

# Cultural Dynamics in an Economically Challenged, Multiethnic Middle School: Student Perceptions

Carolyn Hughes, Allison Page, and Donna Y. Ford

**Abstract:** *Cultural dynamics in school may contribute to disaffiliation and inhibited academic performance among diverse student populations (Marx, 2008). We queried 16 special education students in a low-income, ethnically diverse English Language Learner-cluster middle school about their perceptions of the cultural dynamics at their school and the occurrence of culturally responsive practices. Although most students reported the occurrence of some culturally responsive practices, students overwhelmingly responded that their race and culture were not acknowledged by teachers. Students also indicated that their teachers rarely, if ever, gave information or taught about other cultures or races. The majority of students also believed that animosity and violence among racial groups were a problem at school. Implications of the study are discussed and suggestions are given for future research and practice.*

## Introduction

In just over 30 years, the student population of U.S. public schools has drastically changed. In 1972, White students comprised 78% of the K-12 population; by 2008, Whites represented just 56% of students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). During that time, Hispanics increased from 6% to 22% of the school population and Blacks maintained at approximately 15%. Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander students and students of more than one race represented an additional 7% of the 2008 population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Increasing diversity is particularly evident in the southern and western states where White students are now in the minority (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a; Orfield, 2009). Indeed, by 2020, the majority of U.S. public school students are expected to be of color (Ball, 2009; Sable, Hoffman, & Garofano, 2006). In addition, growing numbers of the school population are English Language Learners (ELL). During the 2003-04 school years, 11% of students were receiving ELL services versus only 5% of students during 1993-94 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Further, in 2005-06, 20% of the school population was reported to speak a language other than English at home while 5% spoke English with difficulty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007b).

Additional demographic changes are occurring in American public schools. In 2007, the South became the first region in the U.S. in which low-income students were the majority of the school population, increasing from 37% in 1989 to 54% (Southern Education Foundation, 2007). Three western states also reported a majority of low-

income students: California, New Mexico, and Oregon. Several additional geographically diverse states reported nearing a majority of low-income students, while the nation as a whole nears this point at 46% of the school population (Southern Education Foundation, 2007). Children and youth of color are disproportionately represented in low-income families; approximately 25% of Black, Hispanic, and Native American young people live in poverty compared to less than 10% of their Asian American and White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In addition, the families of ELL students are also overrepresented at the lower end of the economic spectrum (Markham & Gordon, 2007).

Unfortunately, such demographic characteristics can place students at risk for school failure. Increasing numbers of racially and ethnically diverse students are attending segregated, high-poverty, failing schools where they are less likely to be taught using effective, evidence-based instruction (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Orfield, 2009). For example, 40% of Hispanic and 59% of Black (vs. 11% of White) students attend high-poverty secondary schools with limited resources and dropout rates of 50% or more (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Not surprisingly, therefore, both Hispanic and Black children and youth are more likely to experience grade retention and less likely than their White or Asian counterparts to be enrolled in advanced placement courses, gifted and talented programs, or postsecondary education (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007).

In contrast to the growing diversity of the student population is the striking and persistent lack of diversity of the teaching force. Whites constituted 87% of public school teachers in 1993-94 while Blacks represented 7%, Hispanics 4%, and other

ethnicities 2% (Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 1999). Little had changed by the 2003-04 school year when Whites represented 83%, Blacks, 8%, Hispanics 6%, and other ethnicities 3% of teachers (Snyder, 2009). Moreover, at 75%, teaching has continued to be a predominantly female occupation drawn primarily from the middle class (Ball, 2009; Snyder, 2009).

To what extent might lack of diversity among teachers be a problem? Researchers (e.g., Bacon, Jackson, & Young, 2005; Ball, 2009; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Sleeter, 2001) have argued that one factor associated with the low academic achievement frequently reported for many low-income students who are racially and ethnically diverse (e.g., Barton & Cooley, 2009) is the disparity in cultural backgrounds between students and their teachers. If ethnically, racially, and economically diverse students do not believe that their culture and background are acknowledged or accepted at school by teachers of the dominant culture, they will likely disengage from instruction and expected academic and social activities at school. For example, Hispanic youth report leaving school because teachers disenfranchise them, disrespect their culture, neglect their language differences, and lower expectations for them (Headden, 1997; Thompson, 2008). Further, if teachers and staff do not help foster an atmosphere of acceptance at school, animosity and distrust may form among culturally diverse groups of students (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007; Padilla & Perez, 2003). Consequently, education legislation (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004) and teacher education programs are increasingly focused on raising the competence of preservice and in-service teachers in using culturally responsive classroom practices with all students (Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008).

## Culturally Responsive Practice

*Culturally responsive practice* refers to modifying curricula and materials, classroom interactions, teaching approaches, and parent outreach in response to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to create an environment more conducive to effective learning (Rueda, Lim, & Velasco, 2007). Teachers are urged to expand their understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, values, customs, and traditions in order to increase their teaching effectiveness by welcoming students' cultural differences (e.g., discipline methods, religious beliefs, health, and hygiene practices) and accepting that their own worldview is not universal (Asimeng-Boahene & Klein, 2004; Ball, 2009; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Trent et al., 2008). Students should not be expected to discard their culture and ethnicity at the schoolhouse door because only cultural practices of the dominant group are taken as the norm (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Hughes, Hollander, & Martinez, 2009). Culturally responsive practice is considered appropriate means of addressing the nation's increasingly diverse school population because it focuses on the attainment of cultural understanding at the societal level and integration of educational practices with the ethnic, racial, cultural, and economic diversity that characterizes U.S. society (Banks, 2005; Gay, 2004).

Although teachers are urged to tailor their instruction in response to students' cultural backgrounds, the literature reveals limited empirically-based guidelines for doing so (Rueda et al., 2007; Trent et

al., 2008). For example, culturally responsive teachers are described as caring, affirmative, flexible, and nurturing. However, observable measures of these teacher behaviors are lacking while a causal relation between these behaviors and student achievement is elusive (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). In addition, researchers may be tempted to gain a limited knowledge about a culture and then assign stereotyped characteristics to all members of a cultural "group" rather than view diversity as individualistic and dynamic (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

## Concerns Related to Research and Practice

Three concerns related to culturally responsive practice are of particular relevance to the present study. First, it is widely acknowledged that racially and ethnically diverse students are overrepresented in special education (Skiba et al., 2008), arguing for developing empirically-based culturally responsive practices for these students. However, reviews of the empirical literature on culturally responsive practice indicate that studies have overwhelmingly been conducted among general versus special education populations (e.g., Trent et al., 2008; Voltz, Dooley, & Jefferies, 1999). As such, Trent and colleagues argued that over the past decade the empirical database shows little improvement in training special education teachers to use culturally responsive practices despite the increased challenges typically faced by special education students in achieving expected academic standards and fitting in socially with peers.

Second, most of the literature on culturally responsive practice addresses early childhood or elementary students (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Studies are needed that address the unique needs of middle and high school students who are culturally diverse. Third, rarely have the voices of students from racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds been heard regarding their views of culturally responsive practice and cultural dynamics in their schools (Howard, 2002; Hughes et al., 2009; Nieto, 1992). Unless efforts are made by teachers to acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds and respond to students' cultural differences, it is unlikely that students will feel accepted at school, and a process of student disengagement from the school environment is likely to ensue (Marx, 2008).

## Purpose of the Study

Our study adds to the literature on culturally responsive practice by addressing several shortcomings of the literature. First, we sought the perspective toward culturally responsive practice of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse middle school students with learning disabilities, including low-income, ELL, and immigrant students. Rarely, if ever, have the voices of these students regarding culturally responsive practice and cultural dynamics in school been reported in the published literature. Second, we investigated students' views toward their own acculturation and cultural background and traditions, as well as their feelings of acceptance of their culture at school. Third, we asked students about their perceptions of the cultural dynamics existing among the racial and ethnic groups that comprised their school. Fourth, we included middle school students versus younger children as participants, addressing a gap in the research literature regarding secondary students.

## Method Setting

Participants attended a Title I middle school located in a large urban school district in southeastern U.S. The school enrolled 751 students in grades 5 - 8, of which 41 % were Hispanic, 31 % White, 24 % Black, and 4 % other ethnicities; 79 % of students received free or reduced lunches. Students attending this ELL-cluster school spoke a total 21 different languages at home and 29 % participated in ELL classes. Of the school's 40 teachers, 78 % were White, 15 % Black, 7 % Asian, and 0 % Hispanic.

## Participants

Participants were all 16 students enrolled in two special education pull-out reading resource classes for grades 5 - 7. All other classes attended by these students were in general education. Mean age of students was 11 years (range = 10 to 13) and 10 were male. Six students were identified as Black, five Hispanic, three White, one Asian, and one Native American. Students were identified as having learning disabilities (n = 13) and speech (n = 1) or other health impairments (n = 2). Reported reading level for students was approximately two grade levels below their current grade (six, seven, and three students were in grades 5, 6, & 7, respectively).

## Measures

A questionnaire was developed to assess students' perceptions of (a) acceptance of their culture at school and the school's cultural dynamics and (b) the presence in school of culturally responsive practices. Items on the questionnaire were drawn from the literature on models of acculturation (e.g., Doná & Berry, 1994; Hughes et al., 2009; Padilla & Perez, 2003) and culturally responsive educational practices (e.g., Banks, 2005; Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Siwatu, 2005). Ten yes/no questions drawn from acculturation models (e.g., "Do I identify with and maintain traditions from my culture of origin?" [Hughes et al., 2009]) asked students about (a) their feelings about their own culture (e.g., "Are there traditions or rituals specific to your family or community?"); (b) the extent of their feelings of acculturation or separation (e.g., "Do you feel different from other students because of your race or ethnicity?"); and (c) their perceptions of the cultural dynamics at school (e.g., "Is there animosity between racial groups in your school?") (see Table 1).

Twelve questions assessed students' perceptions toward culturally responsive practices in their school (e.g., "Do you learn or read about other cultures in your textbooks?") using a 3-point Likert-type scale where 2 = often, 1 = sometimes, and 0 = no (see Table 2). These questions were selected and adapted from the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE; Siwatu, 2005), a self-report measure of preservice teachers' perceptions of their own competence at implementing components of culturally responsive instruction as found in the theoretical and empirical literature (e.g., Gay, 2004). Selected questions addressed the role of the classroom teacher in implementing culturally responsive practice, were consistent with and representative of recommended practices (e.g., Banks, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000), and were reworded to elicit students' perspectives (e.g., "Do teachers spend time in your community?").

Finally, students were also asked open-ended questions about their demographic background, including place of birth and language spoken at home.

Four members of the research staff and two university professors who were experts in the area of cultural diversity reviewed a candidate form of the questionnaire to evaluate wording and to determine comprehensiveness and consistency of items with our research questions. Field testing with three students not participating in the study was conducted to further determine clarity of wording of items. Based on feedback, a final form of the questionnaire was established.

Table 1

*Students' Cultural Perspectives*

Item	N	%
Are there traditions or rituals specific to your family or community?		
Yes	12	75
No	4	25
Are members of your community predominantly of the same race as you?		
Yes	6	38
No	10	62
Do you embrace your cultural background?		
Yes	10	62
No	6	38
Is your culture embraced among your friends?		
Yes	14	88
No	2	12
Is your culture embraced at school?		
Yes	15	94
No	1	6
Are there advantages to being of one race or ethnicity?		
Yes	2	12
No	14	88
Do you feel different from other students because of your race or ethnicity?		
Yes	0	0
No	16	100
Do you dislike any ethnic groups?		
Yes	0	0
No	16	100
Is there animosity between racial groups in your school?		
Yes	10	62
No	6	38
Is violence an issue in your school?		
Yes	14	88
No	2	12

Table 2

*Students' Perceptions Toward Culturally Responsive Practices*

Item	Often	Sometimes	No	M
Do teachers change their teaching styles to fit with the way you learn best?	9	5	2	1.44
Do you learn about the languages of your classmates?	9	3	4	1.31
Do you learn or read about other cultures in your textbooks?	8	5	3	1.31
Is it important for teachers to be familiar with the cultural backgrounds of students?	7	4	5	1.13
Is a student's teacher important in his or her achievement?	5	8	3	1.13
Do teachers give information about different cultures and cultural groups?	6	6	4	1.13
Do teachers spend time in your community?	6	6	4	1.13
Is there a good connection between your home culture and school?	7	3	6	1.06
Do teachers give information about the different cultures of your classmates?	1	11	4	.81
Do teachers teach about other races and cultures?	3	7	6	.81
Do your classrooms have pictures or posters of people from different cultures displayed?	3	3	10	.56
Do teachers acknowledge your race or cultural background?	3	1	12	.44

Note. Often = 2, sometimes = 1, no = 0.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The questionnaire was administered during the two reading classes in which students were enrolled. First, the second author, a special education graduate student, stated that she was interested in the students' views about their classes and school. The author then held a discussion about the concepts of race, culture, and culturally responsive instruction defining terms such as culture, race, and ethnicity. The questionnaire was distributed to students, and they were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that their responses would not affect their treatment or evaluation in class. In addition, students were instructed to base their answers on all their classes and teachers in the school versus one class or teacher. Next, the author read each question aloud to the class providing examples and clarification for each and allowing time for students to respond.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic information and responses to questionnaire items. In addition, responses to items related to culturally responsive practices were rank-ordered by mean score. Finally, all questionnaire responses were analyzed by students' gender, race, and ethnicity.

**Results****Students' Demographic Background**

Students self-identified as Black ( $n = 5$ ), Hispanic ( $n = 5$ ), White ( $n = 3$ ), Asian ( $n = 1$ ), Biracial (Black/White) ( $n = 1$ ), and Kurdish ( $n = 1$ ). Twelve students reported that they were born in the U.S. and four reported that their birthplace was Mexico. Spanish was the spoken language at home reported by all of the Mexican-born students and one U.S.-born student. Kurdish and Vietnamese were each reported to be spoken in one home while English was the spoken language at home reported by the remaining nine students. All but one student reported that religion was important in their lives, although four students did not know their religious affiliation. Six students reported that their families were Baptist, five Catholic, and one Muslim.

**Students' Cultural Perspectives**

Table 1 displays students' responses to questions regarding their perceptions toward their own cultural affiliation and the cultural dynamics of their school. Twelve of the 16 students reported that there were traditions or rituals specific to their family or community, although 10 students said that their community was predominately of a different race than theirs. Most agreed that they ( $n = 10$ ) or their friends ( $n = 14$ ) embraced their cultural background and all but one indicated that their school did. Only two suggested that there was an advantage to their race or ethnicity and none claimed to feel different from their friends because of their race or ethnicity. Although no student acknowledged disliking any ethnic group, 10 students reported that there was animosity between racial groups at school, and 14 indicated that violence was an issue at school.

In addition, an analysis of responses across gender, race, and ethnicity revealed several interesting patterns. All five Black students and the one student identifying as Biracial (Black and White) were the only racial or ethnic group members all responding "yes" when asked if there were traditions or rituals specific to their family or

community. In contrast, Hispanic students (one U.S-born and four born in Mexico) were the only ethnic group members all responding “yes” when asked if they embrace their cultural background. Half of all male students, regardless of race or ethnicity, responded “no” when asked if there was animosity between racial groups at school, whereas all but one female reported “yes.” No other pattern related to gender, race, or ethnicity was identified across responses.

## Students’ Perceptions Toward Culturally Responsive Practices

Students’ responses to queries regarding culturally responsive practices in their school are shown in Table 2 rank-ordered by mean score. The greatest agreement with indicators of culturally responsive practices was that (a) teachers changed teaching styles to match students’ learning styles, (b) students learned about classmates’ languages, and (c) students read about other cultures in their books. However, half of students either disagreed with these indicators or said they occurred only sometimes. Although few students disagreed with the importance of teachers being familiar with students’ cultural backgrounds ( $n = 5$ ) or their importance to student achievement ( $n = 3$ ), only six students indicated that their teachers often gave information about different cultures or spent time in students’ communities.

Students were almost evenly split between whether there was often ( $n = 7$ ) or never ( $n = 6$ ) a good connection between their culture at home and their school. The majority of students ( $n = 11$ ) indicated that teachers sometimes gave information about their classmates’ cultures although only one student reported that this happened often. Similarly, seven students said that their teachers sometimes taught about other races and cultures, but only three students indicated that this happened often. The two indicators prompting the greatest number of disagreements were whether classrooms displayed pictures of different cultures ( $no = 10$ ) and whether teachers acknowledged the student’s race or culture ( $no = 12$ ).

An additional analysis of responses across gender, race, and ethnicity revealed that the only ethnic group members all responding that teachers often changed their teaching styles to fit the way the student learned best were Hispanics (U.S.- and Mexican-born). Hispanic students were also the only ethnic group members all responding affirmatively when asked (a) if they learned about the languages of classmates, (b) if they learned or read about other cultures in their textbooks, and (c) if it is important for teachers to be familiar with the cultural backgrounds of students. All four Black males responded that it was not important for teachers to be familiar with their students’ backgrounds. Although some members of all other racial and ethnic groups responded that their teachers often gave information about different cultures and cultural groups and spent time in their community, no Black students responded similarly. No other patterns in responding were evident across gender, race, or ethnicity.

## Discussion

It is important to obtain the perspective of students attending culturally diverse schools to determine if they perceive that culturally responsive instruction is being practiced and if they believe their classroom and school environments are welcoming and accepting of their culture and traditions. We asked special education students in a

low-income, racially and ethnically diverse ELL-cluster middle school about their feelings toward their own culture and the cultural dynamics of their school, and whether they perceived that culturally responsive practices occurred at school. Students, in general, reported embracing their own culture and believing that their friends and school did, as well. Although no student reported disliking another ethnic group or feeling different from others because of race or ethnicity, the majority of students believed that animosity and violence among racial groups were problems at school. In addition, although most students and, in particular, Hispanics, reported the occurrence of some culturally responsive practices at least sometimes, students overwhelmingly responded that their race or culture was not acknowledged by their teachers. Students also indicated that their teachers rarely, if ever, gave information or taught about other cultures or races. Our findings contribute to the literature on culturally responsive practice and cultural dynamics in multiethnic schools in several important ways.

First, we addressed specific gaps in the research literature investigating culturally responsive practice. To date, we have not found one study in the published literature in which culturally diverse special education students attending a racially and ethnically diverse middle school were queried about the occurrence of recommended culturally responsive practices in their school. Previous studies (a) primarily have focused on preschool and elementary school general education versus secondary special education; (b) rarely have sought student input, or, in the rare case of seeking such, have asked only open-ended questions not specific to culturally responsive practices recommended in the literature; or (c) have investigated student populations predominately of one race or ethnicity (Bacon et al., 2005; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Trent et al., 2008). Our study fills a gap in the literature with respect to participant population, setting, and methodology. In addition, we asked students their views about their own and their classmates’ cultures and family traditions, as well as their views toward the cultural dynamics existing at school. Variability in individual students’ responding across questionnaire items, in which they expressed both positive (e.g., “my culture is embraced at school”) and negative (e.g., “violence is an issue at school”) views of their school, suggests that students likely were responding honestly to the questionnaire and that their answers were valid. In addition, we analyzed students’ responses by individual students’ gender, race, and ethnicity to determine possible patterns of responding related to these factors.

Second, asking students about their own acculturation and analyzing responses by gender, race, and ethnicity, allowed us to relate students’ cultural perceptions to their views of the cultural dynamics of their school. Students, especially Blacks and Hispanics, did report identifying with a particular culture, despite most living in a community where the dominant culture differed from their own. However, students overwhelmingly did not feel that their race and cultural background were acknowledged by teachers at their school. Failure to address students’ race and culture can have dire consequences—such as disengagement—for students, particularly those who are not of the dominant culture and those attending a school comprised of multiple ethnicities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Most students indicated that there were traditions and rituals specific to their families, which likely were important to their cultural identity. However, if students do not feel that their cultural identity is acknowledged at school, they are

not likely to feel a part of that school in a holistic sense (Valenzuela, 2000). This may be why only two students in our study believed there was an advantage to their race or ethnicity. In contrast, Hughes et al. (2009) found that Hispanic secondary students believed that their ethnicity was an advantage because of (a) achieving status by fitting into a unique social niche or (b) being bilingual.

Researchers have argued for creating communities of students in which cultural and individual differences are acknowledged and the total person is accepted (Valenzuela, 2000). Teachers' perceived failing to acknowledge students' race and ethnicity in this study may have related to the animosity between racial groups and violence that participants reported was an issue with respect to the cultural dynamics in their school. A likely cause of racial discord in schools occurs when racially and ethnically diverse students do not have opportunities to learn about each other. Fear, suspicion, and prejudice may develop if students are not introduced to each others' differences in dress, hygiene, language, religious practices, food preferences, or musical tastes (Banks, 2005). For example, unless teachers discuss the reason that females generally cover their hair in Moslem cultures, classmates may be confused or even angry when Moslem classmates wear a scarf on their heads while other students are not allowed to wear their favorite baseball cap in class. Or some students may become frustrated with another student's poor English without realizing that the student speaks Portuguese or Chinese at home and is just learning English for the first time. Or some students whose culture values assertiveness and playfulness may become frustrated in their interactions with peers who, because of their cultural upbringing, appear soft-spoken and passive.

In our study, although slightly over half of participants indicated that they often learned about the language of their classmates, few reported that teachers gave information or taught about the races or cultures of their classmates or that classrooms had posters or pictures displaying other cultures. Our findings suggest that teachers in similarly diverse schools must be especially vigilant in their responsiveness to all cultures of their students. Doing so may be even more challenging than, say, to a White teacher in an all-Black school. Teachers need to develop the cultural competence and awareness to address the cultural dynamics among racial and ethnic groups and to educate and include students of all cultures equally and equitably (Bennett, 2002).

Third, study participants attended a "majority-minority" school in which White students were less than one-third of the population, Hispanics 41 %, Blacks 24 %, and 4 % other ethnicities. Almost one-third of students received ELL services, 21 languages were spoken at students' homes, and the majority of students (79 %) were from low-income families. The 16 participants in this study were representative of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the school as a whole; in addition, four students were immigrants, and three different languages were spoken at students' homes (only nine families spoke English at home). In contrast, 78 % of teachers were White, and there were no Hispanic teachers. The cultural dissonance between teachers and students at this school argues for the need to educate and support teachers to practice culturally responsive instruction. Nevertheless, our sample of the school's student population indicated that there was not widespread application of culturally responsive instruction and that students did not feel their race or culture was acknowledged

at school. Our findings corroborate Trent et al.'s (2008) call for more teacher preparation and support in practicing culturally responsive instruction. Teachers need training to prevent adopting a "subtractive cultural assimilation process" (Valenzuela, 2000), in which students are expected to discard their ethnicity when they enroll in school. Failing to acknowledge and accept students' cultural differences and address the cultural dynamics of a school's population exacerbates the already existing vulnerability of ethnic and racial minority students in a dominate White society, perhaps resulting in disengagement and lowered academic performance in school.

## Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Several limitations of this study suggest areas for future research. First, our sample size was small and represented only one school in one metropolitan area. Future studies should include a larger sample of students across schools and geographic areas. Second, although our questionnaire was adapted from the empirical and theoretical literature and from an assessment of culturally responsive practice (i.e., CRTSE; Siwatu, 2005) for which the psychometric properties were established, the validity and reliability of our adapted questionnaire were not tested. Further analysis should be conducted to investigate the psychometric properties of our questionnaire. Third, our data were based only on student self-report. Although student input is critical, no direct observation of culturally responsive practices in the school or of cross-cultural student interactions was reported, although the graduate student provided anecdotal evidence that culturally responsive practices rarely occurred. Future researchers should corroborate student input with measures of direct observation, as well as input from other stakeholders including teachers and parents. Fourth, no comparative data were provided. In the future, researchers should compare findings across schools that represent different racial and ethnic compositions, such as predominately Black schools or schools with a greater White or Asian population. Finally, no information was provided with respect to possible training in culturally responsive practice that teachers at the school may have received prior to the study. Future studies should investigate the effect of training in culturally responsive practice by evaluating schools before and after training or comparing schools that did or did not receive training.

## Conclusion and Implications for Practice

Simply learning about their and classmates' languages in a culturally diverse school or reading about their and other cultures in textbooks is not enough for students to feel that their own race or culture is acknowledged in their school. Teachers must develop the competence and confidence to learn about their students' diverse cultures and ethnicities and the cultural dynamics that exist among students, particularly considering that U.S. schools are rapidly becoming more and more diverse. Teachers need training and ongoing support to bring issues of cultural diversity to the table with students, administration, co-workers, and parents. Students need to feel that their cultural traditions, views, and background are understood and accepted at school and that they do not have to hide their ethnicity when they enter the schoolhouse door. Unspoken fears or resentments across cultural groups need to be brought out into the open

,and students should have opportunities to learn about each others' cultures to prevent feelings of distrust and animosity that may result in violence. The likelihood that a teacher in a public school in the U.S. will be instructing students who are not of her own race or cultural background is extremely high. Pre- and in-service training for teachers in culturally responsive practice is critical to fostering communities of students who feel totally accepted at school, who are knowledgeable of and respectful of each others' diversity, and who are being taught with effective instructional practices likely to promote their academic engagement and achievement.

## References

- Asimeng-Boahene, L., & Klein, A. M. (2004). Is the diversity issue a non-issue in mainstream academia? *Multicultural Education*, 12(1), 47-52.
- Bacon, E., Jackson, F., & Young, K. (2005). Voices of African American boys with behavior problems: Perspectives on schooling. *Multiple Voices*, 8(1), 1-16.
- Balfanz, R., & Legters, N. E. (2004). Locating the dropout crisis: Which high schools produce the nation's dropouts? In G. Orfield (Ed.), *Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis* (pp. 57-84). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Ball, A. F. (2009). Toward a theory of generative change in culturally and linguistically complex classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46, 45-72. doi:10.3102/0002831208323277
- Banks, J. A. (2005). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching* (5th ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Barton, P. E., & Cooley, R. J. (2009). *Parsing the achievement gap II: Policy information report*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Bennett, C. I. (2002). *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice* (5th ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bondy, E., Ross, D. D., Galligane, C., & Hambacher, E. (2007). Creating environments of success and resilience: Culturally responsive classroom management and more. *Urban Education*, 42, 326-348. doi:10.1177/0042085907303406
- Cartledge, G., & Kourea, L. (2008). Culturally responsive classrooms for culturally diverse students with and at risk for disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 74, 351-371.
- Doná, G., & Berry, J. W. (1994). Acculturation attitudes and acculturative stress of Central American refugees. *International Journal of Psychology*, 29, 57-70.
- Gay, G. (2004). The importance of multicultural education. *Educational Leadership*, 61(4), 30-35.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher*, 32(5), 19-25.
- Headden, S. (1997). The Hispanic dropout mystery: A staggering 30 percent leave school, far more than Blacks or Whites. Why? *U.S. News & World Report*, 123(15), 64-66.
- Howard, T. C. (2002). Hearing footsteps in the dark: African American students' descriptions of effective teachers. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 7, 425-444. doi:10.1207/S15327671ES-PR0704\_4
- Hughes, C., Hollander, M. J., & Martinez, A. W. (2009). Hispanic acculturation in a predominately Black high school: Application of an adapted model. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 31, 32-56. doi:10.1177/0739986308329031
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004).
- Kirby, S. N., Berends, M., & Naftel, S. (1999). Supply and demand of minority teachers in Texas: Problems and prospects. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 21, 47-66. doi:10.3102/01623737021001047
- Kohler, A. D., & Lizarin, M. (2007). *Hispanic education in the United States* (Statistical Brief No. 8). Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51, 206-214. doi:10.1177/0022487100051003008
- Markham, P. L., & Gordon, K. E. (2007). Challenges and instructional approaches impacting the literacy performance of English Language Learners. *Multiple Voices*, 10(1 & 2), 73-81.
- Marx, S. (2008). "No blending in": Latino students in a predominantly White school. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 69-88. doi:10.1177/0739986307311906
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2007a). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table\\_7\\_2.asp?referrer=report](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table_7_2.asp?referrer=report)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2007b). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table\\_8\\_2b.asp?referrer=report](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table_8_2b.asp?referrer=report)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2010). *The condition of education: Participation in education*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2010/section1/table-1er-1.asp>
- Nieto, S. (1992). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425, 20 U.S.C. §§ 6301 et seq. (2002).
- Orfield, G. (2009). *Reviving the goal of an integrated society: A 21st century challenge*. Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA. Retrieved from <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/reviving-the-goal-of-an-integrated-society-a-21st-century-challenge/orfield-reviving-the-goal-mlk-2009.pdf>
- Padilla, A. M., & Perez, W. (2003). Acculturation, social identity, and social cognition: A new perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25, 35-55. doi:10.1177/0739986303251694
- Rueda, R., Lim, H. J., & Velasco, A. (2007). Cultural accommodations in the classroom: An instructional perspective. *Multiple Voices*, 10(1 & 2), 61-72.
- Sable, J., Hoffman, L. M., & Garofano, A. (2006). *Characteristics of the 100 largest public elementary and secondary school districts in the United States: 2003-04 statistical analysis report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

- Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, A. C., Karenga Rausch, M., Cuadrado, J., & Chung, C. (2008). Achieving equality in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children, 74*, 264-288.
- Siwatu, K. (2005). *The factors that influence preservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Nebraska, Lincoln.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*, 94-106. doi:10.1177/0022487101052002002
- Southern Education Foundation. (2007). *A new majority: Low income students in the South's public schools*. Atlanta, GA: Author.
- Snyder, T. D. (2009). *Mini-digest of education statistics, 2008* (NCES 2009-021). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009021.pdf>
- Thompson, L. (2008, May 8). Hispanic students at Interlake pull together to graduate. *Seattle Times*. Retrieved from [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document\\_id=2004399964](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document_id=2004399964)
- Trent, S. C., Kea, C. D., & Oh, K. (2008). Preparing preservice educators for cultural diversity: How far have we come? *Exceptional Children, 74*, 328-350.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). *2004 American community survey*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *Issue brief: English Language Learner students in U.S. public schools: 1994 and 2000*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2006). *Public elementary and secondary students, staff, schools, and school districts: School year 2003-04*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Valenzuela, A. (2000). The significance of the TAAS test for Mexican immigrant and Mexican American adolescents: A case study. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 22*, 524-539. doi:10.1177/0739986300224009
- Voltz, D. L., Dooley, E., & Jefferies, P. (1999). Preparing special educators for cultural diversity: How far have we come? *Teacher Education and Special Education, 22*, 66-77.

---

## Authors

**Carolyn Hughes**, Ph.D., is Professor of Special Education and Human and Organizational Development at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. Her research interests are peer support programs for youth at risk and youth with disabilities and self-directed student learning.

**Allison Page** received her M.Ed. in Special Education from Vanderbilt University and is now a Learning Specialist at The IDEAL School of Manhattan in New York City. Her interests are in working with diverse students with disabilities and culturally responsive instruction.

**Donna Y. Ford**, Ph.D., is Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University. Her research interests are gifted education with an emphasis on diverse children and youth, multicultural education, and underachievement of diverse children and youth.

---