

## FACILITATING RESPECTFUL DIVERSITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Zhou (2003) several distinct demographic patterns have emerged since the 1990 Census. First, America's population has grown steadily at 13%, but growth is uneven among its racial/ethnic sub-populations. Overall, we have witnessed stagnant growth in the non-Hispanic White population (3%), moderate growth in the non-Hispanic Black population (21%), and rapid growth in the Hispanic and Asian populations (61% and 69%, respectively) due in large part to the immigration that has accelerated since the 1970s. Additionally, immigrant growth in the suburbs has surpassed the growth in the inner city from 3.5 million to 4.8 million immigrants (Logan, 2003).

Nationally, shifting demographics has challenged professional development programs to prepare teachers, counselors, and administrators to serve a rapidly expanding diverse student body (Klauke, 1989). Further embedded in this challenge, is the understanding of how to better address the needs of the diverse experiences children bring daily to the classroom (Klauke, 1989). Therefore, the consistent shifts in racial and ethnic demographics have profound implications for schools. Consequently, schools must ensure teachers possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to understand and teach an ethnic and culturally diverse student population. However, due to the lack of professional preparation in culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers have often applied inappropriate practices to meet the needs of the diverse students in their classrooms (White-Clark, 2005). Thus, their perceptions of how such students learn and respond to their teaching is often based on a general unfamiliarity with the cultural backgrounds of

students and their communities. Additionally, the concern is how to change teachers and administrator's perception, attitudes, and beliefs so they are empowered to address the needs of the culturally and ethnically diverse student.

Terehoff (2002) believed that when working with teachers, staff developers need to be aware of the essential elements that facilitate adult learning. Planners must consider the experiences that teachers bring, their needs, motivation for learning about diversity, and the design of an appropriate learning environment that support teachers pre, during, and post the staff development experience (Knowles, 1980).

The principles of adult learning are ideal for creating the conditions for a positive teacher professional development experience. The principles suggest that a relaxed, collaborative supportive climate between the teacher and facilitator must be established. Knowles (1980) espoused that mutual respect between the teacher and the facilitator must be established in order for any professional development experience to foster change.

As researchers who have worked with elementary and secondary schools facing shifting student demographics, we have found the popular models of teacher preparation with regard to diversity are on a continuum. One element of the continuum consists of teacher preparation focused on the design of themes and activities that are ethnically and culturally relevant. For example, the celebration of different holidays, food fests, and special assemblies that focuses on diversity. This approach may create a narrow perception of cultural diversity within a school environment and community. A second element on the continuum, consist of teachers self-reflection and re-examination of beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about a population other than their own. This approach may lead to the promotion of stereotyping, bias, blaming, and prejudicial attitudes that

often result in teacher resistance to any culturally diverse professional development experience. The third element is learner centered in which teachers examine student diversity within the context of the school environment and the student's unique cultural background. This approach often leads to change in teacher practices, attitudes, and perceptions about school environment while addressing the needs of a diverse student population.

As researchers we have studied the impact of diversity professional development that fosters teacher and environmental change. We conclude that in order to minimize teacher resistance to change a diversity professional development program should include the following:

- Experiences that engage participants in a re-examination of the definition of cultural diversity,
- Experiences that engage teachers in the identification of the diversity needs within their school,
- Experiences that are responsive to participants and school needs,
- Experiences that provide opportunities for ongoing reflection, and
- Experiences that is delivered within a non-threatening/nonjudgmental environment.

Therefore teachers' must be respected at all times. It is also imperative to understand that any reform initiative can lead to teacher resistance. If the magnitude of the resistance is not understood, this may lead to tension that could impact the outcomes of the professional development experience. Often the resistance comes from professional development experiences where teachers feel blamed and accused of not being ethnically

and culturally sensitive. This conflicts with popular approaches that a diversity professional development experience should begin with self reflection and public re-examination of ones beliefs, attitudes, and perception about groups other than their own. Although the public re-examination of ones beliefs, attitudes, and perception are important, this should not be the first planned experience for any diversity initiative. Initially, the experience should include opportunities for participants to examine and establish a broad definition of cultural diversity that goes beyond race and blaming. Therefore, when planning a diversity professional development experience the design of the program should ensure participants are not seen as the problem but viewed as positive contributors to any change effort. In order to engage teachers as contributing partners they must play a significant role in planning, executing, monitoring, and evaluating the diversity professional development experience. Ultimately, their active participation is vital to the identification of the diversity needs within their school while providing a lens for ongoing reflection, and creating a non-threatening/nonjudgmental respectful environment.

## References

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