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## UNLV College of Education Multicultural & Diversity Newsletter

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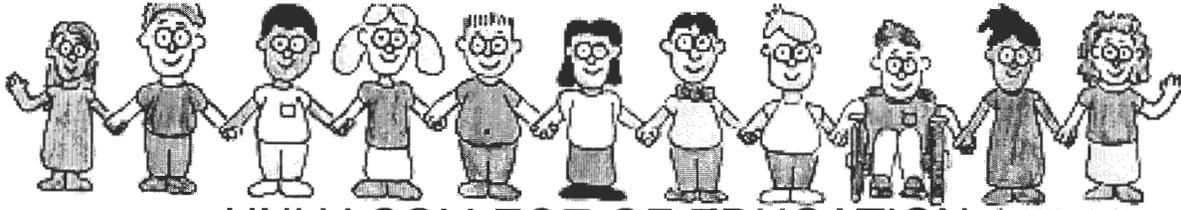
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## Multicultural & Diversity Newsletter

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\*\*\*This newsletter is published twice a semester. The articles that appear in the newsletter are based on author interest and consist of both scholarly works and opinion pieces. For further information regarding submissions contact Nancy Sileo or Kyle Higgins at [higgins@nevada.edu](mailto:higgins@nevada.edu) or [sileo@nevada.edu](mailto:sileo@nevada.edu) \*\*\*

**“It is the supreme act of the teacher to awaken joy in the creative expression of knowledge.”**

**Albert Einstein**

## INVITED GUEST COLUMN

### **MARIA'S GOING TO HAVE A BABY: SOME THOUGHTS ON DISABILITY, CULTURE, AND BEING A WOMAN**

by Colleen A. Thoma

"I'm going to have a baby!" Those words, when exclaimed by most women, elicit congratulatory remarks from friends, relatives, and coworkers. However, when a good friend of mine, Maria, made that announcement, the thoughts of others were not so positive. For when you have a disability, especially a physical disability that requires significant supports from others, your choices and decisions are subject to scrutiny from others who "have your best interests at heart." Maria's coworkers, friends, and relatives thought that she would not be able to care for her baby, a pronouncement that did little to change Maria's resolve.

Let me tell you about Maria. She is a latino woman who also happens to have significant physical support needs due to cerebral palsy. Besides that, she is smart, determined, financially savvy, and possesses a wicked sense of humor. As a latino woman first and foremost, it was Maria's greatest wish to become a mother. Besides feeling the biological clock ticking (she is in her thirties), she also believed that it would help her feel more connected to her cultural heritage, a connection that she struggled to find. You see, she had been immersed in a culture of separateness since elementary school: the world of those with disabilities who grew up in separate schools. It was there that she learned that she had more in common with others who also had cerebral palsy than she had with others females her age who did not have disabilities but who were latino.

I first met Maria when she came to speak in a class I was teaching. She came in to demonstrate her high-tech communication system which I've never seen her use since that evening. This often frustrates those who work or study with her and I have often heard other say, "Maria needs to use that communication system so that others will understand her." Maria has a different view of the same situation. She is perfectly happy with the way she speaks and if others are not able to understand her, then

she believes it is their problem, not hers. Those who work with her, though, believe that she *needs to use the device*. We expect those with the greatest challenges to change, not the professionals.

This tendency to expect Maria (and others with disabilities) to change according to what support people believed became clearly apparent as I spoke with others about Maria's life recently. Maria allowed me and a group of doctoral students to write about her life to begin to understand self-determination from the perspective of someone from a diverse cultural heritage. Self-determination is a "hot topic" in special education right now, particularly in relation to helping students with disabilities prepare for life after high school. Self-determination is defined as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life, able to make choices and decisions about one's quality of life, free from undue influence or interference" (Wehmeyer, 1992). What we were interested in understanding were the similarities and differences in how an individual with disabilities from a diverse background operationalized self-determination. To begin to understand this, we began with attempting to understand the life of one self-determined individual in depth. We therefore interviewed Maria, members of her family, friends, coworkers and support providers who knew Maria well.

What was interesting was the fact that almost no one could speak about Maria's support needs from the aspect of her cultural heritage. Most said that she had not experienced any cultural barriers to her ability to set and meet her goals for the future. Nor did they believe that the educational and employment-related services she received were impacted by her cultural heritage. A few said that they believed that the significance of her disability overshadowed her connection to her cultural heritage, others felt that Maria "transcended" culture. That was surprising to me since Maria was particularly vocal about her desire to be married and have children, a desire that she traced directly to her cultural heritage. When asked whether there was a cultural context to self-determination, Maria answered:

There is if you make it that way. It depends on your background. For a lot of parents, they look at the disability

first. They don't think of the possibilities. And this conflicts with cultural traditions. I have a lot of cousins. They ask the cousins why aren't you married? But nobody asks me. If I lived by my culture, I would be married by now.

When asked about the cultural issues that they encountered while providing services and supports for Maria, most talked about cultural distinctions that were different from the ones that Maria believed to be important to her life. A friend who also runs an agency that provides supports to individuals with disabilities referred to a party that she attended at Maria's house that included "lots of relatives, a piñata, and Hispanic music." Another service provider said "the family was characteristically very warm and friendly. I was included right away. With other families, I felt more 'official.' Once, I salsa danced with Maria's mother."

Besides her desire to have a marriage and children, Maria reflects the Latino culture through her lack of use of services and supports for individuals with disabilities. As a review of literature revealed, many minority families do not become engaged in service delivery systems (Lynch & Hanson, 1992; Lynch & Stein, 1987), often because there is a perceived lack of understanding of issues that are important to them. For Maria, nothing is more important than being perceived as someone who is capable, self-reliant, and strong. This is different from how service providers perceive her, or interact with individuals with disabilities in general. Her description of this tension follows:

When I left high school, I moved into a group home. But I only stayed there for eight months. My father died, and I realized that life was too short. I didn't like being controlled by other people. So I moved back home with my mother.....When I moved here (Nevada), receiving supports or living in a group home wasn't an issue. Andrew and I just moved into an apartment. I didn't want to get services here because I'm my own woman. And now that I've been here, I know that Nevada's philosophy holds people with

disabilities back. It's a belief that if you have a disability you can be at a certain level and you can't go beyond that...things like wages, and types of jobs. I have my own house, I work at an agency instead of receiving supports from them. I'm my own woman.

Service providers and those who described themselves as friends talked about a disability culture, and described how they thought Maria was affiliated with it. Maria answered this way:

I feel a greater affiliation with folks with disabilities than those of the Latino culture. It was more of an issue of what type of disability you had than what our cultural background was (you had similar experiences and received similar supports based on your disability label). There was some tension between the professionals and my family. The professionals were very supportive, but the interactions were not always positive. The cultural expectations were to get married and have a family. My parents, though, became more worried about who would take care of me. My parents were afraid in terms of raising me. They babied me, they didn't push me a lot or have high expectations for me like they did for my sisters.....Home life was lively. School was very different.

The key, therefore, is to recognize that cultural issues do play a role in transition planning and if we are to support students in becoming the causal agent in their own lives, we need to allow them to tell us the importance that their cultural heritage will have within those lives. As Maria said:

Those values that my dad had instilled in me when I was very young were not over-written by my over-demanding disability. I am proud that I had a culture that could let me get away with anything [disability culture], but a heritage that would not let me get away

with anything [Hispanic culture]. My heritage had made me who I am today: a strong, independent, Hispanic woman with a disability.

So, can Maria be a good parent? I don't think that there are any guarantees that anyone, with or without disabilities will be a good parent. What matters is that we share our whole lives with our son or daughters, that we teach by example, and that we love beyond what others may think is reasonable. Under these criteria, Maria will be an awesome mother. The other things will fall in place with help and support from a very strong circle of support. And I'll be there for her, too, as she experiences this most basic aspect of being a woman.

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## A PIECE OF CAKE OF THE WORLD

by María G. Ramírez

The third grade teacher was feeling very proud of the progress his Spanish-speaking students were making in acquiring and learning to express themselves in English. The teacher typically presented rules and examples to illustrate the various concepts he was focusing on related to the English as a second language lessons, and he felt confident and secure the students were not only understanding but learning the expressions, as they attempted to use them in everyday conversations. The teacher did not avoid using idiomatic expressions as he engaged the students in

interactions pertaining to the lessons being presented. In fact, he felt strongly that idiomatic expressions were important and necessary for his students to master, since their use by English speakers in their daily interactions with others was commonly observed, not only by the teacher but by the students as well. The students appreciated learning the formal, textbook English, but they delighted in trying to figure out, endeavor to use, and master the idiomatic expressions the teacher would pepper his language with.

The class was particularly animated the day the teacher heard the expression, "a piece of cake of the world." At first the teacher thought he had misunderstood what was said, after all the students were engaged in lively discussions as they talked and cheered each other on in the small groups scattered throughout the room. The teacher continued to walk around the room and tried to listen more attentively to the language he heard them grappling with. Again, he heard, "It's a piece of cake of the world." The teacher walked over to the table where he thought he'd heard the statement made. As he approached the table, he saw the students working and heard their excitement as they completed each task and more of them exclaimed, "It's a piece of cake of the world." The teacher didn't want to ask them what they meant, for fear of embarrassing them and thwarting their enthusiasm, so he permitted them to work, uninterrupted by questions and careful not to let his face reveal his bewilderment.

That night at home, as the teacher reflected on the day's lessons and graded the students' papers, his thoughts returned to the expression. Why had they said that? The papers he had just finished grading revealed they had understood the concepts and any errors made were typical for third graders struggling with learning English as their second language. The teacher had never used the expression, at least not that way. He recalled telling them, before they began working, that he felt they would do well on the assignment and described what they would do as easy, calling it, "a piece of cake." Why were they saying, "a piece of cake of the world"?

The next day the teacher returned the graded papers to the class and praised them for the good work they had done. As he walked

around the room, passing out each group's papers, he heard another boy say, "I knew it. It knew it was a piece of cake of the world." This time the teacher could not ignore the statement and decided to find out why they were using the expression. He walked over to the boy who had first made the statement and asked in a non-judgmental tone, "Why are you saying that?" The boy replied, "I knew it was going to be easy. I knew we could do it. I told them [his group] it [the worksheet] was going to be a piece of cake of the world. It was."

### Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are as common to everyday conversation as *fleas on a dog*, and while used in written communication, they are a standard to causal, informal speech. For English speakers, they *roll off the tongue easily* and are as much a part of the English language as the schwa. Richards, Platt, & Platt (1992) define an idiom as "an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts" (p. 172).

Idiomatic expressions pose problems for individuals who are in the process of acquiring or learning English, since the meaning of the expression and its use can not be discerned solely from knowing the meaning of the individual words. The lack of semantic clues offered by the individual's words, along with the syntactic restriction of the expression make idiomatic expressions difficult to comprehend, not only for those learning English as a second or foreign language but also for English speaking preschool children acquiring English, typically described at the preoperational stage (Harris, 1986).

Idioms are *a hard nut to crack* for non-native English speakers and English speaking preschoolers, alike, for yet another reason related to the figurative language of the expressions. The figurative meaning of some idioms is completely unrelated or discernible to its literal meaning. For example, *kick the bucket* for 'die,' is not only incomprehensible to non-native English speakers but also more difficult to understand, recall, and use due to "the degree of mismatch between the literal and figurative meanings of the idiom" (Parker & Riley, 2000, p. 223). *Kick the bucket* is equally troublesome

for English speaking preschoolers, since they are functioning linguistically at the literal level of meaning and would have great difficulty in understanding what *kick the bucket* has to do with dying. While an explanation of the origin of the idiom might be helpful to non-native English speakers, it would probably not be as useful in helping English speaking preschoolers understand it, since they have difficulty conceptualizing and comprehending temporal references and concepts of mortality. Idioms, like the spelling of some English words, have to be memorized initially before the speaker is able to use them naturally and effortlessly but with use, their meaning to the speaker becomes relevant and linked to the context.

### Closing Comments

An example was used in the introduction to illustrate the use of an English idiom by a non-native English speaker. The situational context described was a third grade classroom comprised of Spanish-speaking students engaged in group work related to an ESL lesson. The teacher overheard a student commenting to his group, "It's a piece of cake of the world." Not wanting to disturb the students' work, the teacher did not attempt to query the student about the comment until the following day, only to be told by the student that he felt the work they had completed was easy for them. The situational context described in the introduction and the abbreviated summary just provided should assist the reader in discerning the meaning and use of the idiom by the student.

The student was attempting to use an English idiom, *piece of cake*, but combined it with the phrase *of the world*. Recall that the students were Spanish-speakers and consider the Spanish equivalent expression *lo más fácil del mundo* denoting the same figurative meaning of *piece of cake*. The literal translation of the Spanish idiom *lo más fácil del mundo* is *the most easiest of the world*. The Spanish-speaking student, in his effort to describe the task they were completing as extremely easy, combined the English idiom *piece of cake* with a literal translation of the second half of the Spanish idiom, yielding *piece of cake of the world*. In other words, if *piece of cake* meant something easy, then the addition of phrase *of*

*the world* to the English idiom meant the easiest thing in the world, at least to his way of thinking.

"We should take into account three important aspects of words -their form, their meaning, their distribution-, and we should consider the various kinds or classes of words in the operation of the language. If these things are important in understanding the vocabulary system of a language, they become more important when one learns the vocabulary system of a foreign language, since the forms, meanings, distribution, and classifications of words are different in different languages. Out of these differences arise vocabulary problems and difficulty levels that constitute teaching and learning problems" (Lado, 1972, p. 287).

Understanding idiomatic expressions that others use and learning to incorporate them into one's speech are essential for developing a full and complete understanding of the English language. The teacher can help English as a second language students bridge cultural expressions through direct instruction that allows students to understand and learn their use in everyday authentic communication.

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### **TRADITION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

by Jennifer L. Fabbi

In reflecting on the holiday season, I realize just how much tradition is a reflection of our cultures. There are many traditions that we may take for granted: turkey, lights, a tree, Santa...these things have always been staple in

my family's celebration of the season. Other families have theirs. I can still remember my amazement back in junior high when one of my best friends couldn't tell me the biblical version of why we celebrate Christmas. He truly thought it was for his parents to give him football cards (that particular year). No Jesus, no Mary... still, tradition.

Some traditions change as family groups change. While my extended family is still reenacting the nativity scene and singing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus on Christmas Eve, my husband's family (all grown) get the presents out of the way by mid-afternoon of the Eve, go out to dinner and then to the Forum Shops for shoe shopping and margaritas. You take your pick!

The aforementioned traditions all revolve around Christianity, or lack thereof, and family. With such a diversity of cultures surrounding us, we cannot forget that there are many wonderful traditions to which we have never been exposed. Many traditions are celebrated by friends, individuals, and even strangers who unite for a common purpose. While Thanksgiving through the New Year is the period of time that I consider the "holiday season," this is not the case for many people on Earth. And then there is always the joy and challenge of starting new traditions for future generations...some catch on quickly, some take work!

This year, in lieu of the standard Thanksgiving feast that many Las Vegas elementary schools have adopted, I was invited to an international Thanksgiving feast. Each child was to share a dish that he or she traditionally enjoys during "the holidays." While there was a turkey, some pumpkin pie, and of course, the green bean casserole, the fried rice, German potato soup, latkes, and pasta were also a hit. However, I invite you to take a look beyond the food and festival of culture to the significance of tradition in the picture books that follow. Different cultures, different celebrations, different customs, and all tradition.

*Cherry Pies and Lullabies*, by Lynn Reiser, follows four generations of mothers and daughters, whose family traditions are "the same, but different." Cartoon-like illustrations speak volumes to the special ties that are made as each tradition is passed down, and also how

each has changed. In Reiser's companion picture book, *Tortillas and Lullabies/Tortillas y canciones*, a girl living in El Salvador tells a similar story in both Spanish and English. This book is illustrated by a group of women, the "Corazones Valientes" ("Valiant Hearts") whose stunning acrylic paintings portray their heritage, their changing lives, and enduring expressions of love between mother and daughter. Reiser says of both books, "...I thought about the similarities and differences of life in all families everywhere, and how each generation, in the midst of changes in technology and ways of life, keeps and changes family customs to make them their own."

In Patrica Polacco's *Chicken Sunday*, a young girl is invited to share Sunday dinners with her neighbors and "family," Stewart, Winston, and their grandma, Eula Mae. In order to buy Eula a coveted Easter hat, the children make beautiful Pysanky eggs, a piece of the girl's Ukrainian heritage, to sell. Once Eula receives her hat and sings with the choir on Easter Sunday, she says, "Oh baby dears, I can die happy now. And after I'm dead, on Chicken Sundays, I want you to boil up some chicken—bones, gravy, and all—and pour it over my grave. So late at night when I'm hungry, I can reach out and have me some." Polacco tells this story from her own childhood and uses detailed folk art to communicate the importance of tradition, which transcends death.

*Now We Can Have a Wedding!*, by Judy Cox, emphasizes the importance of food at a wedding. However, because each guest believes that a proper celebration requires his or her own specific ethnic food, there are delicacies prepared from all over the world for this particular wedding, all within one apartment building! From French wedding cake to *tai shio-yaki*, the "fish of happiness," the tradition and significance of every dish is described in a childlike joyful manner, and an end note gives additional information about each. Warm watercolor paintings show familiar cooking scenes in a diversity of kitchens and exhilarating scenes of preparation for the pending marriage ceremony.

In *Jalapeño Bagels*, by Natasha Wing, Pablo has a dilemma: he has been asked to bring something to school for International Day that reflects his culture. While working at his

parents' bakery, he comes across many possibilities that are tied to his mother's Mexican culture, as well as those that reflect his father's Jewish culture. However, it is when they begin to make the jalapeño bagels that Pablo can decide: "Because they are a mixture of both of you. Just like me!" he tells his parents. Realistic watercolor paintings portray a thoughtful Pablo and loving parents who have begun new traditions for their son. A final illustration shows Pablo proudly sharing jalapeño bagels with his classmates.

*Rainy's Powwow*, by Linda Theresa Raczek, is about a young Native American girl who must find her own way in the tradition of the powwow, where she is expected to choose a style of dance, so that she can be given her special name. Many dances are discussed by the dancers themselves and explained through bold, yet finely detailed, paintings; these include the shawl dancer, the grass dancer, and the jingle dancer. Rainy listens to the words of her Grandmother White Hair and, after much deliberation, decides to become a traditional dancer and take her grandmother's place in the powwow circle. A very thorough glossary of powwow terms and dances is included, and the illustrations depict Native Americans in both traditional dress and contemporary street clothes.

Janet Wong's *This Next New Year*, is narrated by a child who explains his family's preparations to celebrate the Chinese New Year, or the Lunar New Year. In clear, lyrical verse, the boy states his plans for soaking up some good luck, and tells of how his friends also celebrate the Chinese New Year. Bright, exaggerated illustrations are perfect for capturing this child's dreams. In an author's note, Wong explains the Chinese lunar year, and states, "But I never knew any of this when I was a child. I never wondered why the lunar new year happens at a different time from year to year. I guess I figured it would come between late January and the middle of February, and I didn't need to worry. When my mother started cleaning in a mad rush, that would be the sign it was near."

I remember reading something about traditions giving us a feeling of security and sanity, even if they aren't practical. So here's to security, sanity, a bit of practicality, and much,

much more this holiday season (or whenever yours may be)!

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### **IS ANYBODY LISTENING?: IDEAS FOR EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES** by Connie Malin and Nancy Sileo

#### The Parents' Perspective

*"... whenever I go to school, they want to tell me what to do at home. They want to tell me how to raise my kid. They never ask me what I think. They never ask me anything!"* (Finders & Lewis, 1994, p.53).

*"Please be honest with me. Don't tell me that she is doing good in class, when you are having trouble, because maybe I can help"* (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p.56).

*"They expect me to go to school so they can tell me my kid is stupid or crazy. They've been tellin' me that*

*for three years, so why should I go and hear it again? They just tell me my kid is bad"* (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, pg.56).

*"Teachers just don't understand that I can't come to school at just any old time. I think J. told you that we don't have a car right now. . . . A. catches a different bus than D. He gets there a half an hour before her, and then I have to make sure J. is home because I got three kids in three different school. And I feel like the teachers are under pressure, and they're turning it around and putting the pressure on me 'cause they want me to check up on J. and I really can't"* (Finders & Lewis, 1994, p.53).

"Communication is the key to good school – home relationships" (Love, 1996, p.440). Parental contact encompasses various forms ranging from informal to formal, from verbal to written, and from teacher initiated to parent request. Communication with teachers symbolizes a lifeline for parents allowing them to remain involved with their child's interests, development, and socialization skills.

Berk (1999) noted that schools are formalized institutions designed for imparting knowledge as well as developing various skills within children of all ages. Typically, "children spend many long hours in school – 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, 36 weeks a year – totaling about 15,000 hours" (Berk, 1999, p.79). The author also noted that more children are entering day care centers and preschools before the age of five, which increases their overall total time spent in a school-like setting. In order to allow parents to remain involved with their child's daily activities, progress, and needs, parent-school communications have become vital lifelines. Morrow (1997) stressed, "every teacher has the responsibility to inform parents about what is happening in school on a regular basis, how they can help their child, involve the parents in school activities during the day, and provide activities for parents to do at home" (p.68).

Love (1996) stated, "good communication with parents means letting them

know what their children are learning and how their children are doing in school. It also means listening carefully to what parents have to say about their child and their perceptions of the child's program" (p.440). Therefore, this theory of vital communication has been investigated in order to lead one to nurture parent-teacher relationships in an academic setting for young children.

Love (1996) implied that close home-school relationships enabled parents to find opportunities to become more effective as parents and teachers of their children. In her estimation, good communication with parents involved many different tasks or methods. One element to be addressed was that of notifying the parents of their child's learning and his/her progress in school each day. "Successful teacher-parent communication can be accomplished by reaching out to parents in ways that show concern for the child and a genuine desire for cooperation with the parents" (p.440).

#### Teachers' Role in Communication

Pang & Watkins (2000) spoke of six types of communication as necessary for allowing both teachers and parents to exchange information and ideas about the development and progress of children in and out of school. These authors mentioned context expectancy, social expectancy, self-expectancy, efficacy of teacher beliefs, teacher and school characteristics, and the model of teacher intention and behavior. Pang & Watkins (2000) placed an emphasis on the model of teacher intention and behavior as the form of communication that afforded teachers and parents the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of mutual expectations to assist in understanding and working with the children. In an effort to further their communication models, the authors conceptualized the following key elements.

- Context expectancy involved parent-teacher communication and acknowledgment of internal and external factors that affect a child's behavior.
- Internal factors concerned those associated with affective and cognitive development and external factors concerned those associated with

interpersonal skills and socialization.

- Social expectancy involved the child's attitudes toward learning and developing friendships as well as the teachers' motivation to comply with parental wishes for their child.
- Self-expectancy involved the self-expectation of teachers concerning parental involvement.
- Teachers who held a stronger feeling of shared responsibility with parents were likely to communicate more frequently with parents.
- Efficacy beliefs of teachers concerning their skills and ability to instruct children reflected changes in a child's life.
- Teacher and school characteristics influenced teachers' practices concerning parental involvement directly or indirectly correlated to their individual beliefs.
- Teachers' sense of confidence logically supported their efforts to discuss instructional methods, objectives, and goals with parents in a discussion.
- The atmosphere and clientele of the school community affected teachers' beliefs concerning expectations and policies concerning parent-school communication.
- The model of teacher intention and behavior began at the onset of the school year and continued throughout.
- The positive or negative tone of teacher intention overshadowed the entire school year regarding parental

acceptance and teacher initiation of communication procedures.

Pang & Watkins (2000) noted, "Teacher accountability to parents is defined as the teacher's self-expectation or perceived requirement to inform, to explain, and to listen to parents" (p.145). The manner in which this communication was established and upheld determined the parents' acceptance or rejection of the teachers' communication procedures.

Hoover-Dempsey, Basslet, & Brissie (1987) believed that an individual with a high personal teaching efficacy would affect a sense of professionalism and security in his/her

instructional role in education. This self-confidence carried over to curricular areas, lesson planning, classroom management, and instances regarding parent-teacher communication.

Bredenkamp & Copple (1997) editors for NAEYC indicated that from birth to age eight, educators must understand the developmental needs of the young child. "The younger the age of the child, the more vital it was for professionals to acquire knowledge of the child and his/her environmental influences from parental partnerships" (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997, p.22). These authors as essential components of exemplary parent-teacher partnerships named five specific guidelines. Included in these guidelines were: creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning, constructing appropriate curriculum, assessing children's development and learning, and establishing reciprocal relationships with families. A key element of reciprocal family relationships concerned the establishment of mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts between school and home.

Next, Bredenkamp and Copple (1997) stressed the importance of early childhood teachers working with families in regular and frequent two-way communication activities. They also expressed that parents were to be welcomed into the classroom and to share in the planning of the child's care and education, as they were an integral part of the young child's life. Yet another critical characteristic concerning teachers was the need to have these individuals acknowledge and respect the goals that parents have set for their children. In so doing, teachers have been encouraged to be sensitive to and promote family responsibility concerning the child. The authors acknowledged the promotion of family decision-making and competence when selecting and interacting with the teachers and the preschool program as a vital element in parent satisfaction. Assisting in the placement, transition, and identification of individual needs and additional resources available to families and children was the final element for preschool teachers to work on in an effort to further the parent-school communication process.

### Things To Consider When Working With Families in Educational Settings

Teacher preparation programs play a key role in assisting educators with developing parent communication skills. Listed are twelve tips for teachers to consider when speaking with parents.

1. Do all staff members have a commitment to and skill in communicating with families from diverse backgrounds and lifestyles, and have knowledge of family systems, needs, and services?
2. Are family members encouraged to become involved in all aspects of the program and decision making - goal setting, implementation, and evaluations?
3. Does the program provide a wide range of opportunities for families to become involved in culturally appropriate ways (e.g., observation, participation in program planning, participation in activities and lessons, implementation of strategies, assessment of the program?)
4. Are services for families **individualized** so the specific needs and concerns, priorities, and resources of each family are addressed; and the family characteristics (e.g., cultural background, language spoken, socioeconomic level, values, and priorities) are considered and respected?
5. Do staff members focus on children's and families' strengths, priorities, and resources?
6. Does the program have a well-defined procedure for identifying family needs and establishing a working partnership with parents?
7. Do staff members view the family as a system so that the educational program strategies take into consideration the dynamics of the entire family, not merely the child or the child and one parent?
8. Are parents' supported to experience positive relationships with their children and competency in their parenting roles?
9. Does the education program enable and support parents to assume the various roles that they are required to play?
10. Are various types of services provided

by the education program - general information, support, education and training, support in parent-child interactions, and help in using community resources?

11. Does the program actively coordinate with other community agencies that provide services to families so that families are able to procure the range of services they may need (e.g., respite, financial, and health insurance, among other things)
12. Does everyone on the staff treat families with respect and remember that parents know their children better than anyone else and that parents are the **experts** on their own children?

### Conclusions

Knight & Wadsworth (1998) stated, "With the passage of federal legislation in the past two decades, the family's perspective and input have become critical, legally mandated components of instructional planning and assessment" (p.213). Even though these authors were referring to legislation pertaining to children with special needs, the same can be said for all young children.

To reiterate the importance of communication among parents, teachers, and children, Knight & Wadsworth (1998) continued to stress that general education teachers were encouraged to participate in parent involvement programs in order to enrich their relationships with families and students within the communities. Whitehead & Ginsberg (1999) stated, "Excellent early childhood programs are characterized by caring and responsive interactions between adults and children, developmentally appropriate programming, partnerships with families, qualified staff, low staff-child ratios and small group sizes, provision of a safe and healthy environment, and nutritious food" (p.4). The authors continued to say, "It is important in any setting to create an atmosphere that not only welcomes family members but also gives a clear message that input and feedback, especially from families, are valued" (p.9).

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## **THE MEDICAL WISDOM OF CULTURE: SOMETIMES, DR. MOM DID KNOW BEST**

by Jean Henry

I grew up outside of the city. My parents were farm folk. Doctors were, literally, few and far between, and a service more expensive than my family could usually consider using. Consequently, we more often consulted Dr. Mom (or Dr. Grandma) than we did the town doctor or hospital when faced with minor illness. And we were healthy. The truth

is, other than the occasional broken bone or cut requiring stitches (we were kids, after all!), we seldom experienced conditions that needed medical care. Were we lucky? cautious? genetically blessed? Probably a little of all of these, but when we did need care, it most often was the medical wisdom handed down through family generations that helped us through our illness.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines folk medicine as "traditional medicine as practiced non-professionally by people isolated from modern medical services and involving especially the use of vegetable remedies on an empirical basis." Traditional medicine is often considered fairly primitive - based in a belief that supernatural forces (good or evil spirits, gods, etc.) are responsible for both the cause and cure of disease. Despite the seemingly widespread availability of scientific knowledge, many people continue to follow such practices based on this belief ... and science doesn't seem to be able to explain everything, as yet. However, they are working on it, and more and more western medical professionals are beginning to acknowledge and confirm the wisdom of Dr. Mom.

### **A Popular Practice**

Folk medicine is prevalent in American history and culture. Cures and treatments are as varied as the populations from which they come. Some are effective, some work through placebo effect, while others either do not work at all or cause harm to the individual (Helton, 1997). Alternative medicine and/or alternative therapies, including home remedies, are rapidly gaining popularity in the US. A 1998 Stanford University/American Specialty Health Plans study found that 68 percent of people in their sample had used a Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) therapy within the last year, and that 81 percent had used at least one CAM therapy during their lifetime. Many more simply follow the recommendations of Grandma or Mom in dealing with a minor, or even a major, illness.

The appeal of unconventional or alternative treatments stems, to a great extent, from disenchantment with conventional medicine. Many people feel that the current medical system in the U.S. fails to fully

investigate an individual's illness, to respond appropriately or in a timely fashion once an illness is diagnosed, or to promote personal disease prevention except through the use of prescription drugs. While many alternative practices are still thought of as unconventional, the major competing systems of medicine are increasingly recognized as viable approaches to health care that can either stand on their own or be used to complement conventional treatment.

Some try to write folk medicine off as quackery, but it is not usually considered so, even when it might be considered erroneous or useless - unless it is being done by unscrupulous practitioners strictly for the purposes of personal gain. State laws against practicing medicine without a license are rarely enforced against folk healers. (Barrett, Jarvis, Kroger, & London, 1997) Unfortunately, sometimes attempts at home remedy may influence the ability or willingness of a patient to cooperate with or respond to necessary conventional medical treatment. By delaying treatment too long, it may become impossible for any form of treatment to prevent permanent damage, or even death. Some medical facilities and practitioners are now enlisting folk healers to help gain the trust of people who have little knowledge of medical care or those who are uncomfortable in a medical system significantly different from that which they have always known and in which they are not comfortable.

In fact, many traditional, or folk remedies have a basis in science - the "why" and "how" of the folk cure is founded in proven medical research. Some have therapeutic benefits, some may provide psychosocial benefits, and others such as willow bark (from which aspirin is derived) actually have proven medicinal value. Many of the practices recommended through generations of families are now understood to be based, at least loosely, in science.

For example, in the southern U.S., a common remedy for cold and sore throat is a "hot toddy" - a heated concoction of honey, lemon, and whisky that is liberally dispensed to all (the amount of whiskey usually altered, depending on the age of the patient). On closer inspection, there is true medicinal value to this simple medicine. The honey serves to coat and soothe a sore throat. The lemon contains

vitamin C, which is still thought to provide some protective value against colds and flu, and improves the taste of the concoction. The whisky, or alcohol, serves as a sedative, usually allowing the patient to rest or sleep more soundly (particularly the wee ones). Many common over-the-counter cold medicines available today have a fairly high alcohol content. While exploring the home remedies of students in my class, we discovered that this remedy was, in fact, commonly used not only in other parts of the U.S., but in other countries, as well, under a variety of names.

### **An Opportunity for Student Activity**

The fact that every family, every culture, has a history of home remedies for a variety of conditions presents a rich opportunity for a cross-disciplinary multicultural education activity. Increasingly, educators are attempting to meet the goals of increasing cultural competence and improving the skills of independent and critical thinking. Exposing students to various cultural approaches to health and wellness in contrast to contemporary western science and medicine presents students with just such an opportunity. Schmitz (1992) stated that "Direct engagement with the realities of cultural difference, as manifested in both individual and group habits and commitments, can foster the development of skills of analysis, interpretation, and judgment." Achievement of these intellectual skills are at the root of much of the effort to incorporate cultural diversity in to our schools (Sanchez, 1996). The content of an activity that explores folk medicine traditions could easily relate to such areas as: multicultural education, health, social studies, allied health care, and possibly to other content areas, as well.

We learn from our own cultural and ethnic backgrounds how to be healthy, how to recognize illness, and how to be ill. The meanings attached to the notions of health and illness are related to the basic, culture-bound values by which we define a given experience and perception. As such, these family/cultural practices can provide interesting and educational insight into both the differences and similarities among cultures. By having students explore and share the folk remedies handed down through the years in their families, as well as

researching the beliefs behind the remedies and any scientific foundation for the practices, students often discover many shared practices. Despite geographical, or perceived cultural, distances that may exist between family origins, students generally discover more commonalities than differences in their family health practices. Many believe that a given practice was an "original," practiced only by their family or their culture. It is interesting for students and teachers alike, to discover the many cross-cultural practices that exist in regard to medical self-care.

### **Alternative Practices & Practitioners**

Following are a few, among the many, folk practitioners still evident in our country, and throughout the world. (Barrett et. al, 1997; Nakamura, 1999)

Curanderas, popular among Hispanic populations, particularly of Central and South American descent, are regarded as specialists in the folk medicine of their people. Their ministrations may include prayer, religious objects, herbs, rituals, and dietary measures. Examples of conditions they might treat include mal ojo (evil eye), mal aire (bad air), bilis (anger), susto (fright), and diseases of hot and cold imbalance within the body.

Root doctors, found mainly in the southeastern states, are consulted by people who believe they have been "hexed" or have had unduly bad luck. The doctor listens to their story and either prepares a toke, char, powder, or other special object ("root") that can help them fulfill their wish or undo the hex.

Powwow, centered in rural Pennsylvania, combines prayer and laying on of hands. Practitioners may touch an afflicted part lightly, rub the surrounding area vigorously, or pass their hands over the entire body while praying either quietly or aloud. They may also utilize or prescribe tokens, charms, spells, potions, herbs, teas, and other paraphernalia

Voodoo is a religion indigenous to Haiti that is also practiced in Louisiana and other parts of the U.S. to which Haitians have migrated. Derived from ancestor worship, it invokes spirits to explain and influence the course of events. It includes an elaborate system of folk medical practices, primarily administered by voodoo "queens" and

"doctors." Common treatments include charms, magical powders, and amulets.

### Conclusion

The term "alternative" used to refer to any practice outside of the mainstream Western medicine arena, and such practices were often perceived as odd or weird or even counter-culture. Today, such practices are being redefined as larger segments of our population are from other countries, or still embrace the health customs and traditions of their country of origin or heritage. As multicultural educators, we can bring our own part of the world closer together by guiding students in the exploration of the wisdom of Dr. Mom.

In closing, to ensure that we also take an opportunity to enrich our students' lives through empowering them to make well-educated lifestyle choices, the following recommendations can guide all of us in making intelligent decisions regarding our self-care decisions.

### Questions for determining the safety and validity of home remedies:

- Of what does the method consist?
- Is it testable? Can its effects be measured?
- Do its premises contradict what is currently known in medical science?
- Does it claim to be a complete treatment, i.e. no other care is needed?
- What evidence is there that it helps? Anecdotal? Scientific?
- What evidence is there that it may harm? Anecdotal? Scientific?
- If you cannot answer all of the above questions, how can you obtain the necessary information?

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### HEY, SISTERS!! WHAT ABOUT US?

by Monica Brown and Kyle Higgins

#### How to Talk to a New Lover About Cerebral Palsy

Tell him/her: *Complete strangers have patted my head, kissed my cheek, called me courageous.*

Tell this story more than once, ask him/her to hold you, rock you against his/her body, breast to back,

his/her arms curving round, only you flinch unchosen, right arm trembles, Don't use the word *spastic*.

In Europe after centuries of death by exposure and drowning, they banished us to the streets.

Let him/her feel the tension burn down your arms, tremors jump. Take it slow: when he/she asks about the difference between CP and MS,

refrain from handing him/her an encyclopedia. If you leave, know that you will ache. Resist the urge to ignore your body. Tell her/him:

*They taunted me retard, cripple, defect. The words sank into my body. The rocks and fists left bruises.*

Gimps and crips, caps

in hand, we still  
wander the streets but now  
the options abound: telethons,  
nursing homes, and welfare lines.

Try not to be ashamed as you flinch and tremble under her/his warm hands. Think of the stories you haven't told yet. Tension locks behind your shoulder blades.

Ask her/him what she/he thinks as your hands shake along her/his body, sleep curled against her/him, and remember to listen: she/he might surprise you.

Elizabeth Clare (1997)

Who are all the women with disabilities and where are they? The reality is women with disabilities are everywhere. In fact, women with disabilities are a "large minority with great diversity" (Saxton & Howe, 1987, p. xi). It is estimated that there are 846 million people around the world who have disabilities (Charlton, 1998). If half of these are women, there are 423 million women in the world with disabilities. In the United States, there are between 35 million and 43 million people with disabilities---depending on who collects the data and what disabilities are included (Shapiro, 1993). Again, extrapolating to women, this could mean that there are 17.5 million to 21.5 million women with disabilities in the United States.

These are women with sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities; women with a history of chronic illness, epilepsy, mobility limitations, etc. These women range from new born babies to senior citizens. They are Asian, Native American, Black, Hispanic, white, biracial; they come from all economic groups and ethnic groups. And, if you are a woman, this is a group that most probably, as you grow older, you will join--- fewer than 15% of Americans with disabilities were born with their disability and the likelihood of incurring a disability as one ages increases (Shapiro, 1993).

#### So, Why Don't We Know More About Women with Disabilities?

Because the issue of women with disabilities has not been discussed in the

literature (biographical or historical) or in the feminist literature, women with disabilities have been rendered virtually invisible---even in the disability civil rights movement. In literature and historical writings women are unable to find models who have lived their lives with physical or cognitive limitations and who have achieved success despite being both female and having a disability. And, in feminist theory, feminist perspectives on disabilities are not yet widely discussed, nor have insights offered by women with disabilities been integrated into feminist theories concerning the body.

Feminists have studied women of diverse racial and ethnic groups and different sexual orientations, but have paid little attention to women with disabilities (Quinn, 1994). Even though, women with disabilities have been vocal concerning this exclusion from the feminist literature (Stone, 1985), there is no strong agreement as to the reason why feminists have not rallied to the cause of women with disabilities. Quinn (1994) discusses the theory that feminists view women with disabilities as dependent and view these women as helpless. It has also been suggested that the feminist movement and women's services have not been accessible to women with disabilities, and, until recently, have shown little awareness of the need for accessibility or little inclination to do anything towards opening their doors to this group of women (Stone, 1985). Thus, women with disabilities experience a double and sometimes triple burden (Baldwin & Johnson; 1995 Deegan, 1981; Quinn, 1994). As members of two, and sometimes three, oppressed and stigmatized groups, they often have little power to effect change in their lives (Deegan, 1981).

There are many parallels between the oppression of women and the oppression experienced by people with disabilities (Saxton & Howe, 1987). Society and their feminist sisters often view women and people with disabilities as being passive, dependent, and childlike. Frequently their skills are undervalued and their ability to contribute to society minimized. Society continues to perpetuate stereotypes concerning women (e.g., emotional) and marginalize people with disabilities (e.g., teachers who do not want students with disabilities integrated into their

classrooms). If a woman is a member of a racial or ethnic group, is older, or is a lesbian, they are susceptible to even more stereotypes.

Even within the segment of society who have disabilities, standards are set, guidelines are established, and policy is implemented as though all people with disabilities were male. Women are less likely to benefit from the programs in place for people with disabilities because the professionals responsible for services assume that the effects of having a disability are gender neutral (Reisine & Fifield, 1988). The reality is men and women with disabilities are not alike. Their experiences in society differ significantly because, for women, having a disability can be a more handicapping experience (Fine & Asch, 1981).

The society in which we live has rigid cultural standards of beauty and women are judged more by their bodies than men (Wendell, 1989). Girls learn early in life to feel inadequate about their bodies and, as women have, at one time or another, been temporarily frustrated with the way they look and inconvenienced by their looks. For a woman with a disability, these experiences are not temporary, their disability is not something they "grow out of." Thus, women with disabilities are perceived as defective women by virtue of their disability and incompetent by virtue of their gender. They don't fit in the roles that society has neatly defined for women and end up in a strange space at the edge of gender, often without a gender role (Fine & Asch, 1981).

Surveys conducted by the Office of Special Education Programs indicate that opportunities for women with disabilities are more limited than for men with disabilities. Only 70.9 percent of women with disabilities receive services that provide rehabilitation into wage-earning occupations, compared to 97.2 percent of men with disabilities. Of these, women are usually trained to work in service industry positions (e.g., clerical or food) while men receive training in a wider variety of jobs. Even among high school graduates, fewer young women with disabilities found jobs, and when employed, earned less than young men with disabilities (Wagner, et al, 1991). In fact, women with disabilities earn less than 24 cents for each dollar earned by men without disabilities; black women with disabilities earn

12 cents for each dollar. Women with disabilities earn approximately 52 percent of what women without disabilities earn. Additionally, young women with disabilities are less likely than young men with disabilities to be employed after they are out of school 2-to-3 years (Wagner, et al, 1991). The fact that disability benefits are frequently linked to work and wage histories and that women with disabilities are less likely to have a work and wage history has a negative impact on a women's ability to obtain needed assistance overtime (Mudrick, 1983).

#### What Are Women with Disabilities Doing?

Currently, there is a growing women's disability rights movement. This movement is attempting to define specific challenges faced by women with disabilities, generate funds to support the movement, and to build a support group for these women to combat discrimination. The women's disability rights movement has as its goals:

1. To combat educational discrimination, both sexist and able-bodied, against women and girls with disabilities.
2. To enhance the self-esteem of women and girls with disabilities by presenting positive role models. The goal is to present women with disabilities as communicators and leaders of their own movement.
3. To develop a literary forum for the exploration of the experiences of women and girls with disabilities. This literary forum is multidimensional in nature and, as such, explores the lives of women with disabilities in all aspects of their lives--as a person with a disability, as a member of an ethnic group, as heterosexual or lesbian, and as members of different economic groups.
4. To challenge education, the arts, and society to recognize women and girls with disabilities as contributing members of society. Remember, Charlotte Bronte, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Tubman, Dorthea Lange, and Sarah Bernhardt were all women with disabilities.
5. To encourage members of society to confront their own feelings concerning disabilities, physical limitations, appearance, standards of beauty,

dependence, and vulnerability.

### Where Should Educators Begin?

Robert F. Murphy, a man with a disability, in his book *The Body Silent* (1987, p. 79) points out:

*“Disabled people contravene all the values of youth, virility, activity, and physical beauty that Americans cherish. We are subverters of the American Dream. The disabled serve as constant, visible reminders to the able-bodied that the society they live in is a counterfeit paradise, that they too are vulnerable. We represent a fearsome possibility.”*

Acceptance at the individual level is where change begins. Until educators recognize their own stereotypes and fears concerning people with disabilities in general, and specifically with women and girls with disabilities, change cannot occur. Young (1990) maintains that educators must recognize how they contribute to the oppression of women and girls with disabilities. She discusses that educators must be aware of the following: (a) the exploitation of women and girls with disabilities within the school or university setting, (b) the marginalization of women and girls with disabilities within the school or university setting, (c) how the school or university setting contributes to the powerlessness of women and girls with disabilities, (d) the cultural imperialism that is present in the school or university that demeans women and girls with disabilities, and (e) violence against women with disabilities that may occur within the school or university setting.

As educators, one of our major tasks is to make the invisible visible. If we are an educator and a woman without a disability, our task is twofold. We must make our sisters with disabilities visible and we must make sure that we do not leave them behind as we move forward.

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## **SUGGESTED MULTICULTURAL INFUSION ACTIVITIES**

by Nancy P. Gallavan, Porter Lee Troutman, Jr., & LeAnn G. Putney

During the 2000 fall semester, three professors integrated parts of their courses while teaching the Paradise Professional Development School (PPDS) cohort to help the preservice teachers better understand themselves and to explore elementary school environments in a creative and holistic approach. Dr. LeAnn Putney from UNLV's Department of Educational Psychology, Toni Kuiper from CCSD's Department of Special Education, and Dr. Nancy Gallavan from UNLV's Department of Curriculum and Instruction collaborated on a six-stage project conducted with the 16 preservice teachers enrolled in the PPDS cohort. The cohort completed this project by working with their mentors in the elementary school classrooms at Paradise Professional Development School. We thank them again for their continuous support and assistance!

Stage I: Dr. Putney began the project by guiding the cohort through the process of looking at classrooms from an ethnographic perspective as future teachers and as educational researchers. She demonstrated the effectiveness of "note-taking, note-making, and note-remaking" as she describes in her forthcoming book, "Visions of Vygotsky." The cohort viewed a half-hour videotape of an elementary school classroom to practice this process after which Drs. Putney and Gallavan assisted the cohort in recording their observations as they closely examined the various interactions occurring in a typical elementary school classroom. The cohort shared their observations in class as Drs. Putney and Gallavan led them to ask probing questions and to see the environment from multiple viewpoints. The cohort discovered the notions of meaningful inquiry and powerful connections as they began to contextualize teaching and learning.

Stage II: Dr. Gallavan facilitated a series of exercises for examining various topics and

issues related to valuing cultural diversity. The cohort watched a different videotape that featured a sequence of events occurring in a train station. This videotape ends with a twist, which tends to catch many viewers off-guard. This outcome was true for many of the cohort as well. They expressed surprise at their miscalculated anticipations and false impressions. Drs. Gallavan and Putney used this videotape to illustrate how many educators carry their own presumptions and prejudices about students into schools and classrooms. From these two learning experiences, the cohort recognized three important and intricately linked challenges for teachers:

- trying to see the world more broadly and from multiple perspectives;
- knowing that our individual backgrounds and beliefs influence what we see, how we see it, and how we value what we see; and
- learning that the messages and models that influence our personal beliefs greatly impact educators' professional behaviors in classrooms.

Stage III: Toni Kuiper launched the PPDS cohort into thinking about special education and inclusion by building upon the prior experiences introduced by Drs. Putney and Gallavan. The three professors team-taught several class sessions for the cohort to recognize that special education is an intricate aspect of cultural diversity that should be infused authentically into all classrooms and educational practices. The cohort seemed eager to learn more about understanding and meeting young learners' individual needs.

Stage IV : Stemming from these classroom conversations, the cohort generated lists of questions related to elementary school students with emphasis on the students in CCSD and at PPDS. Clusters of questions were constructed; a sampling of which included:

1. What are the racial, ethnic, language, and socio-economic profiles of the CCSD student population? at PPDS? nationally?
2. What are the racial, ethnic, gender, and educational profiles of the CCSD educator populations? at PPDS? nationally? How long is a teaching career?

3. What percent of CCSD and PPDS students receive free and reduced lunch? How do students qualify for the free and reduced lunch program? How is this information collected and managed? What services can students and families receive?
4. What percent of CCSD students receive special services? What kinds of special services are available? How are referrals conducted? Who oversees these activities? Are counselors available in all schools? What determines availability?
5. What kinds of testing are conducted in elementary schools? When are tests administered? Who is tested? How are

6. second language and special education students tested? How are scores reported and used?

Stage V: The cohort formed partnerships and took responsibility for a cluster of questions to explore with their PPDS mentor teachers and specials teachers and other sources of information in CCSD.

Stage VI: A month later, the cohort shared their data in class with all three professors. Their explorations yielded these conclusions:

- I. Cultural characteristics encompass the entire student as an individual and as a member of various groups and settings. Multicultural and special education are vital aspects of every student and learning environment. Culture is one's past, present, and future. Culture is static and dynamic; surface and deep. Culture influences how we learn and how we express our learning. Active participation is essential for understanding and accepting others. Teachers must know themselves well to work effectively with all kinds of students, families, and educators.
- II. The questions generated in this exercise are difficult, if not impossible, to answer conclusively, and that information is used for a variety of purposes. Not all teachers know the answers nor where to find the answers. Not all teachers maintain the same educational beliefs,

and their beliefs strongly influence what happens in their classrooms and their educational practices.

- III. This holistic exercise was just a first glance at the complexity of elementary school environments, and that many more questions needed to be asked and explored. The cohort realized that many different kinds of questions need to be asked throughout their teaching careers as various kinds of students enter their lives, as teaching expectations change, and as teachers grow and develop. Becoming a teacher needs to be a lifelong learning experience.