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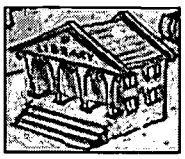
ABSTRACT

The rapidly shifting demographics of school-aged children, as well as continuing projections for the future, suggest that the enrollment of children who are culturally and linguistically different from what is considered the mainstream U.S. culture will continue to increase. The diversity of students in today's classrooms underscores the importance of developing curricula, teaching strategies, and policies to help all students succeed in school. Efforts to welcome, understand, and affirm all students, and to treat their cultural and linguistic backgrounds as equally valid and important, should be reflected in every facet of the school environment. This approach is especially important when addressing "literacy for an increasingly diverse student population." Effective literacy instruction builds upon the cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ways of making meaning, and prior knowledge that all children bring to the classroom. Such instruction also acknowledges the important role of "culture" in language and literacy learning. Understanding and respecting the array of different cultures and languages represented in their classrooms helps educators adopt strategies for teaching literacy that will encourage and support student achievement. This paper discusses addressing literacy needs in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. It consists of the following sections: Issue; Overview; Goals; Action Options; Pitfalls; Different Viewpoints; (Illustrative) Cases; and Contacts. The paper focuses on the different knowledge bases needed by teachers in diverse classrooms: self knowledge; cultural knowledge; linguistic knowledge; culturally informed teaching knowledge; knowledge of multicultural materials and literacy methods; and knowledge of home-school relationships. (NKA)

Critical Issue: Addressing Literacy Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.

by Arlette Ingram Willis



Critical Issue: Addressing Literacy Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms

ISSUE: The diversity of students in today's classrooms underscores the importance of developing curricula, teaching strategies, and policies to help all students succeed in school. Efforts to welcome, understand, and affirm all students--and to treat their cultural and linguistic backgrounds as equally valid and important--should be reflected in every facet of the school environment. This approach is especially important when addressing literacy for an increasingly diverse student population. Effective literacy instruction builds upon the cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ways of making meaning, and prior knowledge that all children bring to the classroom. Such instruction also acknowledges the important role of culture in language and literacy learning. Understanding and respecting the array of different cultures and languages represented in their classrooms helps educators adopt strategies for teaching literacy that will encourage and support student achievement.

OVERVIEW: The rapidly shifting demographics of school-aged children, as well as continuing projections for the future, suggest that the enrollment of children who are culturally and linguistically different from what is considered the mainstream U.S. culture will continue to increase. These students may differ from the mainstream in ethnicity, primary language spoken at home, and social class (Au & Raphael, 2000). To improve the academic achievement of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, educators must be responsive and sensitive to the variety of cultures in the United States. Historically, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have not experienced high levels of academic success because their literacy needs often were unaddressed as they were encouraged to assimilate into the mainstream.

What do these cultural and linguistic differences mean for teaching? According to Derman-Sparks, what occurs is sometimes called the "Pygmalion effect." The teacher's expectations, often communicated in verbal and nonverbal ways, influence children's behavior and performance. In effect, children mirror the teacher's expectations. When those expectations are negative, the response of students also is negative. Derman-Sparks finds that racism or sexism in the classroom "affects kids' ability to be successful, because some of the energy they can use for learning gets drained off so they can defend themselves. It can happen in a variety of ways. Kids can become angry and become

troublemakers; kids can simply withdraw; kids start to believe they 'can't do it anyway' or the teacher doesn't think they can do it" (cited in Payne, 1991, p. 18).

When teachers treat all students as competent, however, the students are likely to demonstrate competence (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers who teach to the highest standards provide academic challenges for their students and encourage all students to achieve. When teachers build on students' prior knowledge and skills and then provide appropriate scaffolding, students can move more easily from what they know to what they need to know. Building on students' prior knowledge and experiences provides opportunities for authentic learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and also improves student engagement (Miron & Lauria, 1998; Nieto, 1994). This teaching strategy requires that teachers have an in-depth knowledge not only of the subject matter but also of their students. For instruction to be successful, educators must spend time developing their understanding of literacy instruction as well as their awareness of their students' cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. Teachers can develop this understanding and awareness by acquiring specific knowledge bases relating to teaching in diverse classrooms.

Knowledge Bases Needed by Teachers in Diverse Classrooms

A growing body of research describes the knowledge bases needed for teaching in diverse classrooms. In addition, more specific knowledge bases in the area of literacy have been determined. Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000) describe five essential knowledge bases for language arts and English teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Their list includes the following: self-knowledge, cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, culturally informed teaching knowledge, and knowledge of materials and methods for multicultural literacy education. In addition, Jackson (1998) emphasizes knowledge of home-school relationships. Each of these knowledge bases is discussed in more detail.

Self-Knowledge

Before teachers can address the cultural and literacy needs of their students, they must first become aware of the influence of their own culture. Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000) suggest that self-knowledge can be gained through "inquiry into cultural consciousness" so that teachers will discover "the assumptions and stereotypes which will create obstacles to culturally responsive teaching" (p. 254). Further, they suggest the need for teachers to "critique their own values pertaining to languages and dialects other than standard English, what counts as good literature, and the role they can play as English/language arts teachers in the success of students from diverse cultures in the schooling process" (p. 254). A teacher's culture, language, social interests, goals, cognitions, and values--especially if different from the students'--could conceivably create a barrier to understanding what is best for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Orange & Horwitz, 1999). Teachers can break through this barrier by reflecting on their self-knowledge and by learning to acknowledge and respect their students' language, literacy, literature, and cultural ways of knowing. Various writings on the personal journeys of teachers convey the importance of such reflection.


Bette Wilson, director of multicultural education at Oak Park School District 97, Oak Park, Ill., discusses why teachers need to develop cultural self-knowledge [259 K audio file]. Excerpted from an interview with Bette Wilson (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000). A text transcript is available.

Haberman and Post (1998) note the importance of teachers having cultural self-knowledge and self-acceptance. They define *self-knowledge* as "a thorough understanding of one's own cultural roots and group affiliations" and *self-acceptance* as "a high level of self-esteem derived from knowing one's own roots" (p. 98). Tatum (1997) notes that dominant groups, whether by race or class, often are unaware of their identity because it is in sync with the internal and external images they hold of themselves and reality. In contrast, subordinated groups are much more aware of their identity because internal and external images often do not reflect their ideas of themselves or their world.

When teachers become aware of their own cultural backgrounds and values, they have an opportunity to recognize and address any bias or preconceived notions they may have that would make it difficult for them to accept, understand, and effectively teach their students. It is important for educators to take the time to reflect on these concepts to transfer that knowledge to their teaching.

Cultural Knowledge

Cultural knowledge is an understanding of the importance of culture in affecting students' perceptions, self-esteem, values, classroom behavior, and learning. According to Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000), "Research on culturally relevant and responsible instruction clearly shows that knowledge of students' family, community and socioethnic cultures--their languages, literacy practices, and values--can help teachers address the interests and build on the skills of their students" (p. 254).

Celebrating the cultural similarities among diverse cultural groups has been promoted by some educators as a way of uniting all cultural groups in the United States. However, it is not the similarities among the various groups that challenge people's thinking, behavior, and beliefs; it is the cultural differences. Learning to acknowledge and understand cultural differences should be an ongoing process in a diverse society. The use of ethnographic inquiry enables teachers to learn from their students and the communities in which their students live. It also can help teachers develop an understanding and appreciation of diverse backgrounds and lifestyles.

Bette Wilson, director of multicultural education at Oak Park School District 97, Oak Park, Ill., notes that understanding children's cultures enables teachers to design effective teaching strategies for the classroom [305 K audio file]. Excerpted from an interview with Bette Wilson (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000). A text transcript is available.

As teachers gain insight into and acceptance of various cultures, they should develop an all-inclusive acceptance of their diverse students. All children should feel welcomed, affirmed, respected, and valued in school. Barrera (1992), however, has observed that a culturally affirming attitude is not always present in schools. She writes that there can be a "cultural gap" in how some teachers respond to children of different cultures (p. 227). Offering a useful framework for discussing the intersection of culture, knowledge, and literacy, she argues that teachers' cultural knowledge should include cultural, cross-cultural, and multicultural knowledges.

Equally important is knowing how to address the literacy needs of children of cultures that are different from the teacher's culture. Teachers can acquire or develop an understanding and accepting attitude toward other cultures and build upon the linkages and interplay among culture, language, and literacy. Gay (1994) observes that "deeply ingrained cultural socialization becomes problematic in education when the schooling process operates on one cultural model to the exclusion of all others, or when culturally different children are expected to set aside all their cultural habits as a condition of succeeding in school" (p. 5). Teachers may talk about developing a community of readers and writers, but the concept of community must be more than a school-bound model. Rather, it must include the students' home communities, reflect the influence that those communities will have on the understanding of literacy, and provide the most effective literacy instruction for each child (Barrera, 1992).

Cultural knowledge, insists Barrera (1992), is human knowledge. She notes that "ways with language and literacy of different people, although common in some respects, also reflect some significant differences" (p. 235). These differences may include the forms of questions that children are asked as well as children's patterns of response to such questions, the uses for reading and writing, or the styles of oral narration. There also are differences in language use and patterns of interactions among children and adults (e.g., in some cultures, children are not encouraged to take the lead in conversations with adults); roles of behavior (e.g., some cultures have very strict codes of gender-related behavior: boys are expected and accepted as loud and constant movers, and girls are expected and accepted as quiet

and sedentary); and customs of response (e.g., as a form of respect for authority, many children of color are taught not to look directly at adults when being reprimanded). Understanding each child's culture will influence the way teachers work with their students and plan their lessons.

Many researchers have documented examples of the relationship between culture and literacy development in a variety of cultures. For example, Au and Jordan (1981) studied native Hawaiian communities, families, and children; Heath (1983) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of literacy learning among African-American and European-American children and their families; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) did research with inner-city African-American families; and Spindler and Spindler (1990) did research with the Menominee (Native American) culture.

Nieto (1999) notes, "Home cultures and native languages sometimes get in the way of student learning *not because of the nature of the home cultures or native languages themselves but rather because they do not conform to the way that schools define learning*" (p. 67). For example, Cleary and Peacock (1998) describe the numerous differences between the Indian and non-Indian worlds; they also offer suggestions for improving the literacy performance of American Indian children. These suggestions include using reading materials that have meaning to the children, encouraging children to write with a real purpose and audience so they can see the usefulness of writing, and providing children with explicit lessons in the differences between the structure of their traditional storytelling and the structure of fiction stories typically used in the classrooms.

When teachers make an effort to understand and value the cultures of all students, they are better able to develop meaningful and flexible teaching strategies that can help students achieve academic success. Literacy instruction that explicitly builds upon the cultural knowledge, ways of making meaning, and prior knowledge that all children bring with them to the classroom will encourage children to feel that their culture is important and valued in schools.

Linguistic Knowledge

To effectively reach all students, educators need to understand how students' patterns of communication and various dialects affect their classroom learning. They also need to know how second-language learning affects literacy acquisition. Although standard academic English is the language of instruction in most public schools, it is not always the language of the children in the classroom. Many second-language learners from a wide array of languages have difficulty meeting the academic standards of the classroom, understanding the instruction, and engaging in active learning when the language of instruction is only English. In addition, when children speak varieties of English other than standard academic English, they too may encounter misunderstandings and miscommunications. Acceptance of the home language of students and identification of a process to help students move to a more standard form of English is an important part of literacy development. Delpit (1993) states, "Teachers must acknowledge and validate students' home language without using it to limit students' potential" (p. 293). Au (1993) adds, "With regard to school literacy learning, proficiency in standard American English should be seen as a goal, *not* as a prerequisite to becoming literate" (p. 129).

School expectations for language use, communication patterns, and literacy experiences may differ from the expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse children. For example, schools traditionally value literate instead of oral tradition. Cleary and Peacock (1998) have summarized the thinking of recent research on the differences between oral and literate groups: "People from oral traditions contextualize their articulation of thought; they depend on shared knowledge of the people who will be listening to them and do not necessarily articulate what others already know"; in contrast, "people from literate traditions tend to decontextualize thought, to add the context that a distant audience will need to make sense of speech or writing" (p. 188). The concept *contextualization of thought* describes how some ideas and concepts are taken for granted as being understood. The ways of knowing and "ways of being" (p. 195) learned by children in oral societies explains how they understand their world and how they

communicate their understanding(s) to others. Similarly, Noll's (1998) research among the Lakota and Dakota Sioux describes literacy as more than reading and writing; it also includes constructions of meaning drawn from "music, dance, and art" that the children use to "make sense of their worlds" (p. 211) in their homes and communities. The alternative forms of meaning making experienced by Native American children were not a part of their school literacy.

When planning instruction, educators need to consider the role of students' home language and literacy patterns. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Turner (1997) also suggest that instruction should build upon the linguistic strengths that children bring with them to school. Thus, educators can foster children's literacy development by supporting and scaffolding the languages that children bring to the classroom and moving them to a more standard form of English.

Lack of academic achievement among children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often has been tied to the students' dependence on their home or first language or nonstandard academic English. Villegas (1988), however, contends that this claim is overly simplistic and disregards larger sociopolitical issues. In fact, students' low academic performance may be related to teachers' inaccurate assumptions and lack of cultural understanding. For instance, Orange and Horowitz's (1999) study reveals that mostly Anglo teachers did not fully understand their male African-American and Mexican-American students' preferences for literacy tasks. The teachers defined *literacy tasks* as "academic activities that allow students to express themselves through reading and writing" and *literacy preference* as "the degree to which a task is liked by a participant" (p. 28) However, an analysis of Orange and Horowitz's data indicates that the literacy tasks the teachers expected to be the preferences of their students were not, in fact, the students' actual preferences. The result was "an 'academic standoff' or mutual resistance, in which teachers and students each had perceptions that clearly counterbalanced those of the other" (p. 28) as each group felt the other did not care. This lack of understanding, awareness, and communication on the part of the teachers led to disengagement, disinterest, and boredom for the students and frustration for the teachers.

Other studies also have found a disconnection between what teachers believe are preferred literacy tasks and what culturally and linguistically diverse students perceive as interesting, engaging, and motivating (Foster, 1992; Larson & Irvine, 1999). When educators spend time developing strong knowledge bases, allowing students to construct meaning, creating a collaborative classroom, and providing their students with real opportunities to follow their preferences, this situation can be avoided. "Literacy task selection, done within the context of student choice, could circumvent the potentially adverse effects of boring, irrelevant content that is responsible for many students' passionate aversion to school," note Orange and Horowitz (1999, p. 38).

Culturally Informed Teaching Knowledge

According to Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000), a knowledge base of culturally informed teaching knowledge enables educators to create "collaborative and culturally sensitive classroom environments, cultural patterns in classroom verbal interactions, and other cultural dimensions of reciprocal interaction and dialogic instruction" that encourage "the participation and engagement of the diverse students in their classrooms" (p. 254). Smith (1998) states that culturally responsible teacher education "prepares teachers to be respectfully sensitive to the cultures of their students, to learn about and know the cultures of their students, and to use understandings about how culture influences learning in their day-to-day planning for teaching students" (p. 20). Familiarity with the needs, perceptions, and optimum learning environment for all students will influence a teacher's strategies in the classroom. An example of this manner of teaching is found in Irvine and Fraser's (1998) description of culturally responsive African-American teachers who work with African-American children.

Culturally informed teaching knowledge is based on research and best practice. During the last two decades, many literacy researchers have adopted constructivist and social constructivist theoretical frameworks to explain literacy

acquisition, growth, and development. Several researchers also have examined cultural interaction patterns, learning styles, and the emotional and psychological needs of children of color. For example, Ramirez and Castaneda's (1974) understanding of children's learning styles compares and contrasts the learning styles of European-American children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The researchers describe European-American children as *field independent* (an analytical style without social context) and children from Mexican-American, African-American, and Native American backgrounds as *field dependent* (a style that embellishes social context) (see Nieto, 1999). Such information may be helpful to educators who are choosing appropriate teaching strategies to use in the classroom.

Culturally informed teaching knowledge also supports the learning needs of individual children, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. Delpit (1995a) writes, "The question is not necessarily how to create the perfect 'culturally matched' learning situation for each ethnic group, but rather how to recognize when there is a problem for a particular child and how to seek its cause in the most broadly conceived fashion" (p. 167). After the problem and cause are recognized, teachers can determine specific learning strategies that are appropriate for a particular child.

A study by Larson and Irvine (1999) in an urban elementary classroom suggests that "teachers' and students' diverse experiences and beliefs about language and literacy may affect literacy learning, regardless of method" (p. 393). Similarly, Hankins (1999) explains how she invested considerable time and energy reading African-American children's literature to better prepare literacy lessons for her African-American students. Initially, she was disappointed in the students' response to her efforts to improve their literacy skills, because they misbehaved during story time. Later, after transcribing the interchanges during the literacy event, she found that she had not focused on the children's responses. Instead, she mistakenly focused on their behavior, even though they had made thoughtful and insightful connections to the text. She admits that she missed a valuable opportunity to extend and challenge what her students brought to the text.

Teachers expectations of and relationships with their students profoundly affect students' learning. Numerous research studies in literacy have shown that students are more academically successful when they feel welcomed, valued, and challenged by material that builds upon their prior knowledge, experiences, and interests. When these attitudes, behaviors, and curricular considerations are missing, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may resist learning (Kohl, 1994). At the secondary level, Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990) worked with six high schools whose enrollment was predominately Latino. They found that "the most critical element in determining whether educators can work toward success for all students is the belief that all students can succeed" (p. 318). The authors also identified two other important features needed for student success: "value is placed on the students' languages and culture" and "high expectations of language-minority students are made concrete" (p. 327). Similarly, Ladsen-Billings (1994) identifies six tenets of culturally relevant teaching. These tenets emphasize the importance of teachers holding high expectations, reaching out to students, empowering students, and joining forces with them in a political way.

The teacher's projection of caring is especially important in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Twiss, 1998). Vasquez (1988) notes, "Some minority students must have a relationship with their teacher that is mutually caring and respectful if they are to learn from him or her. ... These students not only need to like their teacher but also must sense that the teacher cares for them as well" (p. 249). Igoa (1993) also documents the need for immigrant children from diverse backgrounds to feel valued in their school environment: "Immigrant children need a safe and nurturing environment in which they can cope with the language barrier until they are ready to express themselves in the new culture. ... Without a caring teacher and other forms of intervention, patterns of loneliness, anxiety, and helplessness continue to persist" (p. 99). Paley (1995) adds: "We teachers must figure out ... how to care for whatever group of children enters our classroom. We must teach them to care about themselves and each other" (p. 114).

Bette Wilson, director of multicultural education at Oak Park School District 97, Oak Park, Ill., discusses the importance of teachers demonstrating acceptance and understanding of their culturally and linguistically diverse students [480 K audio file]. Excerpted from an interview with Bette Wilson (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000). A text transcript is available.

An example of the influence of a caring environment can be found in Walker's (1996) study of Casewell Country Training School. She describes the "homelike environment" of this segregated African-American high school and notes that it provided "support and encouragement" for students (p. 131). Specifically, Walker describes two distinct kinds of caring in this school: *Interpersonal caring* is "the direct attention an individual gives to meet the psychological, sociological, and academic needs of another individual" (p. 131). She contrasts this idea with *institutional caring*, which focuses on the "psychological, sociological, and academic needs, but provides for those needs to be met directly or indirectly through explicit school policies [and] ... focuses on the good of the group" (p. 131). Both types of caring are important in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Midobuche (1999) also emphasizes caring and respect as important attributes needed by teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Recalling her own school experience as a Mexican-American child whose home language and culture often were denigrated, she notes, "The teachers who were caring and respectful and who had a positive impact on my life recognized and valued my culture and language. They taught me the skills (including English) to survive and to become a productive citizen. ... Showing respect was a part of being a good teacher" (p. 81).

Although teacher caring may help improve students' academic performance, it is not enough. Citing the work of Noddings (1992) on caring, Wilder (1999) states that "caring alone is not enough to dismantle school policies aimed at allocating privilege over equity" (p. 357). The literacy needs of children from diverse backgrounds cannot be divorced from an understanding of the linguistic, emotional, and psychological concerns that accompany literacy learning. The long-term cumulative effects of cultural insensitivity may be hard to measure using traditional forms. Such research calls for a more innovative and personal approach to inquiry that includes narratives that center on race and the educational experiences of cultural insiders as alienated, subordinated, and devalued in schools.

Another aspect of culturally informed teaching is an emphasis on students' communication, both within a culture and across cultures. Teachers often begin cross-cultural communication with activities that allow students to make connections with their home cultures and build connections to school culture. In the early elementary grades, students often voice their connections through storytelling. Dyson (1998) says, "Storytelling is a cultural activity through which people participate in complex societies and in which social categories--like age, gender, social class, and ethnicity--matter" (p. 393). Older students also may tell stories, but usually they write their stories as fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

Knowledge formed within a specific cultural group helps one to communicate with others in the group. However, cross-cultural knowledge also is important for communicating with others outside of one's cultural group, and this goal is especially important in school settings (see Shade, 1997). That is, learning how others communicate and make meaning is an important tool in literacy learning. This tool is seldom explicitly taught. As Delpit (1995c) notes, the culture of power--that is, the language, discourse, and rules of those in power--is not often shared.

Knowledge of Multicultural Materials and Literacy Methods

This knowledge base consists of "a broad spectrum of multicultural texts and methods for using these materials in culturally sensitive ways that will dissolve stereotypes rather than perpetuate them," note Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000, p. 254). It includes both multicultural literature and methods for teaching literacy.

The use of multicultural children's literature is one of the most powerful ways for schools to honor students' culture and foster cross-cultural understanding. Teachers also can use multicultural literature depicting children's worlds as a means to bridge home and school cultures. The work of Spears-Bunton (1992) and Willis and Johnson (2000) emphasizes the use of multicultural literature to improve student self-esteem, involvement and engagement, and academic performance in literacy. In each of these studies, the level of involvement and engagement of African-American students increased when culturally relevant literature and instruction were used in high school English classrooms. In addition, the power relations in the class shifted as African-American students, once reticent to respond, became vocal leaders of discussion.

Multicultural literature often is used to broaden student understanding of culture as well as cross-cultural, intra-cultural, and multicultural differences and similarities. Marshall (1998) encourages teachers of young children to use multicultural literature to talk about human differences, to talk through human differences, and to talk about topics that relate to issues of diversity. Walker-Dalhouse (1992) used a variety of fiction and nonfiction with two fifth-grade classrooms to extend understanding of multiple cultures. In addition, Spears-Bunton (2000) has used literature to stretch students' awareness of the African diaspora. Perry and Fraser (1993) assert that teachers play a central role in the construction of a "new American culture" and as such, they need to allow "the lives, histories, and cultures of the historically oppressed to critically influence the reconceptualization of knowledge that is represented in the curriculum and classroom" (p. 19).

Wonderful multicultural books are available at all levels. Educators can use criteria for evaluating multicultural materials to help them select the most appropriate books for their students. In addition, Sims-Bishop (1992) describes guidelines for selecting multicultural literature. Many researchers--including Harris (1992a, 1992b); Sims-Bishop (1992); Slapin and Seale (1992); Pang, Colvin, Tran, and Barba (1992); Willis (1998); and Yokota (1993)--also have offered invaluable insights into selecting multicultural literature.

The literacy curriculum also can be the venue to help students understand the relationship of culture and power. Delpit (1995c) discusses five aspects of power in the classroom. She argues that teachers should explicitly teach children "the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of wonderful communicative endeavors" (p. 45).

Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, and Vasquez (1999) consider multicultural literature as part of a "new kind of 'critical literacy curriculum' which focuses on building students' awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead" (p. 70). The authors note that that their idea of 'critical literacy' is framed by Luke and Freebody's (1997) conceptualization and use of the term. Books in this category, the authors add, "invite conversations about fairness and justice; they encourage children to ask why some groups of people are positioned as 'others' " (p. 70). Along these lines, the authors argue that "readers need to be able to interrogate the assumptions that are embedded in text as well as the assumptions which they, as culturally indoctrinated beings, bring to the text" (p. 71). Specifically, the authors' suggest asking students: "Whose story is this?" "Who benefits from this story" and "What voices are not being heard?" (p. 71). The authors have used such books with teachers and children in elementary schools to better understand how both groups interact and react to the texts. In their view, these books "honor diversity and invite students and teachers alike to explore a new kind of literacy curriculum--one built upon the premise that a model of difference is a model of learning for individuals in society" (p. 72).


Bette Wilson, director of multicultural education at Oak Park School District 97, Oak Park, Ill., notes that all students need to honor diversity and learn skills for relating to others in a diverse global society [419 K audio file]. Excerpted from an interview with Bette Wilson (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000). A text transcript is available.

Teachers working with students in culturally and linguistically diverse classroom will realize that there is not one best way to teach all students; instead, a variety of instructional strategies should be incorporated. Because of cultural differences, not all students are comfortable asking questions or volunteering information. Teachers can develop alternative strategies for soliciting information from students while teaching them that asking and volunteering are acceptable behaviors in the classroom. Students' cultural differences also may influence motivational devices used by the teacher. For example, competitive games may not have the desired effect on student motivation; in some cultures, seeking individual achievement may be embarrassing rather than rewarding.

Strickland (1998) identifies several characteristics of relevant literacy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students. She emphasizes the variability that exists across students' home communities, the construction of meaning from different perspectives, the acknowledgment of context in literacy learning, the use of language for real communication, the use of relevant literacy materials, and a focus on high-level thinking and problem solving. Similarly, Craviotto and Heras (1999) identify six characteristics of culturally relevant classrooms. These strategies include using families as resources, reading multicultural literature, regarding students as active learners, emphasizing classroom dialogue, providing opportunities for exploration, and using multiple languages in the classroom. The authors conclude that these strategies can enhance students' literacy learning.

Knowledge of Home-School Relationships

Another important aspect of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students is knowledge of home and school relationships. Educators need to include parents and caregivers in their children's literacy development. They also need to examine any preconceived notions they may have regarding home literacy. For example, Auerbach's (1995) review of ethnographic studies of family literacy reveals that educators often hold untrue assumptions about family literacy situations.

In actuality, Auerbach (1995) has found multiple studies offering "counterevidence" that "refutes the notion that poor, minority, and immigrant families do not value or support literacy development" (p. 15). She adds that "those families most marginalized frequently see literacy and schooling as the key to mobility, to changing their status and preventing their children from suffering as they have" (p. 15). She cites, for example, Delgado-Gaitan's (1987) and Diaz, Moll, and Mehan's (1986) work among Mexican-American families and students. She also cites Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) study of literacy in low-income urban areas, which found that "families use literacy for a wide variety of purposes (social, technical, and aesthetic purposes), for a wide variety of audiences, and in a wide variety of situations" (p. 202). Moreover, Auerbach (1995) observes that each study valued multiple "socially significant" literacy activities, not just "add-on literacy tasks" (p. 19). Finally, Auerbach cites Urza's (1986) research among Southeast Asian children, which indicated that the school rather than the home is the greater influence on student attitudes and abilities in literacy.

Research by Au (1980), Delgado-Gaitan (1987), Heath (1983), Jordan (1985), Moll and Diaz (1987), Noll (1998), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) documents the variety of language uses and literacy events in the homes, families, and communities of culturally and linguistically diverse children. This research suggests that all children come from homes where language and literacy are important parts of the daily lives of children. For example, Latino immigrant families traditionally are very interested in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Soto (1997) and Jimenez, Moll, Rodriguez-Brown, and Barrera (1999) characterize Latino parents as very trusting of schools to educate and work in the best interest of their children. Like most parents, however, they want to be respected. Moll put it this way: "*El respeto, no me faltes el respeto* (Respect, don't deny me the respect [I deserve]" (cited in Jimenez, Moll, Rodriguez-Brown, and Barrera, 1999, p. 224). Similarly, African-American, Asian-American, and Native American parents have been characterized as desiring a quality education for their children as well as respect for their culture and values.

Conversely, however, some families of color do not trust schools and teachers. Such lack of trust often is born in part out of their personal experience. Parents may feel unwelcomed by school officials, intimidated by school rules and regulations, or ashamed of their language, cultural, or class differences; they also may have misunderstandings about the American school system. Educators must develop opportunities to reach out to such parents, welcome them into the school, and engage them in their children's education. Parent involvement in and encouragement of children's home reading is particularly important in fostering children's literacy development. Koskinen et al. (1999) suggest how the use of a school-home books program and audiotaped books can support students' home reading.

By collaborating with parents and families, schools can help increase the literacy development of children. For example, Morrow and Young's (1997) research focused on improving the literacy achievement (reading and writing) and interest of inner-city children through family literacy participation. The participants were largely African-American and Latino inner-city families and children who participated in a year-long family literacy program. As part of the research, the researches interviewed the teachers, parents, and children to learn their beliefs about literacy. Not surprisingly, parents had goals similar to the teachers: "They [parents] valued achievement for their children and wanted to know how to help them succeed" (p. 737). The researchers found that when developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive literacy activities were used in schools and homes, when parents were included and involved in the planning, when homework was assigned that required parental involvement, and when monthly meetings with parents, teachers, and children were held, the literacy achievement of participants increased. Morrow and Young (1997) observed, "It seems as if this collaboration of home and school doing similar processes could have been the reason for its [the program's] success" (p. 741). The authors added, "Teachers admitted that they had not realized how important such a program was in bringing parents, students, and teachers together in working toward the literacy development of children" (p. 741).

All of these knowledge bases--self-knowledge, cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, culturally informed pedagogic knowledge, knowledge of methods and materials, and knowledge of home-school relationships--are extremely important in helping educators address the literacy needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. They help teachers develop a collaborative and culturally sensitive learning environment that encourages meaningful, engaged learning for all students in their classrooms. School administrators and classroom teachers need to acquire these knowledge bases through teacher-education programs or staff development opportunities. The knowledge bases will support teachers' efforts to nurture the literacy skills of their students and promote high academic achievement.

If educators keep in mind the key elements for effective teaching of ethnic- and language-minority students, they will have a strong impact on the academic achievement of their students. Taking the time to develop appropriate knowledge bases, having high expectations for all students, providing a welcoming environment, and working with family members and the community will provide teachers with the tools and understandings they need to help their diverse students be successful learners.

GOALS:

- Application of various knowledge bases enables educators to effectively teach literacy in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.
- Diversity in the classroom is respected and valued.
- The school climate emphasizes a welcoming, caring, and affirming attitude toward all children and encourages

all children to excel.

- Teaching methods and curricular materials are culturally relevant and complementary of children's cultural learning patterns.
- Effective literacy instruction builds upon the literacy, language, and culture that children bring to school.
- Classrooms reflect diversity in their selection of multicultural books and other learning materials.
- Children's home cultures and languages are used as literacy resources.
- Children whose first language is not English are supported in use of their home language while learning English.
- Ongoing professional development on literacy in diverse classrooms provides opportunities for educators to recognize and address children's literacy needs.

ACTION OPTIONS: Administrators, teachers, and parents or caregivers can take the following steps to support children's literacy needs.

Administrators:

- Respect the multiple cultures and languages of the families and children in the school and ensure that the school provides a culturally responsive education.
- Learn about the communities of the children in the school and become involved in the concerns and needs of those communities.
- Acknowledge the importance of educating teachers for diversity. Sponsor ongoing staff development in multilingual, multicultural schools to improve the learning environment and academic progress of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Encourage all teachers and staff to have positive and respectful attitudes for all cultures. Ensure that all staff members demonstrate anti-racist and anti-bias attitudes and behaviors.
- Determine the quality of the school's multicultural practices. Tools such as the How Multicultural Is Your School? checklist can be helpful in providing a starting point for this activity.
- Emphasize developing language proficiency and connecting school to students' lives to assist student learning.
- Ensure that the school is providing a rich learning experience for all students. Refer to Educating All Our Students: Improving Education for Children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds.
- Expect all students to perform at high levels of academic performance.

- Model and encourage two-way communication between school personnel and parents or caregivers.
- Review school policies to ensure that the school is working to include parents and families from diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. (Refer to the *Pathways* Critical Issues Supporting Ways Parents and Families Can Become Involved in Schools and Creating the School Climate and Structures to Support Parent and Family Involvement.)
- Develop a questionnaire, such as the Questionnaire to Assess Parent Perspectives and Participation, to determine the quality of the school's parent involvement practices.
- Build trust, develop relationships, and encourage dialogue with parents and community leaders from diverse cultural groups. Listen to their concerns and encourage parent and community involvement.
- Personally invite parents and children from all cultures to participate in school literacy activities.
- Ensure that the school provides literacy-rich classrooms, including multicultural and multilingual materials.
- Include parents or caregivers in the decision-making process for the literacy curriculum and materials.

Teachers:

- Learn about one's own culture and language. Examine how this knowledge influences teaching style, reading material selection, and classroom activities.
- Become aware of cultural influences that affect the communication and interaction patterns of students and families. Learn to understand and respect cultural differences.
- Learn about the languages and cultures of children in the classroom through ethnographic inquiry. Consider how these various languages and cultural backgrounds may affect literacy instruction.
- Gather information on teaching strategies for the multicultural classroom. Helpful online sources are A Synthesis of Scholarship in Multicultural Education, Language and Culture, Resources for Multicultural Education, and Educating All.
- Participate in ongoing professional development on effective strategies for educating children in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.
- Reflect on critical behaviors and strategies for teaching culturally diverse students.
- Use information collected from readings, conversations, and experiences to create a classroom environment that makes use of a variety of teaching strategies and is enriching and sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of students.
- Set high expectations for all students. Move students from at-risk to excellence.
- View each child as a learner, thinker, reader, writer, and speaker. Build upon the language and cultural experience that each child brings to school. Be sure new information is building on prior knowledge and

meaningful student contexts/cultures.

- Respond in a positive and affirming way to the cultures, languages, and interests of all children through classroom discussions and interactions with parents or caregivers.
- Develop strategies for fostering second language development in young children.
- Alter instruction to include individual, small group, and cooperative learning experiences. Present reading and writing activities in various formats to include all children's learning styles.
- Adapt or develop a culturally responsive and relevant literacy curriculum that is interesting, age-appropriate, challenging, and representative of children in the classroom.
- Work with the school's library-media specialist to select and use a wide variety of multicultural children's literature and ethnic-specific books for students. Provide reading materials for students in a variety of genres, including traditional literature, poetry, fantasy and science fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction, informational books, bibliographies, and picture books.
- Develop criteria for evaluating multicultural materials to determine if such materials are well written, culturally authentic, and appropriate.
- Include the contributions of minorities in classroom discussions, reading, and writing projects.
- Allow opportunities for children to share their cultural knowledge and experiences as well as their language in oral and written forms.
- Promote the value of storytelling by encouraging students to become storytellers and by asking parents, grandparents, and other elders in the community to share their life stories.
- Create tape-recorded books to help students practice reading skills independently.
- Learn about the multiple cultures in the United States through dialogue with cultural insiders and students and parents who represent different cultures.
- Develop mutual respect and trust with parents. Learn how to communicate with parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Listen to the concerns of parents or caregivers. Work with them to find solutions.

Parents or Caregivers:

- Become actively involved in children's learning at home and at school. Identify some ways to answer the question how can I be involved in my child's education?
- Build children's literacy skills through reading, writing, and talking with them. Relevant online sources for parents include Helping Children Learn About Reading, Helping Your Child Become a Reader, and Simple Things You Can Do to Help All Children Read Well and Independently.

- Provide a variety of reading materials in the home. Frequently read aloud to children.
- Communicate personal needs and concerns to school administrators, teachers, and staff.
- Help educators understand particular cultural values, beliefs, and ways of knowing.
- Volunteer time, expertise, and knowledge to the school and classroom teacher.

IMPLEMENTATION PITFALLS: : Several pitfalls may occur when schools and educators try to address the literacy needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. One pitfall is the inability of educators to know enough about every culture. No singular body of knowledge, book, method, training program, or course will teach all there is to know, and educators may not have time or opportunities to continue their multicultural learning. Rosaldo (1989), however, warns that a short-term investment will lead to a limited understanding of the role of culture in educators' lives and in the lives of students. He adds that a limited understanding also may lead to a "false comfort" (p. 8). Instead, multicultural learning for teachers should be a continuous process requiring a long-term commitment. Building cultural knowledge and sensibilities is a life-long proposition. The most prudent approach is for educators to develop or acquire a respectful and sensitive attitude and an open mind.

A second pitfall is that many schools do not provide relevant professional development for their teachers. According to Lewis et al. (1999), only 31 percent of teachers in public schools during 1998 participated in professional development programs that addressed the needs of students with limited English proficiency or students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such professional development was more likely to occur in schools with greater minority enrollment. Lewis et al. (1999) state, "Teachers from schools with more than 50 percent minority enrollment were much more likely than those who taught in schools with 5 percent or less minority enrollment to participate in professional development programs on this topic (51 versus 14 percent)." In addition, the authors note that teacher participation in professional development addressing the needs of limited English proficient and culturally diverse students also varied by region: 51 percent of teachers in the West, 33 percent of teachers in the South, and 22 percent for each of the Midwest and the Northeast. More schools need to provide such professional development for their teachers.

A third pitfall is that some educators are reluctant to acknowledge their inherent prejudices against children who are culturally, racially, or linguistically different from themselves. Delpit (1995a) reveals that many educators, in an attempt to sound unbiased and free of prejudice, loudly proclaim, "I don't see color, I only see children" (p. 177). She argues that this simplistic notion of race, an ideation of colorblindness, masks more deep-seated issues. Her response, in the form of a question, is: "What message does this statement send? That there is something wrong with being black or brown, that it should *not* be noticed? I would like to suggest if one does not see color, then one does not really see children. Children made 'invisible' in this manner become hard-pressed to see themselves worthy of notice" (p. 177).

A fourth pitfall is a tendency for schools to address diversity only on the surface level. Barrera (1992) and Willis (1995) have argued that the use of literacy approaches that appear to support the language and literacy of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds must be coupled with teacher knowledge and commitment. If not, the result is a "tourist approach" that focuses on celebrating holidays and festivals, glorifying heroes or exceptional people, and adding culturally sensitive and appropriate literature. Such additive approaches assume the inclusion of multicultural materials is all that is needed to address diversity at the school. Although it is important to

have materials that support the culture and ways of knowing that children bring with them to school, multicultural materials and activities alone are insufficient for social change. In order to address issues of cultural and linguistic difference, substantive changes must be made to the curriculum and instruction. Also, literacy must be understood as a socioconstructed process--one that builds upon students' prior knowledge to make meaning. As Nieto (1999) argues, often in the zeal to address issues of diversity, the goal of academic achievement is forgotten.

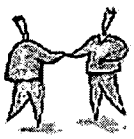
DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW: Numerous scholars believe that the emphasis placed on cultural and linguistic diversity in schools is harmful to the sense of an overall "American" culture. For example, Schlesinger (1998) belives that a focus on the history, literature, and accomplishments of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is problematic because it serves to disunite America as a nation. Ravitch (1999) writes that students identified as limited English-proficient should be enrolled in English-immersion programs rather than bilingual programs. She believes that English-immersion programs will improve the academic achievement of limited-English-proficient students as well as their performance on standardized tests.

The use of multicultural literature has been a concern of other scholars, notably Auciello (2000) and Stotsky (1995). In general, they argue that the use of multicultural literature is detrimental to the racial well-being of the nation, it lacks sufficient literary merit to intellectually challenge students, and there is no hard evidence to support its use for improved academic performance among children of color. Further, Beach (1995), Spears-Bunton (1992), and Willis and Johnson (2000) reveal that some European-American children express resistant behaviors when required to read and discuss multicultural literature. Auciello (2000) and Stotksy (1995) also mention their concern for the guilt feelings that European-American students may experience when reading multicultural literature.

Stotsky (1995) expresses concern about race, ethnicity, and identity in the use of multicultural literature in secondary-school programs. She states that "by making 'American' cover so many different cultural groups and countries, we clearly diminish students' sense of their own identity as Americans" (p. 609). Stotsky (1999a) also believes that "few positive outcomes are possible in an educational system that slots all students into spurious racial categories and then attaches fictitious ways of thinking, learning, and knowing to each. The result is not the elimination of stereotypes but the freezing of them" (p. 17). In addition, Stotsky (1999b) attacks the use of multicultural literature in basal readers. Specifically, she argues that "because of the need to portray a regularly increasing number of social groups around the world, the selections that children are offered in the readers often jump from one culture to another ... in a dizzying sequence" (p. xiii). She concludes by suggesting that "it is quite reasonable to believe that there is a strong connection between the low level of reading achievement in American students and the intellectual limitations of their current reading programs" (p. 262).

ILLUSTRATIVE CASES:

- Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), Honolulu, Hawaii
- Ysleta Independent School District, El Paso, Texas
- Research Reports from the National Council of Teachers of English



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References

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