000) and, perhaps most important, the need for teachers and learners alike to be able to live effectively in a multicultural society with a rich variety of perspectives and worldviews.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Most of the research linking culturally responsive practices to increased student achievement is not definitive or rigorous—there are only a handful of studies that use scientific methods to determine causal links between practice and outcome. However, there are many correlational and case studies that demonstrate how culturally responsive practices affect achievement and other indicators of school success for ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students. The lack of experimental research points to the difficulty of conducting random assignment trials in public schools rather than the validity of culturally responsive practices.

Some skeptics question the need to address cultural discontinuity as a factor in closing the achievement gaps, and argue that a focus on standards, accountability, and the effects of poverty is more relevant (e.g., Ludlow, 1992; Stotsky, 1999). The research we reviewed indicates that culturally responsive practices, which include having high expectations and standards for learning, are indeed related to student success, even if few studies have been undertaken to make this connection explicit.

For example, Demmert and Towner (2003) have examined the research base on Native education and found six critical elements of “culturally based education” (CBE) that suggest an impact on academic achievement of Native American students: Recognition and use of Native languages; pedagogy using traditional cultural characteristics; teaching strategies and curriculum congruent with traditional culture and traditional ways of

knowing; strong Native community participation in education; and knowledge and use of political mores of the community.

Demmert states that poverty is certainly a major factor affecting student achievement, but that culturally based education is also a factor in schools that are currently successful with Native students. “One or two studies question our theories regarding the importance of language and culturally based education, but all others supported our assumptions” (Demmert, personal communication). Demmert and other researchers are currently looking at ways to conduct rigorous studies to prove such a link.

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) developed Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy based on decades of research across cultural and socioeconomic contexts, including the KEEP model, a program for at-risk Native Hawaiian students (Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp, 2003). The standards are:

1. Teachers and students working together
2. Developing language and literacy skills across the curriculum
3. Connecting lessons to students’ lives
4. Engaging students in challenging lessons
5. Emphasizing dialogue over lectures

Studies have shown there is a positive and significant relationship between teachers’ use of the standards and student performance.

These themes are repeated in almost all literature we reviewed for this booklet. The following is a very brief outline of the common characteristics of culturally responsive practices

that educators are using for their students to be successful. (An annotated bibliography is available as a separate document through the NWREL Web site at www.nwrel.org/request)

◆ **A climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of students' cultures is fostered in the school and classroom** (Cooper, 2002; Gay, 2000; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sheets, 1995; Tharp, 1982; Waxman & Tellez, 2002).

The research on resiliency shows that a nurturing environment provides a secure base for children to develop confidence, competence, feelings of autonomy, and safety. In schools where there is trust, caring, and support, students have higher attendance, higher performance, and lower rate of suspensions (Benard, 2004; Strand & Peacock, 2002).

In a recent study of high school dropouts in Oregon, respect was the main concern of students attending alternative schools (Brush & Jones, 2002). Banks and Banks (1995) point out that teachers need to be very aware of how students see their interactions with them, and the extent to which students see them as caring. Teachers can reflect on whether students find their classes meaningful, and whether there are gaps between what they are teaching and what students are learning.

◆ **Bridges are built between academic learning and students' prior understanding, knowledge, native language, and values** (Conrad, Gong, Sipp, & Wright, 2004; Doherty, et al., 2003; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski,

2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Powers, Potthoff, Bearinger, & Resnick, 2003; Waxman & Tellez, 2002).

Culture and native language (and cultural dialects, such as Ebonics) are valued and used as assets in learning, and as a vehicle for learning, rather than deficits. Texts can be chosen so that children make connections with their life experiences. Activities can include families, so that family knowledge can relate to classroom activities.

◆ **Educators learn from and about their students' culture, language, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their students' lives** (Apthorp, D'Amato, & Richardson, 2003; Lee, 2003; Lipka, 2002).

Recent efforts to provide culturally congruent science instruction have shown that when cultural and linguistic background knowledge is used, students increase their science achievement test scores (Lee, 2003). Schools can work with community organizations to provide professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders to learn about their students' culture. Many states in our region are looking at ways to ensure that their teachers are culturally competent, and are working to develop curriculum and professional development opportunities, as well as providing education to preservice teachers.

◆ **Local knowledge, language, and culture are fully integrated into the curriculum, not added on to it** (Demmert, 2001; Hollins, 1996).

Curricula should reinforce and value cultural knowledge of students rather than ignore or negate it. A culturally

responsive curriculum should fully integrate cultural knowledge, not “adding it on” in unconnected units or “culture days.” According to Demmert, “A series of studies conducted in the past 30 years collectively provides strong evidence that Native language and cultural programs—and student identification with such programs—are associated with improved academic performance, decreased dropout rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behavior” (p. 9).

- ◆ **Staff members hold students to high standards and have high expectations for all students** (Cooper, 2002; Hill, Kawagley, & Barnhardt, 2003; Sheets, 1995; Waxman & Tellez, 2002).

High standards and high expectations are an integral part of being culturally responsive. It is well documented that Latino, Native American, and African American students are disproportionately represented in special education and remedial classes and underrepresented in advanced placement classes. Several studies we reviewed showed that when traditionally low-performing students were given the opportunity to be in higher level classes with small-group collaborative work and using higher order thinking skills, they excelled in those classes.

- ◆ **Effective classroom practices are challenging, cooperative, and hands-on, with less emphasis on rote memorization and lecture formats** (Hill, Kawagley, & Barnhardt, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; St. Charles & Costantino, 2000).

One of CREDE’s Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy is to “Instruct through teacher-student dialogue, especially academic, goal-directed, small-group conversations (known as instructional conversations), rather than lecture.” CREDE recommends that teachers engage students in small-group activities with cognitively complex tasks that foster language development and reading comprehension. Teachers can encourage a community of learners by having students share new knowledge with other classmates, and work on interdisciplinary projects that build on their strengths and allow them to explore their interests.

- ◆ **School staff build trust and partnerships with families, especially with families marginalized by schools in the past** (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Cooper, 2002; Demmert, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sosa, 1997; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001; Young, 1998).

The most successful efforts are when schools reach out to families and to the community as a whole and fully involve them in making decisions that will affect their children’s future in school. Actively inviting families to the school, visiting families in their communities, soliciting their input and taking their concerns seriously, and treating families with respect, will all go a long way toward developing trust.

REGIONAL SAMPLER

Research is more relevant for the practitioner when applied to specific school contexts. The following section highlights schools and organizations from our region where the research-based practices summarized in the previous section are evident and producing promising results. Since NWREL's Equity Center serves the state of Hawaii, we profile the experiences of Hawaiian educators along with educators from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. The profiles reflect a broad range of demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic diversity. Our intention is not to prescribe specific practices that work with particular groups of students, but to describe how schools are responding to the needs of their students in various ways and in various contexts.

You will see how staff at several high schools—Tigard, Aloha, Kentlake, and East Valley—are fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive school climate for all students. Educators at Warren School, Russian Mission School, and Tuluksak School are integrating local knowledge into their curriculum and are building bridges between academic learning and students' prior understanding. The Idaho Department of Education, Ronan Pablo Schools, and Warren School provide professional development opportunities for educators to learn about their students' culture, language and learning styles to make instruction meaningful and relevant.

All the educators in these profiles hold their students to high standards and have high expectations—this is a central focus of Linapuni and Queen Ka'ahumanu Schools. Teachers we spoke with at Russian Mission, Queen Ka'ahumanu, and Warren School use challenging hands-on, cooperatively

based learning practices. Finally, several schools and local education organizations have meaningful strategies to build trust and partnerships with diverse families, including Tigard High School and Boise School District.

Although some schools have data to show they are making progress with raising achievement for culturally diverse students, our intention is to profile successes and also challenges of schools as they experience the various stages of becoming culturally competent organizations. Some of our profiles look at comprehensive efforts, while other profiles will focus on individual approaches. As researcher Geneva Gay points out, while systematic, comprehensive, whole-school approaches are what will sustain culturally responsive practices and make them most effective, “micro level changes,” such as at a classroom level, are important too.

Each of these profiles provides multiple examples of culturally responsive practices, including many not specifically identified in the research. As you read, we encourage you to draw your own connections between what the research says, what educators are doing in practice, and what strategies and approaches might be most appropriate for your school and the needs of your students.



ALASKA

The vast geographic and demographic diversity of Alaska creates unique challenges for the state's education system. More than half of all schools are in remote rural villages, often with high rates of poverty. Of the 41 percent minority students enrolled in the state's public school system, 26 percent are Alaska Native.

The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI) is one effort the state has developed to address the needs of their student population. RSI is a set of programs and projects designed to forge partnerships among Native, scientific, and educational communities and to integrate indigenous knowledge systems with educational policies and practices. Twenty partner rural school districts are participating, and more than 90 percent of the students in those districts are Alaska Native. Key outcomes have included developing a standards-based, culturally aligned math and science curriculum, establishing a Native Knowledge clearinghouse, and creating the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.

Now in its tenth year, the Alaska RSI continues to produce an increase in student achievement scores, lower dropout rates, and higher numbers of students attending college. These results support the premise that "increased connections between what students experience in school and what they experience outside school appears to have a significant impact on their academic performance" (Hill, Kawagley, & Barnhardt, 2003).



LOCATION

Russian Mission School
Lower Yukon School District
P.O. Box 32089
Mountain Village, AK 99632
Phone: 907-584-5126
Web site: www.lysd.gcisa.net/~rmission/index.htm

SUBSISTENCE EDUCATION PROGRAM RECONNECTS NATIVE YOUTH TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

Russian Mission School, one of the participating schools in the Alaska RSI, has experienced remarkable success in implementing a culturally responsive curriculum. In 2000, working in close partnership with community members, the school launched a Subsistence Education Program that integrates Native knowledge with academic standards.

In the tiny village of Russian Mission, located in a remote corner of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, most residents support themselves with a combination of seasonal work, public assistance, and subsistence hunting. The impetus for the program grew out of community meetings in which village elders expressed concern that even youth who completed school did not have the skills they needed—physically or spiritually—to live successfully in the community. Loss of native traditions, combined with the challenges of modern life, including poverty and substance abuse problems, had resulted in a generation without a strong sense of identity or the skills to make a successful transition to adulthood in the village.



Principal Mike Hull recognized that the school needed to rethink the kind of education it was providing to Native youth. “Only 10 to 15 percent of these kids go on to college or take a job outside of the village after graduation,” he explains. “Schools should be about serving the needs of the community and teaching kids how to live well where they are.”

To develop their curriculum, staff at Russian Mission borrowed from the Yup’ik model of education—which has been carried out for 10,000 years—as a framework for teaching youth how to be an adult in the village. From a native perspective, the model provides a powerful way for elders to transmit traditional knowledge to the next generation, and for Yup’ik youth to reclaim their cultural heritage and gain a stronger sense of identity.

From an educator’s standpoint, it’s sound pedagogy. A hands-on, inquiry-based instructional approach engages learners in activities that apply learning to tasks that are real and of high interest. The subsistence curriculum makes use of the unique resources of the village heritage and environment, and it’s enriching for students and staff because of the diversity of learning approaches and settings it provides.

The strength of the curriculum lies in directly connecting to the outdoor environment and the seasons, creating hands-on activities that integrate subsistence skills with academic content, and tapping into the native knowledge and skills of elders and community members. The seasons and weather conditions dictate what happens at the school. “We don’t just look at what’s happening this time of year, but what’s happening outside today,” says Hull.



Much of the teaching and learning activities take place outdoors in the village environs or in camp settings. Students become intimately familiar with their natural environment as they learn a wide range of subsistence skills, including traditional hunting and fishing methods, how to build cabins and snow shelters, and navigation and survival techniques.

Traditional knowledge is carefully integrated with academic standards. A unit on berry picking, for example, asks students to study and identify five types of berries, learn where those berries are traditionally harvested, and then use the berries to create traditional Yup’ik foods. The berry picking activity incorporates benchmarks from science, health, and personal/social skills standards. Students then demonstrate what they have learned through writing assignments and using technology to create a PowerPoint presentation about making traditional foods. “We’re very aggressive about using the standards,” notes Hull. “But we see Native culture as the pathway to that.”

Cultural content comes from a strong partnership between educators and community members. “We have very unconventional teaching and learning roles here,” Hull explains. The school’s maintenance man is a leading expert on subsistence in the village. The “facilities” he helps to maintain include a cabin that was built upriver and a 4’ x 8’ hole in the ice used for setting a fish trap. The school librarian has been trapping since childhood. Two new teachers from Oregon who recently joined the school staff “became immediate students of the culture.” The educators, Hull explains, have organizational skills—they know how to manage the kids. But it’s always the village community members who are doing the teaching.



The subsistence education program has had a powerful impact on the students and community as a whole. Within the first year of the program, enrollment rates at the school went up, while crime in the community went down. Connections among students, teachers, and elders in the community continue to deepen, and youth are excited about rediscovering their cultural heritage. A recent survey indicates an increase in subsistence activities, which has the added benefit of putting food on the table for the community's neediest members.

The result that has gotten the most attention from educators is the program's success in raising student achievement scores. For Hull, the test scores are merely an added bonus to the transformation the program has worked in the students and the community. "The idea is that if we work on building a healthy community, we'll have higher scoring kids," he says.



LOCATION

Tuluksak School
Yupiiit School District
P.O. Box 51190
Akiachak, AK 99551
Phone: 907-695-5626
Web site: www.yupiiit.org/436.cfm

UNIQUE TEACHING TOOL LINKS LEARNING TO STUDENTS' LIVES

Vaughn Dosko, principal of Tuluksak School in Yupiiit School District, is excited about the culturally responsive tool they've recently added to the curriculum. It's not the latest reading program or instructional strategy—this "tool" is furry, four-footed, and bushy-tailed. The school acquired nine dogs to form the first school-based dog sled racing team in the state, maybe in the nation.

Dosko, who came to the district five years ago from Northern Idaho, admits that while it took time to understand and adjust to the culture of village life, "It didn't take me long at all to realize that Western educational ways will not work in this community." He firmly believes that Western academic content can be taught using culturally responsive practices. "We want to prepare these kids to be successful in whatever they choose to do after they graduate, whether it's go on to college or be a subsistence hunter in the village."

The dog program is used within the context of a districtwide culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum that aligns



core content with hands-on activities in subsistence, survival, and community. In home economics class, students sew the booties the dogs wear on their feet when they go out and “mush” in the snow. As part of their science courses, students learn traditional hunting and fishing techniques to provide food for the dogs. “Yes, kids go out with guns and shoot caribou,” Dosko affirms. “This is not your typical science curriculum.”

The dogs help with core academic subjects as well, sometimes in unexpected ways. It’s not unusual to find a fourth-grader out in the dog yard, reading aloud to the dogs. For children who are not comfortable reading out loud in class, reading to the dogs is a totally nonthreatening way to practice their skills. After all, says Dosko, a dog will never correct your pronunciation or grammar.

Contact with the animals also helps students develop social and interpersonal skills, serving as a kind of “pet therapy.” Many children in rural Alaska don’t have family pets like kids in the lower states, and the bonds students form with the dogs are very beneficial. Dosko has sometimes taken a problem student out into the dog yard and found that tending to the dogs together provides a nonconfrontational way to work through an issue.

The “carrot” of the program for students in the early grades is that they will be able to take electives in junior and senior high school to actually learn how to mush the dogs. In local mush races the Tuluksak dog team has done well, serving as a source of school and community pride.

One key to successfully implementing the program has been a focus on retaining and developing a culturally responsive



staff. Before Dosko, the school had never had a principal who stayed more than two years. The school suffered from high teacher turnover rates—a common problem in rural Alaskan villages—which led to a lack of continuity and prevented the school from developing its capacity.

Instead of focusing on recruiting new teachers, as many rural districts do, Dosko concentrated on retaining the teachers they had. One strategy was to create a better quality of life for teachers in the village. “In rural Alaska, the district is also your landlord. If you’re not happy at home, you’re not happy at work,” he says. Dosko worked hard to create better housing conditions for teachers, and the village has received funding for water storage and treatment improvements. In August 2004, a new school building was completed.

Another aspect of teacher retention centered on the unique opportunities for professional development for non-Native teachers. The superintendent, Joseph Slats, is Alaska Native. The district also draws in community members to promote better cultural understanding of village life. A three- to six-credit course in Yup’ik culture and history is offered to the staff every year, and professional development is offered in improving instructional strategies for teaching literacy to English language learners. These efforts have paid off. The school has gone from a nearly 85 percent turnover rate to losing only one or two teachers a year. Dosko credits the resulting structure and consistency as a critical factor in sustaining a culturally responsive program.

Community support and involvement is also crucial. The curriculum, which Dosko admits is a work in progress, is



developed through conversations with community members. The dog program was chosen in part because it is both a male and female activity, while many traditional Native practices have distinct gender roles. The school has a local knowledge expert to consult with, plus a cultural curriculum coordinator who assists in identifying supplemental materials and community resources to enhance the program.

The benefits of the program are many. For students, the program has resulted in increased enrollment, graduation rates, and especially student engagement and motivation. “Kids are having so much fun they don’t always know they’re participating in learning activities,” says Dosko. There have also been dramatic changes in the way local people relate to the school. Community members see others participating and spending more time at the school and want to know how they can become more involved. Dosko believes the program has opened doors for other districts to implement innovative, culturally responsive practices. When the school first approached the state for funding for the program, they were “turned down flat.” Because of the program’s success, Dosko thinks they might get a different answer today.

Asked what school leaders can do to implement culturally responsive practices in their school communities, Dosko recommends first gaining an indepth understanding of the student population and their needs, then using creativity to respond to those needs with the resources at hand. “Culturally responsive education really does not mean that you have to go out there and create something completely new,” Dosko asserts. “It’s about utilizing what’s there already, understanding the resources you have right there at your fingertips.”



HAWAII

Students in Hawaii’s public schools come from a much wider range of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds than those in mainland states. Although Hawaii’s educators are also more diverse than in mainland schools, they are both less diverse and culturally different than their student population. One challenge for Hawaii’s education system, identified in the *2003 State Superintendent’s Report*, is “bridging the differences of ethnicity and culture to make educational and economic opportunity real for the state’s future citizens.”

Improving achievement for poor and lower income students is another challenge. Nearly 44 percent of the state’s student population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and achievement data indicate that these students’ test scores in math and reading are well below the state average. Since 1992–1993, although overall public school enrollment has increased by 3.3 percent, the number of students who receive lunch subsidies has increased by more than 48 percent. The state has also seen a marked increase in the number of students with limited English proficiency and the number of students needing special education services.



LOCATION

Queen Ka'ahumanu School
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Phone: 808-587-4414
Web site: <http://qks-esll.k12.hi.us>

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS ARE TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

The tremendous cultural and linguistic diversity at Queen Ka'ahumanu School—including one of the largest populations of English language learners (ELLs) in the district—presents unique challenges and opportunities. Students speak many languages including Japanese, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Spanish, Marshallese, Chuukese, Kosraean, Pohnpein, Nepalese, Tamil, Mandarin, Russian, Ukrainian, Samoan, Tagalog, Ilocano, Visayan, and Tongan.

When the school adopted a reading model based on daily 90-minute uninterrupted reading blocks, English for Second Language Learners (ESLL) Program Coordinator/teacher Diane Murakami recognized that students learning English needed more support. “The model is very structured, and it has a lot of pluses,” says Murakami. “But the ESLL students needed more to address their needs.”

In response, the school devised a schedule that alternates reading blocks with targeted English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Each day while the lower grades are doing their reading block, ESL students in the upper grades have a 45-minute block during which they are provided with supplemental ESL services. Then the groups switch. ESL



services continue throughout the rest of the day for the remaining grades that are not serviced in the morning. This enables the school to be in 100 percent compliance with federal and state guidelines in providing services to identified language minority students. When students come for the ESL period, Murakami and her team are able to assess what each student needs, whether it be help with language proficiency, acculturation, or basic survival skills, and provide instruction to address those needs.

“Every situation is different, and every student is different,” Murakami explains. “The students may come from the same cultural background but their individual circumstances are different. You can’t just take a one-size-fits-all approach.” That philosophy is infused throughout the ESLL program, which draws on a variety of strategies and activities to serve students learning English and their families. “It’s important to generate your own philosophy about learning and about working with culturally diverse learners,” says Murakami. “Then bring in whatever you think will work best.”

In her ESLL classes, Murakami uses an interdisciplinary curriculum design that integrates both academic content knowledge and language skills. This year’s theme is “Communities: Past, Present, and Future.” For the unit on the past, which was set during the medieval period, she developed standards-based lessons with both content and language objectives where students role-played various scenarios through the eyes of the people who lived in those times. The unit on the present explored the ecosystem, or “community” of the tropical rainforest, and the future unit this year will be on space. Themed curriculum provides opportunities for English learners to practice listening, speaking, reading, and



writing while gaining content knowledge and higher-level thinking skills.

Murakami also strives to provide her students with learning strategies, such as memorization aids and graphic organizers. “I tell the students that they also have to learn how to learn for themselves. We can provide them with information and the tools they’ll need to access it, but they have to take responsibility for using it in a way that makes sense for them.”

At Queen Ka’ahumanu, every classroom has several students who speak a first language other than English. Murakami stresses the importance of enlisting support from regular classroom teachers, and providing them with information and resources related to ELLs. “If you have an informed staff,” she says, “They will be aware of the needs of ESLL students and will be better able to address them.”

She offers an overview of the ESLL program for the faculty and staff at the beginning of the school year, and holds “mini-awareness sessions” throughout the year. Recently, she conducted a series of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) inservice training sessions to raise awareness of the model and instructional practices that work with ELLs. Though sheltered instruction has been around for years, these sessions were held because the SIOP takes practices used in sheltered instruction and puts them into a specific framework.

One piece of advice Murakami offers teachers about being culturally responsive is to give English language learners enough time. Too often, she says, we expect results too



quickly. “Last year, a student from Vietnam came into first grade late in the year not speaking a word of English,” she recalls. “All we got from him was a blank stare. I had a tutor sit next to him and try to assist, but he had no response at all. His parents didn’t speak any English either, so there was little or no English language support at home. We kind of just had to give him that wait time.”

“This year wasn’t much different,” she continues. “We tried to do interactive learning activities with him, but we still didn’t get much response. Then one day, just recently, he started talking! He was sitting next to another student from Micronesia who was limited English proficient, and he started helping the other student with his work.”

Murakami is emphatic that allowing more time does not mean expecting less from ELLs. “We cannot lower the expectations we have for these students. We still want them to meet high standards. But we have to allow them enough time to get there.”



LOCATION

Linapuni Elementary School
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STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS WORK TOGETHER TO CHART GOALS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Linapuni Elementary is a small K-2 school serving residents of two nearby federally funded housing projects. The community has a higher than state average of households with public assistance income and families with children living in poverty. Approximately 99 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Like many of Hawaii's public schools, Linapuni is highly ethnically and linguistically diverse. The school's total enrollment is just over 200, with more than a dozen racial and ethnic groups represented. Approximately 45 percent of students are English language learners, and many of the children come directly into school from their home country.

Helping all students to meet high academic standards, while responding to the unique needs of English language learners and students and families living in poverty, is Linapuni's challenge and mission. Inspired by professional development training based on researcher Ruby Payne's work in poverty, ELL teacher Suzanne Kobatake, preschool/special education teacher Colleen Uejo, and kindergarten teacher Virginia Park collaborated to design a parent-child lesson on goal setting that links children's and parents' goals with academic standards.



One premise of Payne's work is that students from poverty bring with them the "hidden rules" of their culture, which are distinctly different from the hidden rules of middle class culture (Payne, 1998). Because school culture is based on middle class norms and values, students and families who don't come from middle class backgrounds need to be introduced and acclimatized to school culture and expectations before effective teaching and learning can take place. The three teachers decided to focus on goal setting because, as Kobatake explains, "Goal setting impacts student and parent learning at all grade levels."

For preschool parents and children, Uejo used a playful, hands-on approach to introduce the concept of goals. During orientation week, she brought parents in and had a variety of art supplies on the tables. Parents were invited to cut out paper dolls and dress the dolls as their child. Next, Uejo had parents cut out a heart shape to add to the doll, and write on the heart what their goal was for their child. Examples might be that the child will learn to write his or her name, or know the ABCs.

Once parents had generated their goals, Uejo then showed them how those goals could be matched to the state standards. She notes that, "For many parents, this was their first introduction to what a standard was." Uejo then used "backward mapping" with the parents to determine what steps were needed to reach the goals.

The next phase was to work with students to get them to take responsibility and generate their own goals. In Park's kindergarten class, "The challenge was, how do I get a five-year-old to understand the goal-setting process?" She began by searching the Web, and came up with information about



making wishes, setting New Year's resolutions, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Next, Park found books from the Harcourt reading series, such as *I Need a Lunchbox* and *A Birthday Basket for Tia*, which related to the goal-setting theme. The class read these stories and discussed the themes over several days, then brainstormed around the question, "What do you want to be able to do?" Once the children chose a goal, they independently drew a picture of their goal, and then Park wrote the goals down. The goals could be related to home, school, or both—such as being able to jump rope.

The class discussed how goals can be hard to achieve and that it takes time to reach a goal. Park reviewed *So Say the Monkeys* with the children as a negative example of not attaining a goal—the monkeys started to build a house but then they got distracted because they found some food. Another book, *I Like Me*, was used as a positive example of not giving up.

Park then posed the question, "How are we going to achieve our goals?" and worked with students to develop a three-step action plan. If the goal was to get a good grade, for example, the action plan might include: 1) focus, 2) do my homework, and 3) finish my work on time.

That same day, Park sent a letter home to parents about what their children could already do, and asked them to set a goal for what they wanted for their child. Although there was a range in how well students and parents—particularly those with limited fluency in English—were able to articulate their goals, in many cases the goals the children set for



themselves and the goals the parents set for their children were aligned.

After students and parents had identified goals and developed action plans, Kobatake conducted a follow-up workshop for parents. Participants looked at standards, benchmarks, and performance indicators related to the goals. Kobatake worked with parents to differentiate between long- and short-term goals and to break out bigger goals into specific, measurable, short-term goals. They developed a three-step action plan similar to what the children had outlined. Additional follow-up workshops are planned in which parents will assess, students will self-assess, and everyone will evaluate how the child is doing on his or her goals.

While all three teachers emphasize the crucial role of parent involvement in student achievement, they also note the importance of motivating students to become self-directed learners. They work with students to continually assess progress, and teach students how to assess themselves. "There is a limit to how much we can involve the parents," says Kobatake. "We try to encourage the child to take responsibility for his/her own learning goals."

When several students in her class were reading below grade level, for example, Kobatake worked with them to write up learning contracts and develop action plans that included tasks like "do my homework," "practice at home," and "learn words on the word wall." Since they signed their contracts they are much more motivated—students will come into class announcing "I did my homework!" As Kobatake points out, "It's much easier to get them to learn the rules when they generate the rules themselves."



IDAHO

Many of Idaho's schools are in rural, high-poverty districts. In 2001, over 13 percent of children statewide lived in poverty. More than a third of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Of the 14 percent of minority students enrolled, the overwhelming majority—11 percent—are of Hispanic origin. Many Hispanic students and their families are migrant.

Idaho's education system has a large and growing population of English language learners. Since the 1991-1992 school year, enrollment of ELL students has increased by a startling 276.4 percent. Among students learning English, Spanish is the most commonly spoken language. Districts throughout Idaho report that recruiting and retaining more Hispanic, ELL, and bilingual Spanish teachers is a particular need and challenge.



LOCATION

Idaho Department of Education
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TEACHER TRAINING AND SUPPORT ARE KEY TO HELPING STRUGGLING STUDENTS ACHIEVE

Improving educational achievement for diverse learners is a statewide priority for Idaho schools. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data indicate that certain groups—particularly Hispanic, ELL, and migrant students—are struggling to meet standards. Many Idaho schools identified for Title I school improvement have significant populations of these students. “We’ve been trying to raise awareness of these issues,” says Irene Chavolla, Migrant Education Coordinator at the Idaho Department of Education. “Now we have the data to back it up.”

The DOE has implemented several programs to address this challenge. Chavolla's department, the Bureau of Special Population Services, was restructured into interdisciplinary teams made up of special education, migrant, and LEP specialists. Six different teams were created to address key topical areas, such as assessment/accountability and instructional strategies.

“The vision is that when we go out to provide professional development training to districts, experts will be sharing information across disciplines,” says Chavolla. If a district



hosted a Reading Academy, for example, the teams would be able to provide teachers with strategies for how to help each specific population group improve reading skills.

The state board of education began developing state-level English language proficiency standards in October 2003, and is currently in the process of training teachers how to implement the standards. The state is also rolling out new language assessments to use as a framework for curriculum development.

Chavolla cites a lack of certified ELL teachers as a significant problem. Though Boise State University is producing more, many new teachers gravitate toward larger districts or other states in search of greater economic and cultural opportunity. To build capacity within the state, Idaho implemented a “grow your own” program, offering grants for bilingual and ELL teaching assistants to go back to school and obtain their teaching certificates.

The DOE is also helping school districts train mainstream classroom teachers in the SIOP model, and conducting “data academies” to help staff understand what the research says about working with diverse learners. Teachers come out of these trainings feeling empowered, says Chavolla. “Teachers have told me, ‘I don’t have to be bilingual in Spanish to be able to help these kids. There are simple techniques I can be using in my classroom—clearer explanations, hands-on instruction, vocabulary building—to improve learning.’”

Chavolla acknowledges that when so many failing students come from one population, there is a tendency for teachers to feel anger and frustration toward that particular group.



The key to preventing this reaction is to provide staff with the resources, training, and support to help those students succeed. Increasingly, superintendents from around the state are contacting Chavolla’s office and asking for assistance. “We can’t provide them with another staff member or a bigger budget,” she says. “But we can bring in someone to conduct a staffwide training, and work on building capacity.”

As difficult as NCLB is to implement, says Chavolla, it is forcing everyone to pay attention to the learning needs of all students. “We can no longer afford to leave behind a whole group or groups of students.”



LOCATION

Boise School District
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INNOVATIVE PROGRAM PROVES LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES ARE NO BARRIER TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

In contrast to many districts in Idaho with large populations of Spanish-speaking students and families, Boise's students reflect a broad range of cultural and linguistic diversity—approximately 84 countries and 94 language groups are represented. “We knew from the beginning that we needed to reach far beyond a Cinco de Mayo celebration and a piñata to connect with students and families,” relates Molly Jo de Fuentelba, one of the district's Federal Programs consultants.

One strategy the district has used to strengthen connections between schools and families of diverse learners is to launch an innovative parent involvement program, Boise Parents of English Learners (BPEL). At the beginning of each school year, the English language learner (ELL) staff identifies community members from different language groups who can serve as interpreters and translators. Using a variety of resources, translators are then given training in protocol and cultural sensitivity.

The district invited families of ELL students to a district-wide BPEL meeting. The goal was for staff to find out what parents knew about the district, what they wanted to know,



and what challenges they were facing in connecting with their schools. Invitations were sent in families' home languages and interpreters followed up with personal phone calls. Because transportation was an issue for many families, district staff collaborated with refugee organizations and community agencies to help bring people into the meeting.

“That first meeting fell on one of the worst winter nights of the year,” recalls de Fuentelba. As snow and sleet poured down outside, ELL staff wondered if many families would be able to make it. Their team had prepared a contingency plan in case turnout was low. But the response exceeded expectations—in all, nearly 300 family and community members attended.

The meeting was held at a neighborhood elementary school. Refreshments and child care were provided, with activities set up for children in several classrooms. Parents were seated at tables by language groups, allowing interpreters to circulate while district staff made presentations. For the four largest language groups, parents were given headsets so they could listen to simultaneously transmitted translation from anywhere in the room. “The headsets were a big hit,” de Fuentelba laughs. “Even after they weren't using them anymore, people were still wearing them just walking around.”

After the large-group presentation, participants divided into focus groups with an interpreter and scribe at each table for group discussion. Although staff had planned to have participants come back together as one large group at the end, the small-group discussions were going so well that they opted to leave things as they were.



The gathering provided an opportunity for district staff and diverse families to gain more information about each other and ways to support student learning. “What we found out was that overall, parents were pleased with their schools,” says de Fuentelba. She adds that parents also discussed challenges such as homework assistance, communication, childcare, and transportation.

The district has followed up by identifying and distributing supplemental resources for parents, and offering mini-workshops and family learning activities. The next steps for the BPEL program are to have individual schools in the district hold at least three more meetings for parents throughout the year to discuss information and concerns specific to their schools, and to host a final districtwide BPEL meeting and awards ceremony in the spring.

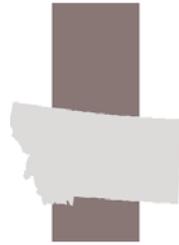
To track the success of the new program, the district will use a variety of measures, including parent participation levels, changes in students’ attendance patterns, and examples of parents taking initiative on projects. After one orientation meeting for families of ELLs, for example, de Fuentelba describes a group of parents who approached the district and said, “We can give this orientation ourselves to other parents, and they won’t be so intimidated to come in because they already know us.”

One key to implementing culturally responsive practices is solid administrative leadership and support. De Fuentelba notes that she is fortunate to have a supervisor, Dr. Ann Farris, who is a strong advocate of cultural responsiveness, and who encourages staff to take innovative ideas, work together on action plans, and follow through with implementation.



Dr. Farris also offers a stipend to an ELL teacher to take on the role of BPEL coordinator. This coordinator plays a critical role in ELL parent participation by assisting each school site with planning and facilitation of building-based parent meetings. “Facilitating multilingual parent meetings is new or uncomfortable for many of our ELL staff,” explains Megan Jones, BPEL coordinator. “Staff support is a key element for successful parent involvement.”

Increasing parent involvement is just one strategy among many the district is using to respond to its increasingly diverse student population. Not all schools in the district are at the same level of awareness. As ELL enrollment increases and demographics continue to shift, de Fuentelba stresses the importance of being prepared with practices that meet the needs of all learners. “We’re trying to get people to understand that this is our population,” she says. “We need to learn the tools to be able to serve the clientele we have, and to do it well.”



MONTANA

In Montana, Native Americans represent a little more than 6.2 percent of the total state population of 917,000. Native American students make up 11 percent of the total student population, which is much larger than the national average of just one percent.

Montana is the only state that has a constitutional obligation to educate about American Indians.* The 1999 Indian Education for All law requires that all Montanans, Indian and non-Indian, must understand the history, culture, and contemporary contributions of Montana's Native American people. The bill requires that educators work with tribes to develop curriculum that includes cultural heritage and contemporary contributions of American Indians, especially Montana Indians. School staff members must have an understanding of Montana tribes to effectively relate to Indian students and their families, and professional development will be provided for these understandings to occur.

In 2004, the state Supreme Court declared that the current funding system violates the constitution and “has shown no commitment in its educational goals to the preservation of Indian cultural identity” (Supreme Court Decision, November 9, 2004. Statement printed on a flyer prepared by the Montana Indian Education Association, February 15, 2005). State Representative Carol Juneau has introduced a bill to provide such funding for the 2005-2006 school year.

*American Indian and Indian (rather than Native American) are the terms most often used in Montana legislation, Office of Public Instruction, and by many Montana educators and tribal members across the state.



To respond to this concern, educators and community leaders are working with the Office of Public Instruction to develop an action plan to focus on closing the achievement gap for American Indian students and ensure that all schools can successfully implement Indian Education for All. Mike Jetty (Spirit Lake Dakota), OPI American Indian Dropout Prevention specialist, and other staff provide resources and assistance for schools to create culturally responsive instruction and curriculum.

Jetty notes that schools are at different stages—some school staff members are ready to implement strategies and others are just becoming aware of them. He tailors curriculum and activities for novices to experts; no one is considered culturally “incompetent.” He teaches that you can only become truly culturally competent when you recognize that each person is a cultural human being.



LOCATION

Flathead Reservation Culture Camp
Ronan/Pablo Schools
421 Andrew NW
Ronan, MT
Phone: 406-676-3390

CULTURE CAMP PROVIDES STAFF DEVELOPMENT ON CULTURE AND DEVELOPS TRUST WITH THE COMMUNITY

The Flathead Indian Reservation is in the Mission Valley of Northwest Montana, north of Missoula and south of Kalispell. The reservation is the remnant homeland that the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai Tribes were able to reserve in the 1855 Treaty of Hell Gate. Of the 7,014 tribal members, about 4,200 live on the reservation. Indian people from other tribes around the state and country also live on the reservation. Local public schools enroll students that represent more than 25 different tribal nations. Even with the presence of Indian people from other tribes, Indian people are still outnumbered by non-Indian reservation residents.

For the past two summers, the Indigenous Math and Science Institute of Salish Kootenai College has organized a Culture Camp for K-12 reservation school staff. During a period of three to five days, tribal elders teach school staff members important aspects of tribal culture and the Salish and Kootenai languages. The goal is to provide sustained professional development that addresses the issues of cultural competency for teachers. The significant impacts that culture and language have on teaching and learning are explored through hands-on activities, language lessons, and conversation and dialogue with tribal elders. This is the first



time that many teachers have had any direct interactions with elders and members of the Indian community.

On the first day of the camp, there was some apprehension on the part of both teachers and elders. Roger McClure of SKC's Indigenous Math and Science Institute remarked on the noticeable distance between the two groups.

"The teachers sat on one side of the room, the tribal members on the other." However, by the end of the week, McClure could see that they were able to come together and collaborate on improving school environments and learning opportunities for Indian students.

Classroom teachers and presenters agree that the camp brought them together in a meaningful way that resulted in both groups finding a new level of trust and openness with each other. The teachers are now more comfortable inviting tribal members to come into the school to teach the children, and know who to call. In turn, the elders and tribal members are more willing to come to the schools as guests and presenters. "So often," explains one Culture Camp presenter, "we feel like we are just giving presentations and teachers only observe but don't participate. At the culture camp, teachers were participants, not just observers."

Tribal member Naida Lefthand remembers the first year of the camp when a teacher said he just wanted to observe but not participate in the cultural lessons. Lefthand did not take "no" for an answer, but instead said, "I have a special project for you" and got the man involved in the day's activities. At the end of the day, he came up to Lefthand and thanked her for making him participate.



In 1910 the reservation was opened up to homesteading by non-Indians, a significant factor in the relationship between the non-Native and Native peoples in this region. In addition to losing some of their land base, the tribes were also faced with having non-Indian neighbors who often had no understanding of tribal histories, government, culture, or languages. Consequently, the Indian and non-Indian communities have lived socially and culturally segregated from one another. This segregation has persisted and affects the content and instructional practices of teachers. Some schools enroll more than 50 percent Native students and others enroll a higher percentage of non-Native students. These student demographics present a unique opportunity and challenge to teachers.

Vernon Finley, one of the camp language instructors, says that a racist environment resulted from non-Indian people homesteading on the reservation. The local school systems were based on white culture, excluding the voices of Native culture. Many tribal members say that even though some school administrators believe they are being culturally responsive, they show cultural insensitivity when they maintain an Indian mascot or require Indian children to cut their hair for sports activities. The tone and response of administrators makes the difference in the school's cultural responsiveness, Finley observes.

The Indian community believes that one of the most important things school staff can do is be “present and accountable in the community.” They suggest that teachers participate in community gatherings and read the tribal newspaper to find out what is going on that will affect their students. Camp participants who have done these things have developed a deeper understanding and



appreciation for important events and activities taking place in the Indian community.

Elizabeth Edson, a reading specialist at Cherry Valley Elementary School in Pablo, said that the camp helped her feel more comfortable with reaching out to families. She understands now why students are sometimes absent and the important reasons why. “When students used to say, ‘I will be out of school for jump dance or a wake,’ I didn’t understand the gravity of the event, what that means for the whole family.” Now Edson realizes why it is important for students to attend these events.

Julie Cajune, one of the camp coordinators, reflected that this staff development activity has been one of the most successful she has been involved in. “Most teachers have been waiting for just such an opportunity to learn more about the history and culture of Indian students and their families. The camp provided a gracious space for teachers to feel comfortable asking questions and being students themselves. The teachers’ willingness to learn and value what the elders are teaching helped build a bridge between the schools and the Indian community.” The camp coordinators and the teachers hope that the trust and understanding they have established will be continued and sustained.



OREGON

Oregon has one of the highest rates of children in poverty and students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch of any state in the region. The state also has one of the largest populations of Hispanic students in the region—12 percent of the total enrollment. The number of ELL students enrolled in Oregon's schools increased by more than 250 percent between 1991-1992 and 2001-2002. As in Idaho, Spanish is the primary language spoken by the majority of ELL students.

Efforts are being made at the state, local, and school levels to help reduce the achievement gaps between minority, ELL, and low-income students and their white, middle class peers. The Oregon State Action for Educational Leadership Project (SAELP) is redesigning education leadership policy, practice, and licensure to demonstrate enhanced effectiveness in regard to cultural competency and educational equity. A summit was held in 2004 to draft definitions and key indicators of cultural competency. For more information about these efforts visit the Oregon Department of Education Web site at www.ode.state.or.us



LOCATION

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COUNSELOR WORKS TO FOSTER CLIMATE OF RESPECT AND CARING FOR DIVERSE STUDENTS

Edward Dueñez is a guidance counselor at Aloha High School in Beaverton, Oregon—a large, comprehensive high school that has become increasingly diverse in the last decade. At present, the minority student population at Aloha is 20 percent Hispanic, 13 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5 percent African American. Just a few years ago, the percentage of Hispanic students was 14 percent. The number of students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program has increased from 14 percent in 1999 to 35 percent in 2004.

Dueñez began his career at Aloha High as a general guidance counselor. He soon realized that many students needed extra attention and that the often overloaded counselors weren't able to provide the kind of support necessary. Dueñez explains that some students are somewhat disconnected from school for various reasons. With just a little more support, such as educators connecting with families and establishing closer relationships with the student, these students can become more engaged. When the school decided to hire an additional guidance counselor, Dueñez suggested to the principal that he be assigned to the students who needed the most help. He was already known as a



trusted person to whom students could talk. “I kept my doors open, even with my large caseload. They need positive influences,” says Dueñez. He notes that Aloha Principal Vicki Lukich has been very receptive to new ideas for creating a more culturally responsive school.

Dueñez has become an advocate on the staff regarding diversity. He monitors his students’ progress in their classes and reviews their transcripts. He checks with kids on how and what they are doing in their classes and looks at their cumulative school record. Most important, he keeps track of how they are doing socially and emotionally. Dueñez started an after-school club that helps students of diverse cultures learn leadership skills and provides a forum for discussion.

Dueñez also stresses to other staff members and students the importance of becoming more aware of culturally insensitive remarks and actions that, even when unintended, can be hurtful and disrespectful. For example, a teacher asked him if he thought it would be OK to shorten a student’s name for a publication (Latino children have both their mother’s and father’s last names). “I explained that if you really want to respect the student and his work you will use his full name.”

Another time a student made a video about Aloha High School for middle school students to learn more about the school. The student filmed various places and people in the school and showed it to the faculty. Dueñez noticed there were no ethnically diverse students in the film, and told the student he should portray the school more accurately. He pointed out that young people are hurt when they feel they are not visible to the mainstream culture.



Dueñez suggests that students and teachers step outside their comfort zones and learn more about what is important to students. They also need to analyze what had been done in their school in the name of “tradition” and accommodate students of all cultures. He recommends that people watch movies like *Stand and Deliver* and *Coach Carter* that show culturally competent educators.

“The most important thing I can do for the kids here, that any staff member can and should do,” says Dueñez, “is show them that I care and get to know them. Simple things like calling home make a world of difference.”



LOCATION

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BILINGUAL PARENT COORDINATOR PROVIDES CARING, HIGH EXPECTATIONS, AND INCENTIVES FOR LEARNING

As Tigard High School's bilingual parent coordinator, third-generation Mexican American Corina Schmidt is an advocate for Latino students and a liaison between teachers, students, and family members. She keeps an eye on ELL students' progress and invites them in for a "chat" if she notices they are frequently absent or if other problems pop up. She facilitates quarterly meetings with families where she discusses educational issues and gives families ideas on how to create a climate at home that is conducive to learning. Since she has been on staff, Schmidt has noticed a marked increase in families coming to family conferences.

Schmidt says the most important thing teachers can do to help their students succeed is to get to know them, learn more about their lives and how their home life relates to school issues. "So many families have 'survival needs' that must be addressed when we consider how to help children—lack of food, clothing, and shelter for example." In one response to this need, district faculty started a volunteer-run clothing center that collects donated clothing for students who otherwise would go without.

Schmidt is always looking for ways to motivate and involve Latino/Latina students in school activities so they can feel



more connected to school culture. For instance, she started a dance group for Latina girls with an academic incentive to join—the girls must have passing grades to be involved, the same rule that applies to all athletic groups at the school. If you don't keep up your grades, warns Schmidt, "I will be on you like flies on flypaper." "This is what caring for students means," she says, "having high expectations and then rewarding them when they achieve."

Schmidt realizes that becoming more culturally responsive is a learning process, even for her. She has learned that her strict, no-nonsense approach to discipline and interactions with students was not effective in motivating her students. "It was my way or no way. I had to learn to lift them up and give them hope," she says. "I learned that it is important to not only understand my students' academic needs but to get to know their life, and their family needs."

A High School Student's Perspective

High school senior Esmeralda Quezada is a very motivated and energetic young woman. President of the Tigard High School's chapter MECha (El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan), the national Chicano student leadership group, she is also involved in the Upward Bound program, which provides sustained support for low-income students to finish high school and go on to college.

One of the most important bits of advice Esmeralda offers teachers is not to judge students before getting to know them. She commented on one teacher in particular who believed she wouldn't work hard because she is Mexican American. She felt unsupported by him, and as a result,



didn't ask for help even when she needed it. After Esmeralda shared her concerns with him, the teacher felt really bad, she says. He hadn't realized that his misperception was having such an impact on her.

Esmeralda says that students of any culture don't like being singled out in class to make comments about their whole group experience. She has observed that the best teachers don't refer to just one group of students, but try to connect with all students. One of the newer teachers at Tigard has passed out questionnaires to get to know students better. Survey questions include: "I think you should know about me ...; I like ...; I don't like ...; How do you think you are unique?"

Sometimes Esmeralda notices teachers responding more to white students, such as when a teacher talks with his back to Latino students and faces white students. Esmeralda also has heard comments from teachers that can make a student feel rejected. The teacher may not even know that the comment was heard by the student, or didn't intend to be disrespectful, but it hurts all the same.

"The most important advice I have for teachers is to get in the shoes of students who are different from them," Esmeralda concludes.



LOCATION

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND NATIVE AMERICAN CURRICULUM MAKE LEARNING MORE INCLUSIVE AND RELEVANT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Warren is one of four elementary schools in the Scappoose School District. Scappoose is a town of 5,500 located 20 miles north of Portland, sandwiched between the Columbia River and Portland's West Hills.

First-grade teacher Wren Christopher, who is part Eastern Band Cherokee, is the volunteer coordinator of the Title VII Indian Education Program at Warren School. Seven percent of the students are Native American, of the Pawnee, Cherokee, Cree, Sioux, Walla Walla, and two Alaska Native tribes.

One of Christopher's roles is to teach other staff members how to use culturally responsive teaching practices. She organizes a Native Summer Cultural Language Arts Camp for first- through twelfth-grade Native students. She also develops culturally responsive curricula and resources that are integrated throughout each grade's curriculum. First-graders plant gardens and learn about salmon. They perform a traditional corn dance when they plant the corn. As a welcoming gift, first-graders present corn to the incoming kindergarten class. Third-graders study Native Americans throughout the United States, and fourth-graders learn about



Native Americans of Oregon. “I give students the truth and a foundation first,” says Christopher, “so that when they come across fiction, they will have the foundation.”

Third-grade teacher Patti Rosenthal says it is often difficult to determine whether you are being culturally sensitive. “Seeking out the experts and elders in the community is always best to determine what is appropriate,” both teachers emphasize. It is important not to make assumptions and to find the most current and culturally sensitive teaching materials. Christopher has set up a mini-library of such resources in her classroom for district staff use.

Rosenthal and Christopher stress the importance of learning about culturally responsive communication with students. For example, when Native American students don’t make eye contact with teachers, it is a sign of respect, not disrespect. They urge other teachers to contact the cultural/educational department of the tribe to ask about local customs.

A number of organizations can inform teachers about appropriate learning materials. OYATE is a Native organization that evaluates texts, provides resource materials and fiction by and about Native peoples, and conducts teacher workshops for participants to learn how to evaluate children’s material for anti-Indian biases. (For more information visit www.oyate.org.)

Christopher is integrating Northwest Native American stories into the curriculum using *The Indian Reading Series: Stories and Legends of the Northwest*. The series has 140 culturally relevant stories written by local Indian authors and illustrated by Indian artists. The materials were



authenticated by the participating tribes and field-tested with more than 1,200 Indian and non-Indian children in 93 classrooms throughout the Northwest. (To see and download the series, go to www.nwrel.org/indianed/indianreading/.)

Says Christopher: “This project will be used in two school districts, Scappoose and St. Helens. A teacher will check out the series that is age appropriate for their class. There will be the teacher’s manual and downloaded books. A Native elder will come to the class who has been taught by a reading teacher to aid the classroom teacher. We are still creating our goals and have not as yet, been in the classroom. We hope to start with Patti [Rosenthal’s] third-grade class here at Warren in the spring.”

Christopher adds that “one important goal is to have children read stories written by Native people about their people. It is important for students to realize there are many nations of Native people and identify and find the tribe and location on a map. Students will also have an opportunity to have a local Native elder read a story with them. This exchange between the elder and students helps develop respect, listening and sharing which is a deep part of traditional teachings in all Native cultures.”



WASHINGTON

Like other states in the Northwest, schools in Washington are experiencing increased cultural and linguistic diversity among their student population, especially in the suburban and rural parts of the state. More than one-fourth of Washington's students are from minority groups, and the state has seen an increase in ELL enrollment of over 105 percent since 1991-1992.

In an effort to address the need for equitable and culturally responsive education, two House bills and a Senate bill have recently been proposed that target closing achievement gaps. To improve educational achievement for Native American students, the Office of Public Instruction has developed a Northwest Native American Reading Curriculum that includes a list of story books developed in collaboration and consultation with tribal content experts, curriculum specialists, and cultural teachers.



LOCATION

Kentlake High School
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PERSONALIZATION, FAMILY OUTREACH PROGRAMS, AND STUDENT VOICE ARE THE FOCUS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES

Kentlake High School is located on the outskirts of the Kent School District, about half way between Tacoma and Seattle. The high school community has seen many changes in the last year. New upper-income subdivisions are being built in a formerly rural area, and the boundaries of the service area were recently changed to include a lower-income housing project, which has many immigrant families from Somalia and Ukraine. Ninth-graders were also added to the school last year.

Principal Diana Pratt and the district boundary committee strongly believed that the boundary change was important to create a more diverse school culture. What Pratt didn't realize was that many students transferred to a more diverse high school where they felt more comfortable. It became Pratt's mission to make her school a more diverse, culturally responsive, safe, and welcoming place where students would want to stay.

Below is a sampling of the many strategies that Pratt, assistant principals, staff members, and students have implemented to create a more personalized, diverse school climate.



Diversity Club and Council. The Diversity Club was formed so that students could take ownership in creating a more culturally responsive climate. The Club meets weekly, provides a forum for voicing students' concerns to staff, and organizes schoolwide events to welcome international exchange students. They also coordinate the local version of the nationwide Mix It Up Day, where students sit at different lunch tables and get to know other students. The Club created its own anti-harassment poster called "Not at Kentlake, Respect Our Differences: Degrading racial, ethnic, sexist, or homophobic remarks not welcome here."

Focused Outreach to Somali and Ukraine families.

Many Somali and Ukrainian families live in the district's low-income housing complex. When children come to school, they face culture shock from trying to live in two different worlds: the culture of their family and the American teenage culture. Says Assistant Principal Gary Melton, "Connections with these families are very important. Often the Somali children and parents have never had formal education and it is really overwhelming for them to navigate the school culture."

The district hired a Somali translator, Omar Ahmed, to bridge the communication gap between Somali families and school staff. Ahmed, the principal, assistant principal, and ELL teacher met with families at the housing complex to discuss concerns and answer questions.

Similar outreach has been done with Ukrainian families, with conferences first being held at their churches where the families were most comfortable. Now twice a year there are conferences at the housing complex, and the district



pays to transport families to the school for other events. Principal Pratt has noticed that parents are now more interested in coming to the school, and often organize carpools for various activities.

Ahmed has become a mentor for the Somali boys, many of whom lost their fathers in wars. "I go to the housing project in the afternoons and listen to the boys," he explains. "I try to be a father figure. I ask them about their problems and give them rides to interviews. I go to school with mothers and help them explain their concerns. I saw that no one was pushing these kids to excel and tell them how they could be successful in school."

Cohort Program for Boys. Assistant Principal Gordon Comfort, who is of European American descent, saw that boys of ethnic minority groups were underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes. He realized that these boys could achieve at higher levels if given more support. After reading an article about a cohort program in the December 2004 *Principal Leadership* magazine, he is designing a similar program to increase the numbers of minority boys in AP classes. Comfort will collaborate with teachers and counselors to provide "coaching" for students, with weekly group meetings and additional meetings with teachers and counselors.

Comfort believes that success for students boils down to relationships. "Although many of my relationships with kids start with disciplinary action, I show them I care and continue supporting them and being their friend after the disciplinary action," says Comfort. Comfort observes that this attention has really made a difference with the Somali



boys, that attendance has increased greatly, and truanancies have decreased markedly.

One inspirational moment came when a student Comfort promised to take to lunch if he didn't have disciplinary referrals left him a note at the end of the year. The boy had not had any referrals, but the note read: "You don't have to buy me lunch, Mr. Comfort. Thanks for setting me straight."

Kentlake has become known for its commitment to culturally responsive practices and was recently selected as one of several state high schools to present at the winter OSPI conference. Test scores have increased steadily: Only 38 percent met reading standards during the 1998-1999 school year; by 2003-2004, 70 percent met reading standards. Administrators say that students are getting along much better, having fewer conflicts and fewer absences. Pratt realizes that school leaders have different perspectives on the impact of school culture on achievement, but she has seen firsthand what this emphasis has done to create a place where young people want to learn.



LOCATION

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STUDENTS LEARN RESPECT AND TAKE OWNERSHIP IN CREATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL

East Valley School District is located east of downtown Spokane, encompassing 100 square miles east to the Idaho border and north to the foothills of Mount Spokane. A high percentage of students are eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program.

A few years ago, the district formed an Equity Committee to address issues of bullying and harassment incidents. After the staff received training from NWREL's Equity Center, the Committee developed and implemented a harassment policy. The committee felt that messages about bullying and harassment would be even more powerful if they were coming from students themselves, so the PRIDE club at East Valley High School was created.

"Personal Responsibility in Diversity Education" is the message PRIDE delivers to all students. The group meets weekly during lunch to develop new schoolwide activities and share concerns. They also reflect on how well activities work and make changes accordingly. For example, the group organized a schoolwide activity about segregation, randomly color coding students and then excluding one of the color-coded groups from certain restrooms and drinking fountains. The point of



the activity was to make students experience segregation firsthand. PRIDE students realized, however, that this activity was very emotional for many students who didn't understand why they were being excluded. The organizers now understand that more preliminary education is necessary.

One PRIDE student, Victoria Everts, has seen her school become more accepting of diverse perspectives, at least in small ways. "Trying to get to the heart of our school, rather than just the appearance always takes longer," says Everts. Many students say they see seniors reaching out to include freshmen and that another group called LINK—which matches junior and senior mentors to freshmen—is helping to create a more welcoming place for younger students.

PRIDE students also bring their message to district middle schools, where bullying and harassment are concerns. The high school students develop their own lesson plans and visit middle schools several times a year under the leadership of teacher Tammy Hovren. Teachers have noticed that middle school students open up more to high school students than to teachers. One PRIDE member explains, "We tell the kids that we have been through what they have—we know what it's like to come to the high school and feel intimidated. I always say to the kids to tell the teacher when they feel threatened."

The high school students take their role seriously, and are constantly thinking of new ways to make their lessons more meaningful. When they make their hour-long presentations, many middle school students want to share their feelings and concerns about bullying. This has inspired some PRIDE students to visit middle schools more often.



Lessons about bullying and harassment are further explored by eighth-grade teacher Julie Scott. She developed a unit on the Holocaust, which she has used for the past 12 years. The unit is integrated into the year's American history lesson plans. The main theme is "One Person Can Make a Difference." She explains through lessons learned from the Holocaust that individuals can have a positive impact, like those who risked their lives to save Holocaust victims. Conversely, they can have a very devastating negative consequence when they do nothing to prevent victimization of others.

"I focus on the human aspect of the Holocaust, show pictures of families who were victims, and share diary entries written by teenage Holocaust victims to emphasize regular family life during this time, and how that was systematically taken away from them." A Holocaust survivor comes to talk and share her experiences, which adds even more of an impact. "I relate how one person can make a difference throughout history. One example, in addition to the Holocaust, is protesting during the Civil Rights Movement," adds Scott.

Scott can see that this emphasis is making a difference. "My eighth-grade students have turned in their classmates for making racial slurs or bullying other kids. It has really made a difference in our eighth-grade culture."

CONCLUSION

Although it might be useful to simply have a checklist of culturally responsive practices, in reality we know that learning to be culturally responsive cannot come from reading a book or attending one workshop, even though these are good places to start. Cultural responsiveness does not exist in a vacuum—we determine the needs of students in our schools and respond accordingly. Culture is not a strict set of prescribed behaviors to memorize, and not all members of the same cultural group act in identical ways or have the same belief systems.

While some students may have preferred learning styles, it is risky to assume that all students from a particular cultural group learn in the same way. Educators need to recognize that specific strategies should be tailored to individual students, and that generalizations about the needs of one group of students can sometimes lead to further stereotyping.

One trait all students share, regardless of their backgrounds, is the need to know that school staff care about them. They want principals, teachers, and counselors to acknowledge and honor their cultural backgrounds and believe in their ability to succeed. If students feel ignored, disrespected, and uncared for, it will almost certainly affect their experience at school. This point often seems to be missing in the debate about how all children can achieve high standards.

We hope the research review and educator profiles provide a starting place to begin developing practices that meet the needs of your students. The following two sections provide more resources to guide you on the path to cultural responsiveness.

RESOURCES

The Equity Center provides training in culturally responsive teaching, cultural diversity, improving school climate, and increasing family involvement as well as staff development, workshops, and consultation in other areas related to educational equity. Contact the Equity Center at 503-275-9603 or eqcenter@nwrel.org

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