Multicultural & Diversity Newsletter   Newsletters

1997

UNLV College of Education Multicultural & Diversity Newsletter

Steve McCafferty
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, mccaffes@unlv.nevada.edu

John Filler
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, john.filler@unlv.edu

Nancy P. Gallavan
University of Central Arkansas, ngallavan@uca.edu

Le Ann Putney
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, leann.putney@unlv.edu

Kyle Higgins
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, higgins@unlv.nevada.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/ co_educ_multicultural_diversity_newsletter
See next page for additional authors

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, and the Disability and Equity in Education Commons

Repository Citation

Authors

Steve McCafferty, John Filler, Nancy P. Gallavan, Le Ann Putney, Kyle Higgins, Porter Troutman, Stanley Zehm, Cyndi Giorgis, Jack Starr, Sheila Gregory, and Joyce Nelson-Leaf
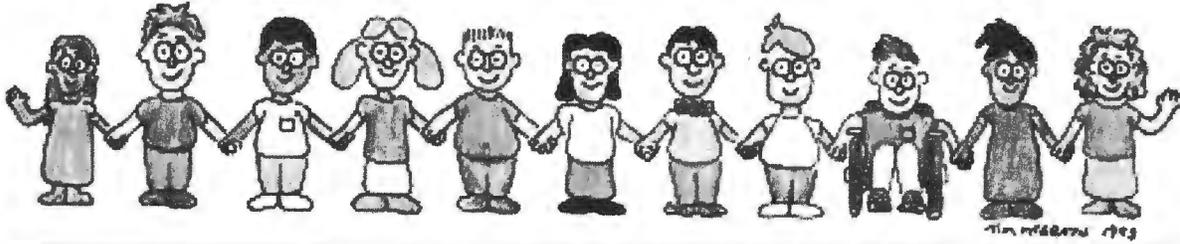
UNLV COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Multicultural & Diversity Newsletter
Published by the Multicultural & Diversity Committee
Volume 2, Issue Number 2, 1997

Members of the Multicultural & Diversity Committee:
Steve McCafferty, John Filler, Nancy Gallavan (Co-chair), LeAnn Putney,
Kyle Higgins, Porter Troutman (Co-chair), Stanley Zehm, Cyndi Giorgis,
Jack Starr, Sheila Gregory, and Joyce Nelson-Leaf

Kyle Higgins, Editor

***This newsletter is published twice a semester. All contributions are welcome and should be
addressed to Kyle Higgins, 895-1102, email: higgins@nevada.edu. ***

REMEMBER

The Half-day Workshop Sponsored by the College of Education
Multicultural & Diversity Committee
Friday January 16, 1998

Call Katrina in the Dean's Office to RSVP

All Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Students
are invited to attend.

THE GREAT WALLS OF AMERICA
by Ana Christine Iddings, Teacher
Wengert Elementary School, Clark County School District

There is a recent preoccupation in American schools to involve parents and the community in our children's education. Hillary Clinton's "It takes a village" is a phrase that has become almost as catchy in the 90's as Nancy Reagan's "Just say no" was in the 80's, and unfortunately almost as naively simplistic.

Schools are in essence very uninviting places---huge walls and fierce gates separate them from the rest of the society while stoically perpetuating its culture. The mighty forces of this institution, abetted by bureaucratic authority, send out clear "keep out" messages---especially to those of us who didn't grow up with this institution. For those of us who don't necessarily recognize the musky smell, the formica tables, or the language used in the classrooms, schools are intimidating places.

There is a well-known stereotype among teachers that parents of second language learners are uninvolved in their children's education, that these parents view achievement as unimportant, and that this attitude is the primary cause for their children's lack of academic responsibility. However, extensive research in this area indicates that parents of English-learning students perceive schools as an essential vehicle to obtain successful positions in society.

This disparity between teachers' perceptions and research findings may be seeded in sociocultural issues. In the Latino culture, for example, cooperative behaviors are valued above competitive ones. This characteristic may be detrimental to second-language learners because measures of achievement are often competitive in nature. Similarly, notions of responsibility may be culturally conflicting. Social responsibilities (e.g., caring for younger siblings, cooking for the family, cleaning the house) many times take priority over academic responsibilities (e.g., homework, developing study habits). The perceived uninvolvement from parents of second-language students may stem from the fact that they trust that the American educational system and its all-knowledgeable teachers will provide their children with the necessary tools to ensure them a hopeful future. These parents often blame their own children for any lack of progress.

Also, in many instances, parents of second-language learners stay away from schools because they feel they don't have a voice---these parents don't feel that they are part of our "village." Perhaps, language and cultural differences make up an even greater barrier than the physical ones built around the schools. However, in an age when we have been fortunate enough to witness the Berlin Wall collapse, the time has come for the great walls of American schools to also be brought down.

I can sense this realization in the efforts of many educators who have been promoting Adult English Education classes, parenting classes, reading skills classes, and other related activities designed to teach parents of second-language learners some fundamental aspects of school culture. However, I would like to argue that these practices, although important, may serve to sustain the "why-won't-you-be-more-like-me" attitude and neglect to recognize biculturalism as an asset. These parents may supply enormous contributions to our schools by tutoring other bilingual students, by volunteering in the classrooms, and by providing teachers with greater linguistic and cultural awareness. By encouraging and valuing this participation, we can create the model of collaboration and reciprocity necessary to begin the dismantling of existing barriers.

WHO ARE OUR READERS?
by Maria G. Ramirez

In an effort to better address second language issues and concerns, we'd like to know who is reading this column and what questions we need to answer. Please help us by providing us with information that would guide us as we attempt to make our columns more responsive to your needs and interests. You may respond through standard U.S. post office mail or by e-mail. Surveys should be mailed to:

Dr. Maria G. Ramirez
Curriculum & Instruction Department
Box 3005
University of Nevada Las Vegas
4505 Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154-3005

E-mail responses should be sent to:
ramirez@nevada.edu

Please check the appropriate descriptors.

Gender:
___female   ___male

Racial/ethnic group identification:
(please select only one)
___African American
___Hispanic/Latino
___mixed (specify)
___Asian American
___Middle Eastern
___other (specify)
___Caucasian/Anglo
___American Indian

Age group:
___20-29   ___30-39   ___40-49   ___50-59
___60-69   ___70+

Years teaching experience:
___1-5   ___6-10   ___11-15   ___16-20
___21-25   ___26-30   ___31+

Teaching position:
(please select only one)
___elementary, K-2   ___middle school, 6-8
___elementary, 3-5   ___high school, 9-12

___administrator (please specify level)
___other (please specify)
Teaching assignment:
(please select only one)
___General Education   ___Special Education
___mainstream   ___ESL classroom
___Resource Room
___bilingual   ___Self-contained
   classroom   Special Education
___computer   ___Other (please
   classroom   specify

Residence:
___Las Vegas   ___Nevada (specify)
___Henderson   ___other state (specify)

Any other information you care to share:

What second language concerns or issues should we address in future columns?

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY
by Steve McCafferty

For most of us there is never any question of who we are in relation to how we speak. Nor do we realize that we tend to speak differently to people depending on the type of relationship we have with them,---both from a personal and social perspective (Bakhtin's concept of *hetroglossia*). However, for people who are second language speakers of English or another language this represents a tremendous challenge. Three dimensions of how learners are confronted by this challenge are provided below and stem from three presentations from a recent conference held here at UNLV. The conference was entitled *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning.*

A major concern of sociocultural theory deals with how people come to represent themselves through the use of language. One of the speakers at the conference, Steve Thorne, found it particularly interesting that learners of

French as a foreign language in a forum that allows them to communicate on-line in real time through writing, tended to make extravagant claims and take on personalities and character traits not their own. However, at the same time, he found that some of the students choose to write about events very close to the heart,--- in particular one student who wrote about his war experiences in Viet Nam.

These examples illustrate an interesting point about the presentation of self in a second/foreign language; namely, that there can be a much greater sense of disassociation with what is said. Words don't have the same history and do not carry the same "sense" as in the native tongue. In fact, some Vietnamese refugees have been able to write in English about the atrocities they experienced while attempting to flee their country while they have never been able to do so in their native language.

Another speaker, Celeste Kinginger, found an interesting reaction on the part of a learner of French in a college course while attempting to communicate on line through a satellite connection with students in France. Although she was a 3rd semester student of the language, she had not realized the connection between language and self until this encounter. She found herself quite unable to use French, and felt very embarrassed by the experience - so much so that she wrote several times apologizing profusely to the student with whom she had tried to speak.

A third presenter, Howard Grabois, spoke at length concerning the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion that we are "inculcated" into various levels of society by the way that we speak. This in turn relates to the people with whom we associate and to the various fields of activity to which we are exposed. How do immigrants derive a linguistic sense of identity given this situation?

There has been much more interest in the area of language and identity lately and, hopefully, people in the community will come to realize the importance of the dimension of language learning. From this will come the understanding of just how difficult it is for learners to bridge the gap between self in a first and a second language.

ENHANCING CULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES
by Stanley Zehm

The study of cultural diversity was an important part of my graduate preparation at the master's and doctoral levels. I completed a series of courses in cultural anthropology, linguistics, and world literature that enabled me to begin to construct a personal-professional knowledge base of many essential aspects of cultural diversity. As effective as I found these courses to be in enhancing my knowledge-base, my cultural competence remained limited in ways of which I was unaware at the time. It was only later when I was given the opportunity to work with teachers in international schools that I began to understand and acquire genuine cultural competence.

Cultural Competence

In a faculty development workshop sponsored by our College of Education some years ago, I borrowed the following definition of *cultural competence* that I now regularly use in my professional practice. *Cultural competence is the capacity to respond appropriately to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that of dominant mainstream America.* Cultural competence requires much more than textbook knowledge of cultural differences and values. It is a responding capacity that is too complex to be fully acquired in a one semester course in multicultural education.

How then can teacher educators be more successful in assisting their students to acquire the capacity to respond with respect, understanding, and appreciation to the needs of students whose cultures are different than that of mainstream America? Many approaches are

available and are currently being employed in our College to nurture the cultural competence of preservice and inservice teachers. Our students are completing observations, practica, and student teaching experiences in many of the most culturally diverse schools in our metropolitan area. We have acquired new faculty in recent years who bring a variety of intercultural experiences that enrich us and our course offerings. As a faculty, we have also been consciously working to create a college culture with an environment supportive of cultural competence. Although there are many initiatives open to us to nurture the cultural competence of our students, I want to share one avenue that many more of our students can use to help them learn to respond in more culturally sensitive ways.

International Experiences

Do you remember how you struggled to learn a foreign language by dropping into a daily or bi-weeky high school or college class? We know that immersion in a second language learning environment is a much more effective way of acquiring linguistic competence in a foreign language. Similarly, cultural competence is singularly enhanced for our students when they experience cultural immersion in an international school setting. Study abroad opportunities are available for UNLV sophomores and juniors in colleges and universities in many foreign countries. Interested students can find more information on the International Program's web site that can be located through the index on the UNLV Home Page.

The completion of student teaching and selected practica in international schools is another option our qualified preservice teachers may select to enhance their cultural competence. We urge you to support the International Student Teaching Committee in identifying and recommending candidates you think would benefit from this culturally enriching experience. The ISTC has representatives from every department in the College of Education. The committee welcomes suggestions for the expansion of international experiences for students throughout our College.

INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN GENERAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES
by John Filler

Students with disabilities who meet the legal requirements will, if they are three years old or older have an IEP (Individualized Educational Program). If they are younger than three they will have an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan). Both documents are "blue prints" that include statements of educational goals and objectives. It is important that each of the child's teachers, whether they are the primary teacher for IEP or IFSP purposes or not, is fully aware of these goals and objectives as well as any "special needs" that the child may have.

Successful inclusion means that we must select and structure activities so that we will have an opportunity to address each goal from the IEP (or IFSP). Some of these activities will be unique to the student with disabilities (e.g., speech therapy, physical therapy), but most of the time the needs of the student with disabilities can be addressed in the same activities planned for the majority of students who have no ostensible disabilities. Suppose for example, that the IEP for a five-year old child includes the annual goal "Jane will learn to recall events in a story." This is a skill that all children this age are practicing. A logical activity for such a goal would involve "Story Time", reading stories to the children, something that occurs in virtually every kindergarten classroom. But, if questions aren't asked and those questions aren't carefully directed, attention may lag and the opportunity to practice may be lost. In this situation the "cue" for recall is the question and the consequence is a "Good Job!!", "That's right!" and repeat the answer to the group. If the answer is slow in coming then additional cues are presented. More specificity to the question, a direction to look at a picture, or drawing attention to a certain page are all ways to provide additional cues to the correct answer.

Use cues and consequences that are natural, logical and task intrinsic to increase the likelihood that the student will be correct. Remember, whereas adults often learn from their mistakes many students, particularly young students with cognitive disabilities, only learn to make more mistakes.

Limited time and resources mean that we have to concentrate upon those skills that are *critically important* . Important skills typically have pronounced easily recognizable cues and consequences. They are often called functional skills. *A functional skill is one that enables and empowers the student to act upon his or her environment in a chronological age appropriate manner in important areas of development.* Different theorists stress different areas of development but all will usually include at least the areas of language/communication, motor (gross and fine) and social/emotional development. Additionally, a functional skill is one that is likely to be maintained for a longer period of time and is more likely to generalize to different environments.

Which is more "functional", teaching a student to build a three-block tower or teaching her to use a door knob? Both involve fine motor skills, but one increases the ability to move independently in his environment and the other .. well...life is full of door knobs. Which skill do you think will be maintained for a longer period of time, riding a two-wheel bike or walking with eyes closed on a balance beam? Which activity is more "important", learning the route from school to home or learning that Mexico borders us to the south? Both can be taught in middle school, but which one is most likely to have an immediate positive impact?

It would be wonderful if we could begin from scratch to design an "inclusive" program that exemplifies these principles but most often we are not able to do so. Typically our program is already established and we are confronted with the necessity of adapting what exists to accommodate to the needs of a more diverse population of learners.

In my next column, we will begin an in-depth examination of the ways to accomplish the transition without sacrificing the many positive aspects of an existing program. Remember, a strategy that facilitates the inclusion of students with disabilities is, almost by definition, one that must enhance the learning of all children.

CONNECTING CULTURES THROUGH STORIES: VALUING LITERACY
by Cyndi Giorgis

The ability to read and write is valued by people from all cultures. Individuals from the past and present have understood the power of written language and the necessity of being able to communicate ideas. The books selected to review for this issue of the newsletter focus on the theme of literacy and the desire and struggle many individuals have assumed in order to become literate individuals.

More Than Anything Else by Marie Bradby tells of nine-year-old Booker who works with his father and brother at the saltworks, but dreams of the day when he'll be able to read. The year is 1865 and the family has just moved to West Virginia where few of the emancipated slaves know how to read, much less write their own name. When Booker sees a man reading aloud a newspaper one evening, he becomes inspired and seeks out the man in hopes that he will "tell him the sounds the marks make." The eloquent words by Bradby and the dramatic, lantern-lit paintings by Chris K. Soentpiet share the dream of one young boy, named Booker T. Washington.

Two books about literacy that work very well to compare and contrast are *The Wednesday Surprise* by Eve Bunting and *Papa's Stories* written and illustrated by Dolores Johnson. Both books focus on the issue of adult illiteracy. In *The Wednesday Surprise*, Anna and her Grandma spend each Wednesday evening reading together in order to create a surprise for Anna's father on his birthday. Readers are led to believe that Grandma is sharing the stories with Anna, but soon discover that it is Anna who has taught her Grandma to read. Donald Carrick's soft

watercolor illustrations add to the mood of the story while conveying the sense of love and warmth that is shared within Anna's family. This is a very poignant story that enlightens readers of all ages to the reality of adult illiteracy in this country.

Papa's Stories tells of an African-American father who reads each evening to his young daughter. Kari is delighted when her father reads a book because each time he does, the stories change. When Kari discovers that her father cannot read, she wonders if he has lied to her. Her father responds by telling her that, "when I was young, I didn't care enough about learnin'. And there was no one who seemed to care about me." The desire is there now for Kari's father as he is determined to learn to read for himself and for his daughter. These two powerful stories depict individuals from different ethnic backgrounds who understand the value of knowing how to read.

Readers explore another culture through Tony Johnston's, *Amber on the Mountain*, which is set in an isolated mountain community. Amber's mountain is a beautiful, but lonely place until the day Anna arrives, bringing both her friendship and the desire to teach Amber how to read. There are days that are both frustrating and exciting as Amber attempts to read the "chicken tracks" that her friend assures her are words. Once Amber learns to read she sets her mind to learning how to write, but it is not to be as Anna must return to the city. Johnston has woven a poetic tale of learning--learning to read, learning about being a friend and learning that anything is possible. Robert Duncan's stunningly rich oil paintings illustrate the beauty of majestic mountains and a simpler way of life.

Sarny by author Gary Paulsen is a satisfying sequel to his previous simple yet heartbreaking novel entitled, *Nightjohn* . Readers are reunited with an older Sarny who soon marries and bears two children, both of which are sold into slavery at a young age. When the Civil War ends, Sarny goes in search of her son and daughter and attempts to make her way on foot to New Orleans. During the journey, she witnesses several small skirmishes and encounters the death and the devastation that is associated with war. Sarny also meets Miss Laura who employs Sarny to work in her New Orleans home. Sarny is eventually reunited with

her children and through the rest of her long life she teaches other African-Americans how to read and write. An afterword states that everything in the novel did indeed happen to someone; the small vignettes, such as that of Sarny reading Shakespeare to her children, have the ring and shapeliness of an oft-told family story. It is a great read with characters both to hate and cherish and a rich sense of the power of literacy.

Literacy is valued in other countries as well as ours. A celebration of reading and the desire to learn is told through a lyrical tale, *Running the Road to ABC* written by Haitian poet, Denize Lauture. Before the sun is up, a group of Haitian boys and girls run and run through the countryside and town to the school, where they will learn to read and write. The vibrant Caribbean colors and double-page stylized illustrations by Reynold Ruffins provide a beautiful backdrop. Illustrations and text also assist in moving readers along with the children as they strive for a better tomorrow and the realization of hopes and dreams that knowledge will bring.

Set in the bustling city of Cairo, *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* by Florence Parry Heide shares the story of a young boy who has a secret to share with his family, but first he has work to do. All day long, Ahmed rides his donkey cart delivering fuel throughout the city. An excited Ahmed returns home at the end of the long day and shows his family that he has learned to write his name. This is a story that all children can relate to as they begin to develop the understanding that many of the experiences we have in life transcend culture and ethnicity. The expressive watercolor illustrations by Ted Lewin provide a glimpse into another way of life and the joy of learning something new.

The power and knowledge that reading and writing can bring to all of us is understood by many throughout the world. Through stories, we are able to gain new perspectives about the struggle many individuals have in

learning to do something we often take for granted. Hopefully these stories will make us all aware of the value of literacy in our lives.

Books Reviewed:

Bradby, M. (1995). *More than anything else.* Ill. C. K. Soentpiet. New York: Orchard. Unpaged. ISBN 0-531-09464-2.

Bunting, E. (1989). *The Wednesday surprise.* Ill. D. Carrick. New York: Clarion. Unpaged. ISBN 0-395-54776-8.

Heidi, F. P. (1990). *The day of Ahmed's secret.* Ill. T. Lewin. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. Unpaged. ISBN 0-688-08894-5.

Johnson, D. (1994). *Papa's stories.* New York: Macmillan. Unpaged. ISBN 0-02-747847-5.

Lauture, D. (1996). *Running the road to ABC.* Ill. R. Ruffins. New York: Simon & Schuster. Unpaged. ISBN 0-689-80507-1.

Paulsen, G. (1993). *Nightjohn.* New York: Delacorte. 92 pp. ISBN 0-385-30838-8.

Paulsen, G. (1997). *Sarny: A life remembered.* New York: Delacorte. 180 pp. ISBN 0-385-32195-3.

SUGGESTED MULTICULTURAL INFUSION ACTIVITIES
by Nancy Gallavan and Porter Lee Troutman, Jr.

Recently several COE faculty attended the 7th Annual Conference of the National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The five-day conference provided each of us with an abundance of ideas supporting the infusion of multicultural education across the curriculum in K-12 school settings AND in higher education, especially in colleges of education for teacher educators to share well-researched concepts and effective teaching strategies with both preservice and inservice teachers. The combination of theory into practice was evident throughout this rewarding conference.

One reoccurring theme presented at an early keynote address was interwoven into many subsequent formal and informal conversations. This idea posed a simplistic notion that teachers frequently should reassess themselves while checking their integration of this concept throughout all of their teaching and learning environments and experiences. As teachers review their curricula along with the resources and materials used to introduce, support, and extend their selected concepts, as teachers consider their instructional strategies and their interactions with and among their students, as teachers design their assessment, evaluation, and testing procedures, all teachers participating in the NAME Conference were challenged to ensure that each of these aspects of teaching and learning are REAL.

What is meant by REAL? According to Webster, REAL denotes something "existing or happening as or in fact; actual, true, objectively so, etc., not merely seeming, pretended, imagined, fictitious, nominal, imposed, or ostensible." Real means "authentic, genuine, honest, sincere, essential, absolute, ultimate."

What does REAL mean in education? All students desire classrooms that reflect who they are as people--as individuals with unique characteristics, interests, and abilities, and as members of groups with various shared similarities AND accepted differences. These educational environments are REAL. All students seek learning experiences that allow them to participate fully and achieve successfully, to design their own learning experiences, construct their own meaning, and demonstrate achievement in their own fashion via ways that nurture their growth and development safely. These educational environments are REAL. All students crave opportunities to express their individual knowledge and understanding as they are validated for their distinctive perspectives, beliefs, and values. These educational environments are REAL. All students want equity and excellence in education that, above all, lets them be themselves in a world that helps them learn more about themselves and others.

Throughout the NAME Conference, K-12 teachers and teacher educators were encouraged to be REAL in their relationships with students, curriculum, instruction, achievement, assessment, and one another. The authors of this column challenge our readers to assess themselves and their teaching practices by conducting their own self-studies that ensure that these events are REAL. Reflect upon your selected curricula, instructional practices, forms of assessment, and communications with your students and colleagues to check that your design, implementation, and interactions are REAL. Educational experiences and environments that are REAL allow students to connect and integrate these meaningful and relevant events within the context of their own lives and become responsible for their learning. Then the learning becomes REAL.

We invite you to share your REAL educational experiences with us. Please send your stories to gallavan@nevada.edu or Nancy Gallavan, UNLV, Box 3005, Las Vegas, NV 89154-3005. We want to see how you make your teaching REAL.

EXPANDING YOUR HORIZONS
by Joyce Nelson-Leaf

The College of Education Cultural Diversity Committee for two years now has included the *Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Mathematics Conference* for Sixth through Twelfth Grade Girls as one of its activities. The support of this committee has been very encouraging. However, many in the college do not know what the *Expanding Your Horizons Conference* encompasses. I have devoted my space in this issue of the newsletter to tell you about it. I hope that you will want to become involved in this excellent event. This year's conference will be held Saturday, March 14, 1998.

Back in the early 1970s, several women (who became the Math/Science Network) from Mills College in Oakland, California, the University of California, Berkeley, and San Jose State University questioned why more female students did not major in science and mathematics. Why were not more women employed as scientists and mathematicians?

These women did not take long to ponder these questions before they took action. They decided to encourage young women to take more math and science in school and consider careers in math and science. They launched the *Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Mathematics Conferences* for Sixth through Twelfth Grade Girls. Since the first conference in 1976, over a thousand conferences have been held throughout the nation that have been attended by over 300,000 young women and 43,500 adults.

Las Vegas held its first conference in March 1988. Only eighty 7th through 12th graders attended that first year. The year after, conference participation increased to 210. Today, over 2,700 students have attended *Expanding Your Horizons Conference* held at UNLV. Our typical attendance is between 300-400 students.

The conference goals are standard for all *Expanding Your Horizons Conferences* :
•increase young women's interest in mathematics and science;
•foster awareness of career opportunities for women in math and science-related fields;
•provide students with an opportunity to meet and form personal contacts with women in nontraditional occupations.

The conference does meet it's goals. Pre and post-test results, as well as follow-up, indicate that conference attendees do take more math and science as well as consider nontraditional careers. As one teacher who has brought her students to the past two conferences affirmed, "My students have kept their grade point averages at an 'A/B' level and continue to talk about career possibilities with each other."

A typical Las Vegas conference is held on a Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Students begin the day with a welcome and overview in the auditorium of the Classroom Building Complex. They are divided into three groups; 6th to 7th graders, 8th to 10th graders and 11th to 12th graders. After the welcome,

they are either attend "guess my job" panels or hands-on workshops. "Guess my job" panels are a play on the old "What's My Line" game. Students have three speakers who are employed in different careers and they ask questions in order to guess the panelists' jobs. After the game is complete, the winners receive a prize and the speakers add more information about their careers and career paths.

The hands-on workshops range from electric auto repair to obstetrics/gynecology. Panelists present a short introduction to a career and hands-on experience with it. Students usually attend two hands-on workshops and one "Guess My Job" panel.

The day ends in the auditorium for evaluation and door prizes. Last year's conference ended with a student broadcast of the conference prepared during a workshop by Channel 8's Sherry Swensk and Polly Gonzalez. A tenth anniversary cake was shared for the celebration.

If that is not enough, there is also an *Expanding Your Horizons Adult Conference.* For the past several years, around 100 adults (parents and educators) have attended this conference. Workshops to assist in working with children in career planning, math and science, financial assistance for higher education, post secondary educational opportunities as well as issues when working with teens make up the agenda.

The conference usually involves between 70 to 100 speakers. Workshops and panels are kept small in size. Approximately 50 to 60 volunteers are needed. The conference is supported through private donations and the student registration fee of $7.00.

Please consider becoming involved in this event. Ask yourself how you can avoid witnessing comments like "I want to be just like Julie Louie Baker;" "I really liked the 'bat lady';" "We did lab experiments and I even got to take home a sheep's eyeball;" and "Thank you for making it possible for me to come to UNLV for the day. I never thought I would get to visit a college campus."

If you, an organization in which you are involved, or anyone you know is interested in participating in this event, please contact Joyce

Nelson-Leaf at the Educational Equity Resource Center, UNLV. Telephone: 895-1380 or e-mail: equity@nevada.edu.

LETTING THE GENIE OUT: STUDENTS AT-RISK
by Sheila T. Gregory

Who Are "At-Risk" Students?

Students who are "at-risk" have always been in our classrooms since the beginning of time. They generally tended to be those who were below average academically and those who often received resources not given to most students. In the past, these students were rarely considered when lesson plans were developed by teachers. Today, with the numbers of "at-risk" students rapidly increasing, little has changed.

Many programs have begun to develop their own definitions of an "at-risk" student in an effort to address the specific needs of their student population. The Focus Program in St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, defines "at-risk" as:

- Inability to function within the traditional classroom setting.
- Academic skill development below average.
- General underachievement (below average for ability).
- Failure to establish goals regarding occupational future.
- Pattern of behavior problems.
- Absenteeism and tardiness.
- Lack of motivation, direction, and drive.
- Poor self-image.
- Stressful family situation having a detrimental effect.
- Hostility toward adults and authority figures.
- Identified as a potential drop-out.
- Difficulty with community agencies and the law.

•General lack of involvement in any school activity.
•Serious economic problems that threaten completion of school.

In 1988, 25 out of 50 states had adopted a formal definition for "at-risk" students. Today, every state in the union has a definition or series of characteristics that tend to be more specific in nature than those identified almost a decade ago. These characteristics vary with regard to focus, yet they have much in common. For example, they all focus on young people who lack a sense of personal power, a sense of connectedness, and most importantly, a sense of identity.

What Works!

What is often overlooked is the role parents play--or fail to play--in the academic and personal development of their children. Schools have an extremely difficult time helping troubled students without the involvement of their parents. Some schools have developed innovative methods for involving parents in activities that benefit their children as well as themselves personally. For example, at Von Tobel Middle School in Las, Vegas, the relatively new administration decided to offer parents personal and professional development programs after school, such as dressing for success, writing a resume, etc. These activities allow parents to work on computers (often for the first time), meet with other interested parents, and socialize with staff and teachers.
Programs such as these are successful because families play an integral role in the educational process. The program at Von Tobel has achieved especially favorable results because parents have been given added incentives to become involved and importance is placed on parents reinforcing the work done during the school-day in the home.

A quote to ponder:

"There was an ancient Cornish custom used to test whether a person was insane. The individual was confronted with three elements: a spigot, a bucket, and a ladle. As water flowed from the spigot into the bucket, the person was instructed to keep the water from overflowing. No matter how tenaciously and effectively the person ladled water from the bucket--keeping it from overflowing--he was judged insane if he failed to turn off the spigot!

By that ancient standard we behave in a crazy way, picking up the pieces of damaged children--at greater and greater cost to society, with more and more direr consequences--rather than curb the supply. What is it in our character--in the way we organize and represent interests in this democratic society--that causes us to treat the consequences of damage far more vigorously than undertakings to prevent it?" (Bundy, 1988)

Studies confirm that when parents become involved in their child's school, we see a rise in student achievement scores, an improvement in student attendance, a reduction in the drop-out rate, an improvement in student motivation, increased self-esteem, and better behavior, and more parent and community support of the school. When parents become involved and genuinely interested, they better understand why their children are "at-risk" and what they can do to assist the school in correcting the situation.

A second method used to assist "at-risk" students is cooperative learning within the classroom setting. Traditionally, African American, Latino, and Native American cultures have based their teaching and educational practices around cooperative learning strategies to meet the learning styles of the population. In the early 1980s, researchers began to seriously look at the outcomes of cooperative learning in an attempt to improve academic achievement, increase self-esteem, and mainstream "at-risk" students into regular classroom settings. Overall, they found that in both rural and urban settings, students' achievement in social studies, language arts, math, science, and reading all increased when cooperative learning strategies were implemented. Some researchers argued that part of the success could be attributed to group goals and individual accountability which are two basic elements of cooperative learning that contribute to achievement. In other words, when students

understand that their individual contributions are vital and necessary to achieve the group goal, they are more motivated to achieve.

In 1986, Slavin reviewed 35 studies available at the time on cooperative learning outcomes. He found that in twenty-nine (83%) of the studies the experimental group gained significantly more in achievement than the traditionally taught control group. None of the studies found a difference that favored the control groups. The methodological quality of the study appeared to be high--most used random assignment to experimental and control groups, standardized achievement measures, and other means of ensuring the objectivity and reliability of the findings.

Conclusion

In a typical classroom we will find a wide variety of learners with different strengths, different weaknesses, and different learning styles. As teachers, parents, and educators we must pool our collective resources, knowledge bases, and sincere concerns to provide alternative options for youngsters who are struggling to learn in the classroom. We must remember that each student holds a special promise and it is our responsibility as educators to identify that promise and nurture it to shine brightly. Within every child there is a magical genie just waiting to appear. The key is the touch of the committed educator rubbing the magic bottle the right way.

References

Bundy, E. (Director, Children's Trust Foundation, Seattle) (1988). "Better to Prevent and Build Than Treat and Repair," address to Court Appointed Special Advocates, March 9, 1988.

Dougherty, J W. 1990. *Effective Programs for At-Risk Adolescents*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Gregory, S. (Submitted for publication) A Fresh, Creative Approach to Improve Learning Outcomes for "At-Risk" Students.

Slavin, R.E. (1981). Synthesis of Research on Cooperative Learning. *Educational Leadership*, 38 (8), 655-660.

SEEKING CULTURAL PATTERNS OF CLASSROOM PRACTICE
by LeAnn Putney

When we refer to culture in a classroom setting, we often think of the rich combination of beliefs, language, heritage, and ways of being that teachers and students bring with them from their home setting and experiences. However, there is another view of culture that takes into account what classroom members construct together as they interact throughout their time together. In this respect we would be looking at the classroom members acting as a cultural group, which is a notion of culture on a more local level rather than a broader societal level (Geertz, 1983). In other words, culture is of a group, and participants in classrooms come together as a group and establish patterns of action and ways of being that are particular to their group (Collins & Green, 1992). If we wanted to enrich our understanding of how people in a particular cultural group live and work together, we might study the language, the oral and written traditions, music and art of the cultural group. The same idea applies in seeking to understand how classroom members learn and work together. One way to study what is being constructed and made available for students to learn is to study what the local expectations are for membership in their classroom cultural group.

Classrooms are particular kinds of settings for the study of teaching and learning because they are bound by their nature with an institutional beginning and ending (Collins & Green, 1992). Teachers and students come together as a group on the first day of the school year, although much preparation on the part of individual teachers and students may occur before the *official* beginning. Still, the first day of class can be thought of as the initial moment in time when they begin their journey together as a collected group of individuals. This group works in a generally common time and place until the last day of the school year. This does not mean that membership in the group is static, for a variety of reasons: participants may not

attend every day, new participants may join the group, either as temporary or long-term members (e.g., student teachers, university researchers), participants may permanently leave the group, or they may leave for a time and return. Although membership is not static it can be said to be relatively stable as a core group remains in place during the entire school year. Thus we can chart the beginnings of the group, and learn what it is that this group constructs together throughout the school year as the participants jointly construct life in their classroom.

Membership in a culture such as a classroom is not guaranteed by the institutional roles that are taken up within the setting. When new students enter an ongoing classroom, they may not feel that they belong to this group since they may not understand the references that members have already constructed. For example, in a particular classroom, a seemingly simple statement from the teacher "do notetaking in your learning log" indicates particular ways of being a student that a new member might not understand. In this case it means that students would have to do all of the following: (a) take a particular notebook out from their desks, (b) turn to a particular section in their notebooks, (c) draw a line down the middle of the page, (d) label the left column Notetaking and the right column Notemaking, (e) enter notes on the left column only, and (f) realize that these particular notes must be only what they observe in a situation rather than writing down an interpretation. This is a tremendous amount of information contained in one small phrase, enough to baffle a new student. This situation is magnified if the new students do not speak the same primary language as the teacher.

However, the situation described above would be less intimidating if the teacher had already established the norm of members welcoming and informing new students about life in their classroom community. If the classroom members recognized that they were constructing a particular language and pattern of actions that a newcomer would not understand, they could take actions that would alleviate the worry of the new members. The teacher in the example of the "learning logs" makes a point from the first day of school to talk with students about the particular culture they are constructing together. She makes it clear that part of their classroom culture is the concept of having respect for each other. Part of showing respect is for members to take up the responsibility of helping each other, which includes helping new students to become part of the classroom acting as a culture.

References

Collins, E., & Green J. (1992). Learning in classroom settings: Making or breaking a culture. In H. Marshall (Ed.), *Redefining student learning.* Norwood: Ablex.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology.* New York: Basic Books.

THERE IS NO PLACE CALLED HOME
by Sheila T. Gregory

In early November of this year, dozens of College of Education faculty and staff donated socks, coloring books, activity books, crayons, toiletries, and other items to the homeless during the 1997 Fifth Annual Thanksgiving Feast for Homeless Families sponsored by Vo-Tech High School and Preferred Equities Corporation.. The children from the UNLV College of Education preschool made two collages of handprints and signatures to stream across the front of the lobby where the dinner was being held.

All guests were given white carnation corsages and personally escorted upstairs for a sit-down, five-course dinner. After dinner, guests were taken downstairs at the Vo-Tech dining hall. The children participated in face painting and everyone received a beautiful silk painted t-shirt with their name creatively scrawled over the front.

After these activities, the children sat around the Christmas tree and were called up one at a time to receive their gifts and have a

short, but private conversation with Santa. Everyone left with a gift bag of goodies which the College of Education helped to collect. The event was a hit as evidenced by the photos displayed outside Dean Readence's office.

It is nice to do an isolated service such as this one for those in need, but it is better to be accurately informed about a particular need so that more can be done. As an educator and human being, I want to share some information I thought might be helpful to you as a teacher, administrator, or support staff person. The following are a few suggestions offered by George E. Pawlas in the May 1994 issue of *Educational Leadership*, entitled "Homeless students at the door."

A Baker's Dozen of Ideas

What can administrators, teachers, and support staff do to provide the necessary educational opportunities for homeless children and youth? Here are some practical suggestions culled from the research:

1. Find out if there are any shelters or hotels/motels housing homeless families in the school district. Arrange a meeting to share information about district programs and policies and to learn about the shelter's program.

2. Identify a volunteer advocate at each school for any homeless children who may come to that school. This person can be trained to help overcome the needless delays most homeless people encounter when they try to register their children.

3. Share copies of all school newsletters, school calendars and bulletins with the shelters. Having access to this information keeps shelter personnel informed about school activities.

4. If possible, develop opportunities for teachers to meet with parents at the shelters. This could be an effective way to share ideas about how the parents can be involved in their child's education and ways the school can be of help.

5. Enlist the support of parent groups and civic organizations to collect school supplies and clothing. Crayons, paper, pencils, and items of clothing are examples of supplies

to have on hand at the school to share with needy students.

6. Have a buddy system. When a homeless child moves into the school, assign a buddy to show him or her around the school and make introductions to people.

7. Provide homeless children with conveyable resources for completing homework, and incorporate play time into their school day. Children in shelters may not have any physical space in which to do their homework. Try to provide a "transportable desk" such as a notebook or clipboard. Homeless children need play time, too. This may need to be incorporated into the school's program, since space might not be available in a shelter.

8. Provide homeless students with structure in the classroom. A consistent daily schedule should be maintained.

9. Incorporate life skills into the curriculum. These skills include listening, following instructions, social skills, and self-esteem enhancers.

10. When you know a homeless child is leaving the school, try to bring some degree of ending for the child. Ways to provide completion to the school experience include allowing time to gather up personal items and to say good-bye to friends and teachers.

11. Try to reduce the time it will take a student to begin working in a new school setting. Ways to accomplish this include having students take transfer cards and records when they leave.

12. Enlist volunteer students or adults as tutors. These helpers should plan to tutor homeless students at the shelters.

13. Finally, remember that homeless children and youth didn't create the unfortunate situation they are in, nor can they participate in the political process to alleviate it. They need all the support, love, and consideration they can get.

Teachers can have a positive influence on homeless students and families. Collaborative efforts within schools can promote services such as after-school tutoring, easier access to school resources, provisions for

needed study materials, increased involvement of homeless students in school activities, and the development of teacher liaisons to local shelters.

Partnerships with agencies and groups that serve homeless families can extend that effort through the organization of several important services: teacher visits to families at shelters, development of study areas in the shelters, special transportation arrangements for students and parents, and school-community coordination of service councils. Teacher advocacy and direct action can also strengthen the community's system for effectively responding to the immediate and long-range needs of homeless students and families.

The education of homeless children can be increased by lessening the red tape required for them to become enrolled and to provide transportation for them. School programs should prevent the stigmatization of homeless children and to emphasize the teaching of basic skills. The students will need special consideration, as with leniency in finishing assignments on time. Minicourses, portfolios and course segments could facilitate this, with learning strategies and activities to fit these course innovations.

The greatest need of homeless children is to have a structured, stable, non-threatening environment (Gewitrtzman and Fodor, 1987). For most homeless children, school is a refuge from the stress of the shelters and the streets. Schools are in a unique position to provide safety, security and some measure of stability for these children. It is imperative that schools take on this role to help these homeless children become contributing American citizens.

Status of the Homeless

Depending on what statistic you read, the numbers of homeless in the United States are reportedly between 3 and 7 million people. Today, families with children constitute more than one-third of the homeless population (Children's Defense Fund, 1992); three-fourths of them are single-parent families, typically headed by women (Bassuk, 1990). A national study from the National Law Center on Homeless and Poverty reported that this past September over 180,000 homeless children are denied preschool classes each year. And, according to the Urban Institute, there are only 116,730 beds available in homeless shelters across the country to accommodate people who are homeless in our nation.

Heart-Warming Stories

*A mentor had brought a birthday card and treats to school with hardly a second thought. But they were simple kindnesses the boy had never experienced, and he was moved to tears.

*For these children, success also comes in small measures. "I tell the mentors that they'll know they've been successful when they hear the students laugh," a leader notes.

*"If you can give them a moment where they feel safe enough to laugh," says the veteran teacher, "you've given them childhood."

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
by Kyle Higgins

Every year the College of Education sends forth a cadre of new professionals to work as early childhood teachers, elementary school teachers, middle school teachers, high school teachers, special education teachers, counselors, physical education teachers, health education teachers, and administrators. We take great pride in our education of these professionals---as we should. Yet, I am concerned. Have we provided them with all the tools they will need to meet the changing world of the classroom? Do these new professionals truly understand that they are cultural agents and that the students they will interact with in the school environment are cultural agents? Do they understand the role diversity plays in education today? Do we, as a College of Education that is looking towards the year 2000, provide enough opportunities for our students to understand their own cultural beliefs and the baggage that comes with those beliefs? Do we, as faculty and staff of the College of Education, understand this ourselves?