

EDUC 310 Teaching in a Diverse Society

# REFLECTIONS ON DIVERSITY AND EDUCATION

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Fall 2008

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# PHILOSOPHY OF DIVERSITY PROJECT

## Introduction

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The first time I considered what diversity really is and what meaning it has in my life, I was concerned with diversity in an academic context. This is where it still has the most meaning and application to me, although, I am now able to recognize its weight and importance in other areas. I know that diversity can be spoken of in terms of its social, political, economic, biological, and environmental implications. However, to me diversity is strongly related to the ways the educational community classifies, instructs, assesses, and provides services to students.

It was sometime in elementary school, near the end of the year when we were so eager for summer to start and hours of monotonous testing to end, when I began a discussion with my parents on the significance of diversity in the world of education. I had just taken my first Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) exam of the year and it had left me with buzzing questions. Long minutes were spent before each assessment in which we would have to bubble in all the information we could about who we were to the people “up top” in charge of deciding our fate with the scores. In the box for ethnicity there were only several choices to choose from: Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic), Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Pacific Islander. At that time there wasn't a bubble for Other. When I came to the choice, I didn't know what to do. The test administrator who came around when I raised my hand looked frustrated and told me to fill in White (non-Hispanic). At the time it felt like a lie, but there wasn't much of a choice. My father is American and my mother is Colombian, but on paper, the mix of the two didn't appear to have an answer. Instead, they were mutually exclusive. Even if there had been a bubble for White/Hispanic, I didn't know how strongly I would identify with that category, either. My ethnicity had never defined who I was before then. However, according to my parents, this identification might someday make a difference in my education or the way others would be analyzed. Whatever I chose, my scores would get thrown in to the mix of statistics. I didn't understand, then, why my such an arbitrary choice would affect how strong my scores would appear compared to others, how much financial aid money I could receive, what colleges I might get into, or how difficult it would be for me to find a job. At that moment, diversity seemed to mean privilege. Only this time, if I performed well enough, it was a privilege to be a minority. I didn't understand the message implied by these benefits, that Latinos generally perform lower in academic assessments than White students, or what implications this had.

My understanding of the meaning of diversity has changed over the years. Other terms have been added to what I associate with the word, including power, difference, prejudice, discrimination, ability, and preference. Emotions have also been added – curiosity, pride, acceptance, appreciation, envy, shame, contempt, isolation, and fear. I believe most of these concepts associated with diversity are learned. They are not natural reactions, but are now rooted in my personal experiences as a result of the significant affects generalizations about diverse groups have had on the organization of society.

Outside of formal discussions, diversity tends to describe only the differences I can observe or discover that make one person different from another, and those that share things in common still

different from others. In this way, diversity doesn't take on labels, but is instead the sum of unique aspects about a person to be uncovered, shared, and adapted. Each person's "diversity" impacts each other person they encounter. Diversity involves qualities that are both inherent in an individual based in their background and experiences, and that are also dynamic in many ways. I remember hearing over the course of this semester a quote by James. A. Banks asserting that cultures are "dynamic, complex, and changing." In my opinion, so are all the parts of a persons identity and interactions between them that pull a person in one direction or another.

In terms of the classroom, my definition of diversity changes to include the characteristics and labels attributed to diverse groups by society that affect our daily interactions with members of both the groups we closely identify with and those whose experiences appear widely different from our own. These include factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, culture, language, ability, family structure, sexual orientation, and other lifestyle choices and interests. When considering the role of the teacher, the sum of all of the unique strengths, interests, perceptions, and experiences each child brings to the classroom, and which will affect a child's learning and interaction with the world around them, contributes to the definition of diversity. The curriculum, instructional strategies, and classroom environment designed must accommodate the different lenses through which the children, as well as the teacher and other members of the school community, are accustomed to seeing the world.

It is important to consider the diversity of students in thinking about different teaching methods in order to ensure equal access to the curriculum for all children. Students will vary in their learning preference, motivating interests, comfort discussing different topics, communication styles, and other aspects of learning and behavior that influence their ability to participate in class, engage in the material, incorporate new information, and apply previous knowledge. It is also important to consider diversity to avoid perpetuating stereotypes, the exclusion or omission of facts, prejudice institutional practices, or misconceptions about diverse groups that are commonly reinforced by textbooks and an ethnocentric curriculum. It is possible to bring about change in the current social structures that oppress the history and the potential of people who do not belong to the majority by encouraging students to appreciate and draw knowledge from diversity around them.

There are five key components that make up my model of diversity awareness and multicultural education. These are; affirming diversity, promoting self-awareness, building bridges, supporting self-actualization, and creating social justice

### ☉ Affirming Diversity

Affirming diversity is the process of acknowledging the unique characteristics of individuals in the classroom and establishing the belief in the ability of each student to achieve through examples that confirm the strengths they bring to the classroom. Denying the variation that exists and individuality restricts the learning of all students. Some children are excluded from the curriculum by not having their needs met to understand and relate to the information presented, while other children are then deprived the opportunity to gain knowledge about the different worldviews represented by their peers and the valuable contributions these views have made in a globalizing society. Delpit summarized the value of affirming diversity in her discussion of the statement made commonly by educators, “I don’t see color, I only see children.” Drawing on her experience as an educator, she asserts that children are made invisible in this way. They have no reasons to see themselves as worthy and capable of any great achievement (Delpit, 177). Students can become disoriented and disillusioned when the teacher, who they see as an authority figure, leaves out the history or contributions to society of people they identify with (Takaki, 16).

Teachers should be encouraged to explore the identity of their students. This process will help them to identify student needs, interests, strengths, and struggles that will inform their planning and instruction. It also helps the teacher develop a greater sense of cultural competency. It is important to recognize that a student’s culture includes not only physical traditions such as foods, holidays, dress, and artistic expressions, but also broader concepts that are shared, such as communication styles, gender role differences, attitudes, symbols, interpretations, values, and family relationships (Nieto, 146). These aspects may have a strong influence on student learning. Teachers may rely on their observations, different forms of assessment, community resources, and the student’s perceptions of themselves.

Students should be encouraged to share their stories in order to strengthen the sense of classroom community. Their personal experiences should be a resource and a foundation for them to build on as they learn, and for others to learn from. Students should be able to relate to at least some of the faces and ideals they see in the curriculum that are like their own. If the things they identify with are continually excluded, the message students receive is that their identity is somehow not important, valuable, or legitimate. When acknowledging the role models and the accomplishments of diverse groups, it is important to seek the truth and fair representation of different perspectives. Looking back in history, it is damaging to alter accounts in order to avoid offending members of the majority. For example, schools should discuss the roots of conquest, slavery, and exploitation in the origins of pluralisms in America. The goal is not to focus on negative images, but to create a truthful representation that explains the struggles various peoples have had to overcome. Students belonging to

these marginalized groups can take pride and encouragement in these achievements, while other students may gain a greater understanding and appreciation for their history.

This guideline encompasses two concepts included in the five dimensions of multicultural education outlined by Banks. First, he describes content integration, or the degree to which teachers are able to use examples and concerns related to variety of cultures and groups. This inclusion helps to demonstrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in a particular subject area or discipline. Another dimension he discusses is prejudice reduction. This requires that instructional activities and plans help students develop positive attitudes toward different cultural groups (Banks, 14).

### ☉ Promoting Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a valuable tool for students to gain respect for themselves as well as respect for one another. It is a foundation of positive relationships and collaboration. It is important to understand what aspects of what we consider “normal” behavior are cultural and what may have different meanings for different people. Identifying what students value, believe, and identify with may help them build a format for evaluating the perceptions of others. All people tend to interpret information and observations by drawing on their own experience. This judgment is made unconsciously and many people simply assume, as a result, their own perspective to be the only way. “Learning to interpret across cultures demands reflecting on our own experiences, analyzing our own culture, examining and comparing varying perspectives. We must consciously and voluntarily make our cultural lenses apparent. Engaging in the hard work of seeing the world as others see it must be a fundamental goal for any mover to reform” (Delpit, 151). Self-awareness incorporates reflection on how an understanding of diversity enriches learning.

Promoting self-awareness helps students evaluate what they know and where they have gathered their beliefs and perceptions of the world. Looking into the past, students can evaluate how they decide, and how society determines, what is true or accurate and what is excluded or omitted. This process helps students clear up some misconceptions and encourages them to seek understanding from first hand experiences or accounts related by members of different groups. Students can admit that they do not like or accept an aspect of another’s culture. Evaluating where their own opinions and behaviors came from, should encourage students to try to at least understand where certain cultural traditions of different groups originated and what significance they have.

As Delpit suggests, students should continue to be allowed to bring in their prior knowledge, their past experience, their own stories (124). Activities that require students to examine themselves from the perspective of someone belonging to another culture or group may help the students gain a lot of insight into their own identity and beliefs. Delpit also encourages teachers to also explore their own experiences, biases, limitations (169). Each individual should also take time to identify the communication barriers that may prevent them from effectively interpreting the ideas of other groups and sharing their own experiences.

There is also a dimension of multicultural education by Banks that discusses self-awareness. He defines the knowledge construction process as the ability of teachers to help students understand and uncover where their cultural assumptions, perspectives, and biases come from. Students become better

prepared to analyze how knowledge is constructed or legitimized, and to understand how these frames of reference influence the way information is presented within different disciplines (Banks, 14).

### ◎ Building Bridges

Building bridges is about forming connections that provide equal access to educational opportunities and which also create opportunities for positive shared experiences. Multicultural education should be present in every aspect of the curriculum and in all instructional strategies. It should also be visible in the interaction between teachers, students, and families. It should define the way a school thinks about the basics of teaching and learning. Diversity education should help build relationships and partnerships that tie together the different worlds students live with their family, community, peers, and educators. These bridges should go in both directions, so that information is mutually shared and able to carefully separate cultural differences from factors inhibiting learning. For example, the language students speak at home may vary from standard English, but it also carries with it a great deal of value. It connects the student to their perception of their world to promote learning, acceptance, and growth for students.

Teachers should be proactive in communicating and getting to know their student's cultural backgrounds. Knowing something about a child's life outside the classroom can help teachers understand and know their strengths. It reduces the risk of "teaching down" to communities that are culturally different. Teachers should own identity and their community belongingness (Delpit, 163). This dialog should not be excluded from the classroom.

Delpit states that "Good teachers are not bound to books and instructional materials, but connect all learning to "real life" (118). Providing students with knowledge about different perspectives and the skills needed to communicate and cooperate in diverse environments is important for enabling students to function in their community, the civic and global culture, and across ethnic cultures beyond the classroom.

"Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, disproportionality in achievement, and the interaction of the staff and the students across ethnic and racial lines are among the components of the school culture that must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups" (Banks, 14). Parents and community guardians can play a vital role in improving classroom management techniques with children who teachers especially struggle with because they do not understand the way ideas are expressed at home. Community resources can also help determine effective instructional strategies to improve learning based on their many years of observation. In turn, the school can help the community by researching the demands of diverse learners outside of the classroom. The school can provide an environment with a greater amount of community resources with the space unused after school hours are over. The school could provide healthcare, an after school daycare or study hall, an open library, resources and workshops for adults, a safe place for young people to gather for events, a food kitchen, and many other services. There are many other ways schools can improve relationships with parents of diverse learners, from translating newsletters to making it a policy to practice showing respect and kindness for all people.

## ☉ Supporting self-actualization

Supporting self-actualization is the process of helping students achieve to their greatest potential and helping them to raise their goals for what they can accomplish. It involves becoming engaged in the process of teaching to student needs and interests. Instruction planning should focus on individual strengths. This guideline falls under what Banks identifies in his five dimensions of multicultural education as equity pedagogy. It is the process of modifying teaching strategies, in ways that will support the academic achievement of students from diverse groups. A variety of teaching styles should be used to target particular learning styles associate with these groups (Banks, 14).

This concept is also known as differentiated instruction. This idea was developed by combining what research from a variety of fields has discovered about how students learn best and to teach them best. It is a commitment to recognize and plan according to student differences. This goal requires teachers and their instruction to be flexible. There must be continual and accurate formal and informal assessment to determine what student needs are and where they believe they belong. Teachers can not expect student identities to remain static. They will grow as the student gains more experience with other ideologies and cultures. Children, and adult, identities are “fluid, negotiated, socially constructed, imagined, and invented” (Takaki, 28). Tasks should be respectful and appropriate for a student’s age, ability, and learning preference.

Teachers must be extremely careful not to misinterpret a student’s ability or intent as a result of different styles of language use or patterns of interaction. Students should ask for administrative and parental support in evaluating a students needs. Educators should also be wary of using labels that have negative connotations or that promote “dumbing down” the curriculum for lower expectations. When differences exists between the students’ culture and the school’s culture, teachers should also research appropriate styles of instruction, expression of authority, and discipline that are in common with community norms. (Delpit, 167).

## ☉ Creating Social Justice

My guidelines for diversity education support each of Nieto’s seven characteristics of multicultural education. Nieto states that multicultural education is antiracist education, basic education, important for all students, pervasive, a process, and involves critical teaching methods (Nieto, 346). Above all, I agree with Nieto that multicultural education is education for social justice. Students should be encouraged and shown how to take direct action, using the knowledge and respect for other identities they’ve gained, to promote positive change in their communities. The goal should not be to target a group of privileged people. It should be to raise the standards for all diverse groups and to counter dominance and oppression as social problems. Teachers should help students gain the knowledge they need to make informed decisions, find the motivation they need to care that change occurs, and then research strategies and implement them in a successful action.

Race is a human construction (Banks, 80). Prejudice is a term used to describe the attitudes and beliefs of individuals about entire groups of people. Discrimination, however, is the actuality, or action, that results from prejudice. It includes any negative or destructive behaviors that can result in denying some groups life's necessities as well as the privileges, rights, and opportunities enjoyed by other groups (Nieto, 34). Racism is discrimination that has been legitimized by society through laws, institutional practices, and culturally accepted beliefs that defend social advantages based on race (Nieto, 35). In my philosophy of multicultural education, diversity should be a recognized part of our history as a nation, even in these terms, that has increased the ways in which people perceive and address concerns in our society.

I think it is important for teachers to actively counter institutional racism and stereotypes by critically evaluating the curriculum and various resources for instruction. It is important for teachers, and community members, to have a voice in appropriate policies. Delpit argues that teachers need to allow discussions of oppression to become a part of the language and works used in the classroom. (Delpit, 165) Teachers can also work to discourage censorship of diverse sources or literature that pervades perspectives that are excluded from mainstream discussions.

Multicultural ed challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect...Multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice" (Nieto, 346).

## Examples of Teaching Practices

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To realize my philosophy of diversity, it would be essential to establish a rules early in the year in which students understand that they will be working on different activities according to their individual needs and that discussions of personal experiences and differences should remain respectful. I would have to have many activities that create a strong sense of classroom community.

It would also be important to analyze why students are performing a certain way in class and adjust instruction according to their diverse needs. The first step would be to recognize what problems they face, what facts or expectations are involved, and how they impact a student in a variety of ways. The next step would be to reframe the problem by identifying the assumptions, values, or beliefs do individuals involved hold true and where each side has a common ground. The instructor would then be required to search for alternatives. This involves researching what the professional literature says, what alternatives might be used, and what the short and long term consequences will be. The final step would be to develop and implement a plan of action, including determining what criteria will be used to evaluate progress. Assistance could take the form of altering the physical space to accommodate student health concerns or providing additional vocabulary resources for English language learners.

The game attached gives specific examples of how I could assist students with diverse needs in a classroom following my philosophy of education. The start and finish of the game convey the sense of urgency now placed on students and teachers to “finish first” – or to accomplish the impossible task of achieving all standards all of the time with every student. As players or “students” progress along the game they will encounter different methods of teaching that move them closer and closer to a classroom that follows my philosophy of education. At the bottom, practices that ignore or stereotype diverse groups of students are found. These include the “Bowling Theory” and “Tracking”. Neither are constructive methods of ensuring all student needs are being met and students are gaining an appreciation of diversity. Students roll a dice to start the game. They move the number of spaces shown on the dice. The color squares represent different factors of diversity the students will identify with for that square. There are four colored cards that list these identifiers. Each time a player rolls the dice, moves, and lands on a square, they will pick up a plain white card. These give situations of what might happen in class that day. If the instructional strategy would help address one of their individual needs based on what color “diversity” square they were on, the student moves ahead two spaces. If not, they move ahead only one space. If a player lands on a square with a ladder, they climb up only if the card they draw will particularly help them. If they land on a square with a slide, they do not draw a card, and must slide down. The student who reaches the “finish line” first is the first to accomplish all their goals for the year and meet the state standards. You must play until every student reaches the finish line.

## Personal Goals

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In the process of defining my own personal identity, I immediately joined several cultural, interest focused, and linguistic diversity organizations on and near campus. These organizations are becoming increasingly popular parts of most institutions today. I think wherever I go it would be beneficial for me to remain active in these discussions in order to continue to expand my awareness about diversity. Clubs and committees are great ways to become exposed to different ideas and perspectives people have, to conduct and share research, and to work on plans for promoting change. In looking into what resources are available to teachers, there are also several journals I could subscribe to that would keep me informed about recent debates and policies affecting the services available to meet diverse student needs.

“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.” (Delpit, 167)

I have learned a lot over the course of this semester about the different factors that make up a student's identity and the diversity of student needs. I know my understanding about the diverse needs will improve when I have the opportunity to observe children I am in continual contact with. I will develop more efficient strategies for helping students reach their full academic potential through trial and error of adjusting different methods that are based on well researched results to the students I work with.

“I have found that if I want to learn how best to teach children who may be different from me, then I must seek the advice of adults—teachers and parents—who are from the same culture as my students.” (Delpit, 102)

There are a few areas that I am already anxious about encountering in a classroom setting with high school children. Taking action to address the needs of students who are less participatory in class will be challenging for me because I can relate to the discomfort that can be caused when participation conflicts with personal values of what is appropriate to discuss. I am also concerned that, although I may observe student diversity and be genuinely interested in my student's backgrounds, I may not give enough support. I generally have not identified strongly with many of the categories of diversity that can affect learning. I may assume certain conditions are not important for students whose lives, and learning, are really greatly affected by them. I had trouble planning time appropriate lessons this semester. I feel like I might not leave enough time to catch student difficulties or determine the source of some student misconceptions.

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Banks, J. A. (2002). *An introduction to multicultural education*. (3rd Ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.

Nieto, S. (2004). *Affirming diversity* (4th Ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Steinberg, S. (2001). *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Taylor, L. S. (Eds.). (2009). *Bridging multiple worlds: Case studies of diverse educational communities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Takaki, R. (1993). *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. New York: Little, Brown & Co.

Takaki, R. (1998). *A Larger Memory: A History of our Diversity, With Voices*. New York: Little, Brown & Co.

## NOTES ON EXCEPTIONALITY

The list below contains ideas to remember when working with children who exhibit various kinds of exceptionalities:

- In hoping to create an inclusive classroom setting, the best way to become comfortable and fluent in talking about diversity will be through genuine relationships where I am able to learn how to talk to and about people who I perceive as different. This type of learning will help me think critically about my initial assumptions or judgments.<sup>1</sup>
- The goal of an inclusive classroom is not to pretend differences don't exist, but to develop the language and skill to discuss diversity. A safe classroom environment has to be one where talking about diversity is not avoided, discouraged, or considered inappropriate.<sup>1</sup>
- Some tips for facilitating classroom discussion on diversity require teachers to research what the current issues and perspectives are concerning different groups and using outside resources the children encounter, the news, community setting, or media, as a starting point for conversations on the background of different cultures, or the forms and effects of discrimination.<sup>1</sup>
- Children are often in a better situation to confront people and situations that frighten, surprise, or confuse even adults. Inclusive settings can guide their natural tendency engage with new things in their world and look for answers. They learn how to ask questions respectfully and how to listen well to the answers – communication skills that will help them throughout life.<sup>1</sup>
- A powerful way to fight apathy is by helping students make connections between their lives and those of others, creating personal connections, and giving them opportunities to make a difference in whatever ways they can.<sup>1</sup>
- “Keep in mind that your students will remember only some of what you taught them but everything about how they felt in your classroom.”<sup>1</sup>
- Students with significant special needs can be included in general education classes in a school where there is a supportive environment, resources and offices centered on addressing inclusion, and strong teamwork between teachers, administrators, and parents.<sup>2</sup>
- One approach to helping Special-need students is allowing them to take electives that are supplemental to the content areas they are studying. In these courses, students who need to improve certain skills can work with materials that are designed to support their core classes rather than traditional skill improvement oriented classes that give more work to a student already struggling. The classes should allow the students to gain credits, so that they can move forward at the same pace as most of their classmates, while receiving the help and support they need, and graduate with their friends and peers.<sup>2</sup>
- It is really a great opportunity more educators are now able to experience, to teach diverse learners in their classrooms. It is widely recognized that special need students have a right to be in general-education classes, and, there are more and more resources to help give teachers the right materials for each individual learner. There are many resources for teachers to seek new skills to help all students have the same opportunities, including coaching from local colleges and also staff development programs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sapon-Shevin, Mara. Learning in an Inclusive Community. *Educational Leadership*, 66(1), 49-53

<sup>2</sup> Ruder, Suzy. We Teach All. *Educational Leadership*, 58(1), 49-51

- Students with disabilities, including learning, attention, and behavior problems, can have trouble with organization in all grade levels. Teachers can help by emphasizing and actively showing students how to improve their organizational skills and why it is important. These students also benefit from routines and consistency in the classroom.<sup>3</sup>
- Prompts, picture cues, colors, and symbols can be used to help students with learning and attention problems remember and find the materials they will need, what order to complete tasks, where to turn in assignments, and how to organize objects and ideas.<sup>3</sup>
- Assignment folders and classroom notebooks are also good tools for helping students remember materials if they have pockets for pencils and things, organize coursework and assignments, and learn time management. But students will need regular guidance and encouragement from everyone to keep their folders and notebooks organized.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hillman, Elgen H.. Improving the Organizational Skills of Students with Learning and Attention Problems. *Council for Exceptional Children*. Accessed: Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008.  
<<http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=7517>>

## RESPONSES TO AN ESSAY ON EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Lisa D. Delpit developed many points in her essay *Education in a Multicultural Society: Our Future's Greatest Challenge* that I think would be useful to keep in mind as I develop my own philosophy of diversity.<sup>1</sup> To list a few:

- Incorporate different viewpoints and perspectives. It is important that students from diverse backgrounds can see images of themselves in the material they learn and of individuals like them who have become successful.
- Include appropriate questions that address the issues of race, ethnicity, prejudices, and achievement in a format that is relevant to what the students experience in the everyday lives.
- Provide instruction that includes a variety of different approaches that address different learning styles and interests
- Observe differences in the styles of language students use and interactional patterns
- Use styles of interactional patterns or discipline that are not at odds with community norms, and recognizing student perceptions of the teacher and the teacher's power
- Take care when analyzing a student ability, not to penalize some for different cultural uses of language, gender roles, or beliefs about what ideas are appropriate to communicate
- Provide adequate instruction, appropriate contexts for tasks, opportunities to display their knowledge, and encouragement for all students by avoiding the use of stereotypes to inform teaching and decisions on meeting different student needs
- Avoid the tendency to assume shortfall in students based on research focusing on failure linked to socioeconomic status, cultural difference, and home environments, and instead seek out and teach to student strengths
- Allow students who are gifted in real-life settings to show their knowledge and skills by assigning tasks that have meaningful contexts, with the level of explicit instruction required for each learner – avoid under-teaching
- Make a conscious effort to understand the realities which some parents live in and the different ways in which parents can show concern for their children – rely on families and communities as a resource for understanding who a student is and what they need to succeed
- Ensure that the curriculum represents the intellectual achievements of people from diverse groups, and hold equal expectations for achievement for all students
- Encourage children to see their self-worth by acknowledging their color, background, ethnicity, strengths, or other differences
- (Favorite quote from the essay.... “work like the dickens” (p.181))

The greatest message I will take away from Delpit's essay *Teacher's Voices* is that students belonging to minority groups are the most reliable and knowledgeable “experts” on their individual learning experiences and backgrounds. The classroom should be a welcoming place for students to rely on and share their personal stories, sources of motivation, and preferences. It should be recognized that each individual, regardless of their socially constructed label or personally defined identity, can benefit from these narratives. I liked the use of the quote by John Dewey, “the greatest asset in the student's possession – the greatest, moreover that will ever be in his possession – is [his] own direct and personal experience.” Story telling helps create a stronger classroom community and builds on both the teacher's

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<sup>1</sup> Delpit, Lisa D. “Education in a Multicultural Society: Our Future's Greatest Challenge.” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 61, No. 3, Africentrism and Multiculturalism: Conflict or Consonance. (Summer, 1992), pp. 237-249.

and students' cultural competency. It can be a way to remove the separation and alienation that develops between teachers in schools and the community.

However, I don't agree with Delpit's notion that an individual can be an "expert" for the entire group they identify with. In general, I have thought that it was ok to keep certain expectations in mind to guide teachers in addressing the different concerns of different groups. Now, I see that it is detrimental to assume any one expert opinion or perspective for an entire group. The multiple identities case analysis assignment we completed this semester showed that various identities can interact to effect a student's educational experiences, and each has to be taken into account on an individual bases. I think it is better to just learn the strategies that help address the needs of certain factors that influence identity and apply them as needed to individuals encountered in the classroom, rather than to try to apply certain identities to entire groups.

I recognized many of the concerns brought up in the interviews on the issue of cultural diversity education in teacher preparation experiences, and I think these are also important to keep in mind. Often when I hear of low Hispanic achievement and other issues that plague Latino youth in my education classes, I remove myself from that particular label. In my experience, it is not uncommon for cultural diversity awareness programs to begin with the positive notion of asserting that each individual brings a variety of unique needs and interests to the table, that we are all diverse. Then slowly these different identities in the classroom are removed, narrowed to only a few, and then studied from the perspective of the majority. I was surprised the first time I was encouraged to consider the influence of my White privilege, power, guilt, and responsibility on my life and relationships with others. These types of activities establish the point of view of the majority for the entire class. This makes it easier to then evaluate the perspective, experiences, and trends related to "others" by quoting various "expert" sources. I think this is a subtle form of discrimination we need to be careful of when preparing future teachers. It creates an environment where it is intimidating to speak from an outside perspective. Minority students are taught that their experiences and stories are not legitimate because they are not discussed to a point where understanding is reached the way other published evidence would be.

I have struggled often this year with Delpit's writing style in that she frequently contradicts her own argument. For example, she speaks out against the use of labels, stereotypes, prejudice practices, and low, generalized expectations toward African American and Native students. However, she then does the reverse by categorizing the behaviors of all White teachers or members of the majority in society. For example in this essay she assumes the influences on teaching styles of White teachers is consistently external based on a study of only fifteen individuals. I think if restrictive labels are to be removed or redefined, they need to be addressed for all groups.

## RESPONSES TO AN ESSAY ON THANKSGIVING DAY LESSONS

The chapter, “The Truth about the First Thanksgiving”, presents Loewen’s observations of the common misconceptions students hold true about the early settlement of Europeans in the Americas<sup>1</sup>. His research, then, tells the story of several “settlement” events, prior to the founding of the Plymouth colony in 1620, dating all the way back to the migration from Asia around 30,000 B.C.. In this short summary, he touches on the subjects of Spanish, French, and Dutch exploration, existing Native culture and population levels, the influence of the plagues that destroyed the Native way of life across the country, the regional differences in the relationships between Native peoples and European settlers, and the variable characteristics and intents of the pilgrims and other passengers onboard the Mayflower.

The author criticizes many history textbooks by outlining the methods used to filter the telling of the first Thanksgiving story commonly found in their accounts. He discredits their accounts of the wilderness the early settlers encountered and exposes the inconsistent estimates used to convey the size and strength of the Native populations. He accuses authors of history books of not thoroughly studying the literature, while presenting their explanations as facts to be learned. Text books tend to avoid including evidence for topics that may have various possibilities or are controversial. Loewen states that this approach prevents students from understanding the “reasoning, arguments, and weighing of evidence that go into social sciences.” Loewen also introduces the idea of “dominance through mentioning”, in which text book writers mention ideas to prevent them from being accused of omitting certain information or perspectives, but are able to bury these facts in other descriptions, ensuring students will not remember them well. Another problem he found in many textbooks, was the inclination to exaggerate, focus, or paint certain people and events in a favorable light. American exceptionalism implies that throughout American history there have been social and political undertakings that were never before imagined. The stories become highly ethnocentric when members of the current majority are viewed as infallible in history, so as not to be offensive. The pilgrims were portrayed as “pure of heart’, hard working, and righteous. He quotes Moore, “Textbooks tend to neglect to analyze the profit motive underlying much of our history.” Loewen also criticized current traditions, that were not initiated by the pilgrims, for transforming the observance of Thanksgiving to a celebration of myth, marginalizing Indians, portraying false images or generalizations, promoting ethnocentrism, and taking on an ideological meaning.

After reading this chapter, I think a good way for teachers to approach this event would be to present students with several primary documents and first hand accounts, from different sources or view points, of the pilgrims’ first year at Plymouth and have them construct the story by piecing together the diverse perspectives. I think Loewen’s philosophy of diversity would contain the inclusion of multiple perspectives into the curriculum, respect for modern, individual interpretations and cultural perspectives, pursuit of truth and accuracy, inquiry into the source of our knowledge and perceptions, and establishment of a community environment that welcomes debate and enables constructive discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Loewen, J. (2007) *The Truth about the First Thanksgiving, Lies my teacher told me: Everything you American History textbook got wrong* (pp. 70-92). Simon and Schuster: New York.

## BOOK REVIEW: A CHILDHOOD IN TWO WORLDS

Loung Ung's novel, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*, is a story of the author's struggle as a child to adapt to life in America while trying to escape her memories of violence and loss after fleeing Cambodia in the years following the Khmer Rouge<sup>1</sup>. The chapters alternate between the voice of Loung as she recalls her childhood and experiences from journals and other memories, and the translation and interpretation she provides to tell the story of her sister, Chou, gathered from interviews fifteen years after their separation.

Orphaned by the war, Loung left her homeland at the age of ten with her brother and his wife to take the dangerous journey to a refugee camp in Thailand and, ultimately, to Essex Junction, Vermont with the sponsorship of the Holy Family Church. There she attended an intermediate school and public high school where her only responsibilities were to care for her neices and to be a good student. She received a scholarship to attend Saint Michel's College and, at twenty-five, she was ready to return to Cambodia. There Loung uncovered and pieced together the life she could have had through the eyes of her older, gentle sister.

Chou lived in the household of her uncle Leang with her two surviving brothers who remained in Cambodia. Chou worked hard to help the family survive in a village in the countryside with no running water, no electricity, no doctors, and no government that could promise their safety. She was unable to attend school, although she desperately wanted to become educated and to have more opportunities. She was later given an arranged marriage which brought her love and children. She worked successfully as an accountant when the family was able to move closer to the city with help from their brother in America. Chou looked forward to each word and visit she was able to receive from her family.

Throughout the book, the experiences of Loung and Chou reflect the importance of family, history, religion, language, identity, and education. In the case of Loung, whether she resented or respected these aspects of her past was shaped by her present immigration, health, poverty, and sense of security. Initially, Loung resented her history, language, appearance because they marked her as different. At the store, her brother told her they must feel ashamed of taking government food stamps. However, he was comfortable not speaking English in public. She had no bedroom of her own to invite her friends to and was painfully aware of her salvation army clothes. She felt alone amongst American children who are unaware of her homeland, her suffering, and the challenges she faced. Loung wanted desperately to be seen as "normal". She watched the fragile girls on the television and the interaction between her best friend and her American mother, and envied them. Her fluency in English prevented her from joking with her friends or retaliating to insults from students who prayed on her mistakes.

On the other hand, Loung loved her family and

One theme the author used to explain experiences, emotions, and choices of the people woven into her story was the relationship between humans and animals, and their shared need to be perfectly adapted to the environment to survive. Loung remembers the faces of the character's she meets by giving them the name of an animal with similar qualities. In her first experiences in America, she is able to relate the new culture with her life in Cambodia through the animated world of cartoons. Chou prays according to, and questions, Buddhist teachings of her father and believes in the ability of human beings to be born again in a different life form.

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<sup>1</sup> Ung, Loung. (2005). *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*. New York: HarperPerennial.

## READING LOG RESPONSES

1. In chapter 8 of *Bridging Multiple Worlds*, the authors quote Kagan in saying, “the education of children cannot be separated from their care.” Educational performance can be greatly influenced by a child’s residence, nutrition, access to resources, health care, and the educational level, marital status, and employment of their parents. Low income children are especially at risk of disability, substance abuse, lack of daycare, exposure to environmental toxins, abuse, and neglect. For this reason I will remember how important it is for teachers to know what groups are most susceptible to periodic and sustained poverty, and how to identify signs of children growing up in low income households, migrating, or living without any place to call home. Also in the chapter, teachers are recommended to work with the school, community, government, and families to ensure that a child’s basic needs are met before being able to fully assess and address problems with a child’s ability to meet their demands – including certain skills, expenses, previous knowledge or experiences, supplies, and family involvement. As an educator, I think it is important to keep in mind how a lack of stability in life can cause children to experience stress, resentment, aggravation, and self-deprecation. These emotions may cause children to have trouble with language, memory, cognitive, and normal social development.

2. The title of the chapter, “Work doesn’t work” applies to Christie’s struggle with the realization that, once at the low-income level, hard worker resulted in fewer benefits and a greater loss of needed support. For example, when she received a raise of ten cents an hour working at the YWCA’s child-care center, 10 dollars were deducted from her food stamps a month, making it hard to catch up. Her everyday time and spending was dictated by the bureaucracies of welfare agencies and legislation. The programs offered by government groups, industries, and charities to train her and give her incentives to work left her in jobs that did not pay enough to replace the housing and food assistance she was eligible for before. They offered no benefits and no opportunities to move into to better positions with better pay. Christie was limited in her job search by her failure to complete college, a tight schedule, and two children. Christie’s story helps to reinforce the need for services and improvements that help adults continue education and receive vocational training to transition to new jobs. The story also argues that companies, employers, and the government must find a way to secure, for all workers, decent wages that allow individuals to support a family, especially those who work in jobs that are necessary to sustain the community or society. It is too common that people who receive low income are misjudged, misrepresented, or misguided in our culture. For me, the key message from this story was that parents who are at the low-income or poverty line, or who are unemployed or homeless, may have made some misjudgments in navigating the complicated systems in society, but in general they work very hard, have little time or luxuries, are not proud of receiving aid in its current forms, and care greatly about their children and their children’s education.

3. In Chapter 9, “Dreams” from *The Working Poor*, Shipler offers the quote, “Poverty or near poverty is not a problem, it is an array of interlocking problems.” Children in poverty often begin with high and noble dreams, however, they find few role models in either their communities or society. One problem with poverty and education is resentment and miscommunication between teachers, parents, and schools. Each blame the other for difficulties low income children have engaging in their classes and studies. Stereotypes and disagreements over the best methods of teaching the subjects and discipline can create a hostile environment. The parents of children in poverty can also be so busy trying to provide the basic needs for their family, they do not have time to be involved in school, even when they deeply care about their child’s educational future and success. There is also confusion between teachers and students. Teachers view students as having unrealistic dreams and lazy attitudes

toward accomplishing their goals. While students can feel culturally separated from their teachers, disrespectful, or intimidated of asking for feedback.

Another common problem is the distracting and debilitating effects poverty has on children's ability to participate in school. Students may show up hungry, sick, or exhausted from constant movement and an unpredictable home life. These students cannot see the importance of schoolwork over these basic needs and may suffer barriers to mental and social development. Children may also be fighting for attention at school they don't receive at home. This usually takes the form of discipline problems that are difficult to direct in a positive way. School itself can often be a problem. The state often funds school programs based on local property taxes. Schools in low-income level districts are then limited in resources, proper maintenance, and skilled teachers. Students see the disparity between their situation and experience of others and become discouraged.

Classrooms can fail to encourage students to see all the steps along the way to reaching their dreams. Without strong guidance their immediate needs for tomorrow – working and a secure source of income – take priority and education loses its purpose. The standardization of assessment, content coverage, and teaching methods has also decreased the frequency that instruction is tailored to meet the individual needs of diverse and low-income students. In schools from districts with minimal funding, students in poverty are often held to much lower standards and are not able to master the most basic skills. These problems collectively work to deter students from poverty-stricken communities from their childhood dreams, beliefs in the value of continued education, and respect for school staff and decision makers. These children become trapped in the same jobs and the same marginal standards of living as they grew up with. The cycle continues for them with few escapes, unless the student is able to excel in sports, entertainment, or overcome all the obstacles to their degree.

4. “It seems as if leaders...find it difficult to develop the vocabulary to discuss the issues in ways in which teachers with differing perspectives can hear them and participate in the dialogue. Progressive white teachers seem to say to their black students, “Let me help you find your voice. I promise not to criticize one note as you search for your own song.” But the black teachers say, “I’ve heard your song loud and clear. Now, I want to teach you to harmonize with the rest of the world.” Their insistence on skills is not a negation of their students’ intellect, as is often suggested by progressive forces, but an acknowledgement of it...” – Delpit, Lisa, 2006, *Other People’s Children*

This passage in the first essay by Lisa Delpit addresses the disagreement between teachers from different backgrounds on what instructional approach is best for minority children to learn. On one side, member of the progressive majority argue that it is important merely to encourage struggling children from low-income or minority neighborhoods to gain “fluency”, or the willingness to learn and the ability to be comfortable creating new works of their own, in academic areas such as literacy. Others argue that many children have already reached this level of critical and creative thinking, but that this is overlooked because of miscommunications between teachers and minority students, and what these children are urgently in need of is the technical skills necessary to succeed in the mainstream culture and to continue their education.

A key point raised in Chapter 2 of Taylor and Whittaker’s *Bridging Multiple Worlds* is the importance of understanding cultural differences when choosing methods of teaching diverse students. They refer to Delpit’s idea that it is necessary to involve adults who share the culture of poor children and children of color when constructing the best educational environment for these students. They also note that skills should be presented to children in the context of both their individual worlds and the mainstream culture, or culture of power. The chapter also outlines efforts to develop successful methods of instruction and assessment, not only by teachers and social scientists, but by national, state, and local organizations. As a teacher I believe it will be valuable to be sensitive to the private lives of

the students and to make connections between classroom material and the families and communities they live in.

5. I believe the most challenging population trend for schools is what Lapkoff and Li refer to as “The Varied Home Front”. I think that the growing disparities and inequalities in terms of access to economic and social resources between the white majority and low-income minorities has the greatest effect on children’s performance in school. I think it will become necessary for schools to play a major role in supporting and initiating change in the communities they serve and creating equal opportunities for children that are both outside the classroom and home, such as after school programs. I think that the effect family settings have on children’s academic success will be a motivating factor to initiate discussions on how to address a broader range of issues that effect the lives of students both in and outside of the classroom, such as violence, poverty, abuse, and fair employment opportunities. Creating a secure and more stable environment in schools may help to improve relationships between teacher, students, and the local community.

6. “You’re gonna realize that you got to learn from day one...and education will never end. It’s only when you stop it and... I realize now... But see, me , I never really had somebody to push me.” – Paul Chavez

It is valuable to remember that education is a lifelong process that will continue long after standardized test scores are reported and diplomas are handed out. This quote reminds me to always think in terms of individual achievement and experiences. Paul Chavez was a young Chicano and Mexican American. He grew up in a single parent household without a strong father figure. He fought for both “respect” and “to make something of himself”. For several years he was expelled from school and chose to live his life as part of a gang. In the end he returned to an alternative program school that offered more resources, teachers who believed in his ability to persist and succeed, and that focused on discouraging gang involvement. I think Paul’s strongest message to teachers is that they should talk with students to try to understand their perspective and, also, to involve parents in the educational process as much as possible for an added sense of support, love, and motivation.

## MULTIPLE IDENTITIES GRAPHIC ORGANIZER 1

Two Identities: Emotionally Disturbed and Poor

MY ROLE: Michael's Teacher

	CHARACTERISTICS (physical, mental, emotional descriptions of things the student may bring with them into the classroom)	NEEDS (based on the characteristics having to meet in the classroom)
<p><b>ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT</b></p>	<p>Michael and his brothers were able to receive transportation to remain at the same elementary school after entering temporary housing with his mother, so Michael has not had to drastically change school environments during the transfer between the custody of his father and mother. However, during last year his grades were falling behind, so Michael has been placed in a "self-contained special education" class with only eight students, so he can benefit from direct help from myself and the assistant teacher. Michael appears to have a lot of potential to succeed in his classes, if he could only control his anger. At times he can be kind and inquisitive. He is also a leader in the classroom, although, he does not always set good examples. He has frequent outbursts of inappropriate behavior and has to leave the classroom in the middle of activities or instruction time to go to the therapeutic social worker's office. For example, one day he refused to do his work, threw his book on the floor, and left the room. In these situations he receives counseling and is then able to return to class, however, it interrupts his academic progress greatly.</p>	<p>There are a lot of changes and coming to school physically and emotionally adjusting directly address is his academic improvement helping him realize the importance of setting academic goals and invest thought into being able to see how his work relates to his connections with positive aspects of his life. There are so many other real and important things he naturally want to address basic needs like belonging, and may have trouble focusing on his coursework and receiving good grades. The school may actually help bring some structure to his environment with consistency and things he can control in his life, so I think it is important that academic success is something he can achieve through organization, strong study skills, and a desire to gain some confidence by performing well compared to his peers, graduating from elementary school into regular classes in the middle school.</p> <p>Michael's mother, Sue Wilson, is struggling to support and her children. Living below the poverty line and assistance in acquiring the basic supplies for the classroom. It is important that, as a teacher, I provide important resources and that his parents are supportive of academic improvement.</p> <p>Teachers, administrators, and other staff have high expectations of Michael and his family. These issues will need to be discussed and addressed in Michael's learning experience and support for academic progress and are willing to work together free of discrimination.</p>
<p><b>SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT</b></p>	<p>Michael is unable to control his temper. His emotions and behavior are unstable. At the school, he has been classified as emotionally disturbed. He visits the office of the classroom therapeutic social worker for crisis counseling when his behavior is out of line. There, in an isolated and calm environment, he seems to be able talk through what was wrong and how he should respond in a similar situation. However, he seems to forget quickly and has trouble going three days in a row without another incident. Many people in the school community have become involved in Michael's behavior contract. They hope to show him that he will be rewarded for his good behavior, but that bad behavior will have negative consequences.</p> <p>I am not sure how Michael feels about his placement in the school. He may want to join the regular classes. Being grouped with only a small number of special education students may show Michael that the school believes he is not capable of interacting with more of his peers or understanding his assignments. In the larger, regular classes he may hope to make more friends. His temporary housing situation does not always allow him to make many permanent</p>	<p>Michael's experiences outside of school are affecting his developing healthy social skills. He has experienced abuse may have taught him that it is normal for everyone. Michael needs a learning environment. The school is hoping that he will benefit from the small group setting of his current placement. He needs a lot of continuing guidance and support with his feelings and how to build long-term relationships. He needs opportunities to play with people both inside and outside the shelter. He may need more group work to help him productively relieve his desire to interact. He will need to be able to talk one-on-one about his ideas, wants, and personal goals. We as a team of us working at the school care about Michael and want to learn to respect the authority of the school.</p>

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

friendships with kids his own age at home, and at the shelter many of the children are going through similar struggles and may not be able to offer Michael very much emotional support. Michael may also be struggling to feel accepted because of he lives in poverty. Before the shelter, Michael had trouble having clean clothes to bring to school. He may see that he does not have a lot of things the other students in his classes do.

Many of Michael's emotional problems may come from his situation at home. Michael does not like living at the Family Inn. The shelter offers him little freedom, privacy, or opportunity to explore and meet other children. His teachers feel like this is an improvement for Michael. At the shelter he is able to receive counseling, education, and mental health services to help him cope with the domestic violence he has experienced in his family for much of his life. Michael directs a lot of his anger towards his parents. Michael lashes out at his mother for leaving her three children behind after her divorce with her husband five years ago. He is now struggling to trust Sue and reconnect with her. Michael is inconsistent with his reactions to his father. At times he is able to admit that his father abused him, but at other times he refuses to. He wants to look up to his father, but he is unsettled by how often his father's words did not match his actions. Michael has had few positive role models in his life.

Michael lives in a city. He spent five years in a two bedroom apartment with his two brothers and an abusive father. The apartment was a crowded structure that qualified for "section 8 reimbursement" (was in need of structural repair). Other students from the elementary school have also lived in this environment. Michael and his brothers have since moved to the Family Inn to live with their mother. She did not have money to afford an apartment in the city. The shelter allows the Michael to have clean clothes, a heated room, and a good dinner. His family receives vouchers to shop at Wal-Mart and can attend community service events and school meetings. However, he does not like living there. There is only one room for the family to share, so the boys have little privacy. They have less freedom because there are strict rules to follow. They can not eat in the room, instead food is brought to them by the staff, and Michael is still always hungry. The playroom closes at four in the afternoon, so he has little time to spend with the other children when he returns from school. The shelter is also not a permanent place to live, in essence the family is still homeless, so Michael may expect to move again.

The school Michael attends is located at the heart of a working class neighborhood in the city. At school Michael has been placed in a small class of only eight students. When a crisis emerges, such as when his behavior becomes inappropriate, the classroom therapeutic social worker is able to take him to a separate office where they can discuss the problem. This helps create a private, quiet, and calming atmosphere where he can work out what he wants to say and take some time before returning to the classroom. However, Michael is currently in a hospital where he will be unable to attend class for a while.

Michael may be experiencing emotional conflict associated with the divorce of his parents five years ago. He lived for five years with an emotionally, physically, and drug abusive father. He was raised during this time by his older brother Joseph. He is now adjusting to living in the custody of his mother. He feels as though she abandoned him for those five years, and so, although he chooses to live with her, he is angry at her for leaving him and his brothers when she moved to a different state following the divorce. At the Judge's orders, his mother was only able to reunite with her children one at a time. Michael may resent that he was reclaimed second. Michael struggles with his feelings towards his father. Some days he is very angry blames his father for abusing the boys, and other days he takes back his accusations. Meanwhile he is trying to learn to trust his mother again, but he can see that she is not always in control of their lives. Her state of poverty causes her to live in a shelter where she can not even decide when or how much her children eat or get to play.

The community is fairly supportive of Michael. The communal living

**FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT**

Michael is one of many children in without a permanent home. Michael his education. He will need sleep, him to be able to concentrate on his School Lunch Program and other from a more full service school than Stress and instability in his life may development. He will need extra help control. The communal housing could privacy. He may need a quiet place completing his assignments and work. In addition, he may need extra time problems at home.

I think one of Michael's greatest need security. He needs a safe classroom of community, where the students open discussions, and build friendships would prevent him from feeling alone needs a school that can provide a safe centered on addressing inclusion and teamwork between teachers, administrators able to focus on his academic improvement can join the general education classroom



<b>FAMILY &amp; COMMUNITY</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) There should be good communication between the counselors, teachers, and parents each day so that they are helpful to Michael.</li> <li>2) Classroom activities should be organized to help build a sense of community. The students should be able to work with one another. The class can participate in group projects and small competitions, such as a jeopardy game. This could also be used to show an acceptable way to disagree with a particular viewpoint and voice opinions back to the group.</li> <li>3) Projects and tasks can be assigned that encourage students to explore the history of their family or city. Michael can look up to in his parents, but perhaps his earlier relatives had exciting lives or were exceptional members of the community. This could give him something to be proud of. This and other assignments can also be used to encourage Michael to seek help to create a stronger family bond. Michael can learn that his mother can be a helpful, trustworthy resource and is someone to rely on.</li> </ol>

## MULTIPLE IDENTITIES GRAPHIC ORGANIZER 2

Two Identities are: Exceptionality (Emotionally disturbed, ADHD, and gifted) and Poverty

<b>MY ROLE:</b> Matthew Simpson's Teacher (an African American teacher)		
<b>ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b> (physical, mental, emotional descriptions of things the student may bring with him or her into the classroom)	<b>NEEDS</b> (based on the characteristics of the student and what he or she is having to meet in the classroom)
	<p>Matthew has been segregated into special education classes since first grade. Matthew began his schooling in Vermont, but then moved to the city where he was kicked out of Truman School after starting a large fire with his cousin. After Truman, he attended Collingswood Elementary where the principal also threw him out, this time for fighting. He is currently in a special education class at Stevens Elementary School, although, I believe he was misplaced, as many African American children are, and is in my class only because of behavior problems. Although Matthew is in a special education class, he is taught using the regular curriculum and the focus of the class is on academics.</p> <p>Matthew's class is academically very diverse. The students are classified in</p>	<p>To help Matthew succeed, he needs effective class management, instructional techniques. Matthew's behavior in class is challenging. He was more academically challenged than he is now. He is bored. He needs to have work that challenges him and he should be given opportunities to use his talents. Instructional technologies to stimulate curiosity and learning are important for Matthew to know that he is capable and able to control through time management and perseverance.</p>

**SOCIAL/  
EMOTIONAL  
ENVIRONMENT**

grade levels 3 to 5, although test scores show that their functional grade levels range from 1.0 to 7.7. Matthew is considered to be in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and receives the highest scores in the class. His recent test scores show that he is a highly able learner, intelligent, and capable of advanced work. Based on his test scores, Matthew is able to read at a 7.7 grade level, and perform 7.3 grade-level math functions. However his placement in special education may be partly affected by an outdated intelligence test where his IQ score was not particularly high. There are five reading groups in the class and Matthew has been placed in the top group. The other students in this group read only at the fifth grade level. Often Matthew has already read the stories we cover in class and already knows all the answers to my questions. In general, Matthew is not being challenged in school. He complains that he is bored and that that is why he talks so much.

Matthew disrupts the learning environment for the entire class almost daily by calling out, talking with students around him, asking continual questions, and giving lengthy responses. He is often sent out of the classroom and to the principal's office. He has even been sent home until his behavior was manageable. I feel sometimes as though fifteen year of experience teaching at this school and an MS degree in special education has not been enough to prepare me to deal with the behavior problems some of the students face, especially Matthew. I sometimes lose a collected and calm temper in front of the class trying to control him. Sometimes I respond sharply to his requests without thinking.

The members of the school staff who are concerned with Matthew's educational success disagree on his placement recommendations for attending the middle school next year. The councilor is recommending Matthew for the gifted and talented program. As his teacher, I worry that this would add to the difficulties transitioning to the new school. The annual meeting to discuss the various recommendations is coming up in a week.

In the school, Matthew is classified as emotionally disturbed. One day Matthew described his experiences as a child being beat up and picked on by other children for having a big nose and a big head. He found his way into a lot of fights, which got him in trouble with the principal at Collingswood. Matthew can be described as easily distracted, impulsive, and extremely talkative. He loves to have the class's attention. When he injured his knee he enjoyed their interest in what had happened. Some of the other students in the class consider Matthew the "class comedian" and may resent his continual interruptions. Matthew is much better at interacting with adults on a one-to-one basis. He tends to get into less trouble when there is adult attention focused on him.

Matthew's class is very small, but racially diverse. This is possibly a result of the general disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. There are nine African American students, five Latinos, and one White child.

Matthew is comfortable volunteering to answer questions in class, although he sometimes doesn't let other students have a chance to speak. He never gives a simple answer, instead his responses are very elaborated and can be up to ten minutes long. On cooperative days he also volunteers to help distribute materials for the day's lesson.

Matthew has many interests. He likes to play basketball and also likes art and inventing. There are also many careers Matthew is interested in, including a computer specialist, pediatrician, doctor, karate instructor, store owner, jet pilot, technology specialist, and astronaut space suit designer. Matthew is able to express, even at a young age, his awareness of many of the problems in his community and his motivation to help change things.

Matthew needs to be continually evaluated for his strengths and weaknesses as they are reevaluated for his intelligence and abilities. He should be recognized as a gifted student and his needs should be reexamined as an emotional factor are not influencing his placement. This should be done from gifted education programs, in addition to other environmental factors that can be identified in a particular group. This should include involvement in Matthew's education and determine a way to monitor the effectiveness of collaboration, time, and effort spent for Matthew.

I stress academic achievement and social skills. Matthew needs to be prepared to receive feedback and can benefit from a differentiated, but challenging program. However an inclusive program should be used with teachers who are capable and confident in their classroom. Matthew needs individualized attention and help him grow.

Matthew needs to be prepared to transition behaviorally to graduate elementary school and the middle school next year. There should be discussion among the staff that has participated in his improvement so far to determine his needs to return to the general education program. It is recommended to the Pace Program at the middle school. This would provide a learning environment that still provided the

Matthew's previous experience in a city setting at home may affect his social skills. He needs a strong sense of classroom structure and a welcoming environment. Matthew needs planned opportunities that encourage him to learn valuable social and communication skills in general education classes. In a diverse environment, he is able to share their experiences and learn from other communities. Matthew would benefit from an approach where he is able to increase his understanding of different perspectives.

Matthew needs a role model in his home. An older student could help him explore things that interest him and help him explore "his frustrations and boundless energy." He needs options for learning and some choices. He has a solid foundation of the math and science. If he has a problem, he may be challenged by reaching right conclusions on a subject. This should be done when there are artistic and inventive opportunities of interest.

There should also be set criteria for progress in the classroom. Matthew needs behavior management and encouragement. Matthew needs clear guidelines for acceptable behavior and what the consequences should be. It should be structured and consistent enforcement of leadership skills would really help him. He needs to be as social interactions, with adults and peers to improve his behavior by encouraging him to interact with peers at more appropriate moments.



<p><b>CLASSROOM RESPONSES</b> (what strategies can you employ to ensure you will meet the student's needs):</p> <p>ACADEMIC</p> <p>Make sure to note your <b>sources</b> to support each suggestion.</p>	<p>4) Matthew should receive a lot of one-on-one time in the classroom to give him the adult supervision he may lack. He should be encouraged to engage in group activities and to demonstrate independence. Differentiated instruction could be used to expand what is covered in the classroom to his everyday life and community.<sup>1</sup> Enrichment materials should be used to support his emotions and creativity. A student-centered classroom would allow Matthew to take some control of his learning through choices between multiple assignments, learning strategies, and topics. He should also be encouraged to reflect on his learning through some type of journal entry. There should be direct instruction on how to set goals, manage time effectively, and how to work will help students achieve their goals. Some goals should be small and easy to attain and have immediate rewards. Others will take to achieve longer, more abstract goals and he is motivated to continue trying.</p> <p>5) Multiple methods of ongoing assessment should be used to identify Matthew's progress and needs.<sup>3</sup> For example, rubrics for 10 years old. Intelligence and problem solving skills should be viewed as dynamic. Matthew should be considered as having a learning disturbance.</p> <p>6) To encourage Matthew to invest in his academic achievement, I think it would be beneficial to create assignments that address social and environmental issues in the community. He should be able to see that his studies can directly help his community. The class should be a place where all the students can acknowledge social injustices and feel empowered to voice their concerns in small ways.<sup>4</sup> For example, students could engage in a project to collect canned foods for the holidays. As a result, the classroom to help encourage a sense of community among the students.</p>
<p>SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL</p>	<p>4) Group work will allow the student to interact with other students in a safe and productive environment. However, it should be used in the classroom.<sup>5</sup> Matthew should be assigned tasks that give him breaks for movement and vocal expression to help him stay engaged.</p> <p>5) The classroom rules should be laid out at the beginning of class and throughout the year. There should be consistency in the classroom. Objectives should be clearly laid out so Matthew is able to expect what is going on in the classroom. He will be expected of him.<sup>6</sup></p> <p>6) A journal may help Matthew voice his concerns and frustrations that he is not able to talk about in school. Other activities that Matthew enjoys most and what might serve as an outlet for his anger and other emotions, such as art projects, music, or computers.<sup>7</sup></p>
<p>PHYSICAL</p>	<p>4) There should be a safe, comfortable, and interactive space for students like Matthew to go to after school. In addition to the fact that Matthew may not have a place or help to study at home. The teacher should refer Matthew to a resource where he can receive tutoring, help, and support.<sup>8</sup></p> <p>5) Multicultural education should be taught through all classroom activities.<sup>9</sup> Matthew should learn to appreciate and respect differences among others. The class should be taught how to handle insensitive remarks and how to create a place of acceptance and inclusion.</p> <p>6) The teacher can supply all the materials students will need in the classroom for assignments and have some that students can bring home. This way Matthew is not singled out among his classmates if his family is not able to supply him with what he needs in order to succeed.<sup>10</sup></p>
<p>FAMILY &amp; COMMUNITY</p>	<p>4) Matthew might benefit from direct, regular counseling to discuss the situation between his parents. There should be counselors, teachers, and parents each day so that they are able to be consistent in their support towards Matthew. If she cannot respond to a letter, it might be best to send her periodic reports and inquiries in the mail and encourage her to continue her studies whenever she is not busy with her full-time job.</p> <p>5) Classroom activities should be organized to help build a sense of community.<sup>8</sup> The students should be able to work together with one another. The class can participate in group projects and small competitions, such as a jeopardy game. Open-ended questions could also be used to show an acceptable way to disagree with a particular viewpoint and voice opinions back to the group. Highly structured forms of classroom discussion would force Matthew to slow down and allow other students to contribute.</p> <p>6) Matthew should receive instruction in basic skills and tools that will help him learn how to succeed in everyday life. He could use practice in the skill of summarizing his ideas. After readings he should be asked to explain the main idea. He could also benefit from classroom activities that helped to build leadership skills.<sup>12</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2006) *Understanding by design* (2nd Expanded Ed.). Alexandria, Va: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

<sup>2</sup> Brdmsford, J.D., et al. (1999). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. National Research Council. Washington D.C. pp. 117-142

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, L. S. (Eds.). (2009). *Bridging multiple worlds: Case studies of diverse educational communities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. pp. 169-172

- <sup>4</sup> Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- <sup>5</sup> Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J., & Pollock, J.E. (2001). *Classroom Instruction that Works*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development
- <sup>6</sup> Sapon-Shevin, M. (2008) *Learning in an Inclusive Community*. Educational Leadership. Volume 6(1): pp 49-53.
- <sup>7</sup> Ung, L. (2005). *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- <sup>8</sup> Sapon-Shevin, M. (2008) *Learning in an Inclusive Community*. Educational Leadership. Volume 6(1): pp 49-53.
- <sup>9</sup> Taylor, L. S. (Eds.). (2009). *Bridging multiple worlds: Case studies of diverse educational communities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. pp. 23, 36
- <sup>10</sup> Taylor, L. S. (Eds.). (2009). *Bridging multiple worlds: Case studies of diverse educational communities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. pp.146
- <sup>11</sup> *How to involve all parents in your diverse community*. ASCD Video Study Guide.
- <sup>12</sup> Tomlinson, C. & Doughty, K. (2006). *Smart in the middle grades: Classrooms that work for bright middle schoolers*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.