



# CHANGING THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS IN THE VILLAGE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE  
RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS SECTION

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

"Many teachers need help adjusting to the growing diversity of today's public schools." According to a survey report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda (2008), this is especially true for new classroom educators.

This same position has been advanced by the North Carolina Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps. For almost 10 years, the Commission has been calling for "professional development initiatives that will ensure that classroom teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful in teaching a diverse population of students" (First Report to the State Board of Education, 2001). Unlike the Center for Teacher Quality, the Commission feels that any classroom teacher – regardless of his/her veteran standing – would benefit tremendously from either course work on dealing with ethnically diverse students or quality professional development opportunities. The obvious outcome to this kind of exposure to teaching ethnically diverse children is the closure of the racial achievement gap.

We do not doubt that most education stakeholders support teacher quality that addresses instructing a diverse student body. The problem is how do we convince our children's pre-service and veteran teachers to enroll in preparatory

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## MAKING THE CASE FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS

### So what is the problem?

In response to dramatic demographic changes and a pattern of under achievement and disengagement of large numbers of students, there is a national movement underway to support teachers to critically examine, reflect on, and respond to practices for learners with diverse needs and from diverse backgrounds. The Council for Exceptional Children (2006) calls for the development of programs that promote educational practices that appropriately identify students who are culturally and linguistically diverse for special education services; assessment practices that accurately reflect cultural influences; education services that provide effective interventions for students from diverse cultures; and professional development to improve the cultural responsiveness of all educators. Many researchers (e.g., Gay, 2000; Harry, et al., 1999; Irvine & York, 2001; Sleeter, 2001) have illustrated a connection between teachers' lack of competency in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners and students' persistent achievement difficulties.

Educators today struggle in their efforts to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, as evidenced by the gaps between children of color and White children in achievement, graduation, and other indicators of school success. Indeed, preparing current and future teachers to teach students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse academic needs is one of the most compelling challenges facing teacher educators today (Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Sobel & Taylor, 2006).

National trends indicate that well over 86% of the current teaching force is White, mono-lingual, and female (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2002). Nationally, teacher shortages are a particular problem in urban and high poverty districts (Schive, & Klien, 2001). The national push for highly qualified teachers through the *No Child Left Behind Act* (US Department of Education, 2002) raises the stakes further for districts with chronic shortages. Researchers (Darling-Hammond, French & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Gay, 2000) have identified the lack of available fully-credentialed and highly-qualified teachers as a culprit in creating and maintaining inequitable access to education for students, particularly in urban settings, where a disproportionate number of students are ethnically, culturally and/or linguistically diverse, and/or live in poverty. Yates and Ortiz (2004) maintain that neither special educators nor general educators are prepared to respond to students from these backgrounds.

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*[Editor's Comments Continued]*

programs or staff development where teaching diverse learners is front and center? And, what fundamental characteristics are present in quality programs that teach inclusiveness? Finally, what can educators expect to personally gain from participating in seminars or courses on teaching ethnically diverse students, including those with special learning needs?

We have attempted to answer these questions in this edition of our newsletter where we bring light on cultural responsiveness in education. To help us do that, we have included articles by two guest writers. The featured article on our front cover is by Dr. Shelley Zion. Dr. Zion is employed with the University of Colorado at Denver as the associate director of the Urban School Alliance, which houses the National Institute for Urban School Improvement and the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems. Our second guest writer, Dr. Timothy Johnson, offers insight on a cultural responsiveness professional development activity as offered by the Department of Public Instruction in which Dr. Johnson was a participant.

We conclude this edition with a peek inside our own cultural responsiveness training.

Finally, we want to leave you with this thought: culturally responsiveness should not be a buzz phrase thrown about casually among educators. It is a must-have predisposition for those who want to see the racial achievement gap and every gap in student performance finally eliminated. With the percentage of racial/ethnic minority students in public schools having grown from 22 percent in 1972 to 43 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006), we no longer have the luxury of *thinking* about requiring classroom educators to be culturally competent.

*[Making the Case for Culturally Responsive Classrooms Continued]*

Continuing to expose ethnically, culturally, and/or linguistically diverse students who live in poverty to educators who are not adequately prepared to effectively teach them is likely to further exacerbate the existing achievement gap. More importantly, such practices will result in these children not receiving the high quality services that federal mandates guarantee them.

### **What do we do about it?**

At the Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education, teachers engage, over a school year, in an intensive professional development and action research project to 1) study the impacts of race/class/culture on individual and groups, 2) examine the structure of power and privilege in schools, 3) collaborate with families and communities, and 4) develop a culturally responsive pedagogy and practice. Teachers who participate in the program are evaluated about their change in values, beliefs, skills, knowledge, behavior, practice, and impact on student outcomes as they participate in the following courses:

1. **Race, Class, & Culture in public schools** focuses on understanding culture and diversity, exploring the socio-cultural histories of students and communities, recognizing the role of power and privilege in both individual and institutional interactions, and developing a philosophy of social justice and equity. Participants complete a Performance Based Assessment (PBA) that examines their own cultural background, identity, values, beliefs, and biases, and examination of a student's background, and a cross cultural analysis of the two experiences.
2. **Working with Communities and Families** focuses on the importance of understanding and connecting with the community and families of the students in a school, with practical strategies and activities to uncover the rich resources that diverse students and families bring to schools as well as to connect and collaborate with community organizations and activities to increase student engagement and relevance. The PBA for this course requires participants to further engage with the student from the previous PBA in an examination of that student's family history, community experience, and to identify community resources.
3. **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices** focuses on developing practical tools for creating culturally responsive, inclusive classrooms by examining assessment and instructional strategies, classroom management skills, and curriculum and lesson planning in light of the needs of the diverse skills and background knowledge that students bring to the classroom. The PBA for this session requires participants to critically examine the above elements of their classroom, critique them in light of their expanding knowledge of the culture and histories of their students, and to make changes to those elements of their classroom practice.

*This article was submitted by guest writer, Dr. Shelley Zion, University of Colorado Denver, where she is based at The Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education. For more information on Dr. Zion's work on culturally responsive systems go to [crucecenter.org](http://crucecenter.org).*



## CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN EDUCATION: A Professional Development Opportunity That Goes beyond Race and Ethnicity

The following modules are featured in a statewide professional development on cultural responsiveness as coordinated and conducted by the Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps Section at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The design of the modules and their accompanying academies is primarily based on the work of the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt). Note that the academies are designed to (1) engage participants through hands-on activities and open, honest discussions about culturally responsive

practices that are desirable and those that are not; (2) strengthen communities' ability to improve culturally responsive systems; and (3) affirm sociocultural histories and experiences that all participants bring to the learning. For information on how to participate in the next statewide training on cultural responsiveness, please visit our website at [www.publicschools.org/racg](http://www.publicschools.org/racg).



<b>Module 1: Culture and Cultural Responsiveness</b>	Academy 1: Appreciating Culture and Cultural Responsiveness	Academy 2: Uncovering Diversity	Academy 3: Spotighting Issues of Power and Privilege to Create Change
<b>Module 2: Culturally Responsive Practices and Pedagogy</b>	Academy 1: Practicing Cultural Responsivity	Academy 2: Exploring Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Academy 3: Applying Culturally Responsive Practices and Pedagogy

### APPRECIATING OTHER STARTS WITH ME

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend a follow-up meeting to an earlier workshop I had attended involving cultural responsiveness in education. The meeting was coordinated and conducted by the Department of Public Instruction's Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps staff.

Let me start off by saying I truly appreciate the willingness of the staff to discuss this issue [cultural responsiveness in education] in an environment which does not always appear to want to admit there are numerous challenges, like these, facing North Carolina public schools.

As a community leader, I believe the biggest challenge facing many of us is admitting we have a number of preconceived ideas based on race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, religious affiliation and even sexual orientation. And while many would like to say they "don't see color" for example, I don't think those same individuals are as quick to say they don't see gender.

As we move into the 21st century and have an increasing need to meet the needs of the "New Millennial Generation," it is imperative that educators teach differently, think more globally and interact with students and each other in more creative ways. Today, like never before, our children need educators who are open to new and innovative ideas which include discussions and activities on what makes us

different from one another. To this end, conversations about race, ethnicity or one's culturally different upbringing and background, for example, should be embraced and encouraged, not avoided and discouraged.

I believe where we go wrong and how we start over begins with each individual. If we learn how to share ourselves with others, admit our insecurities and even identify our misunderstandings, we provide the opportunity for our children to engage one another, establish enriching relationships and have others celebrate our rich diversity.

What I thought was so beneficial at the training was the opportunity for participants to discuss their individual pressures felt day after day in their respective school systems. Be it either as a Black man or Hispanic woman, their challenges and uniqueness must be appreciated by fellow educators and there must be every effort made for children to see this acknowledgement and acceptance. If the courageous conversations [about race] are going to be effective, they must begin with each individual.

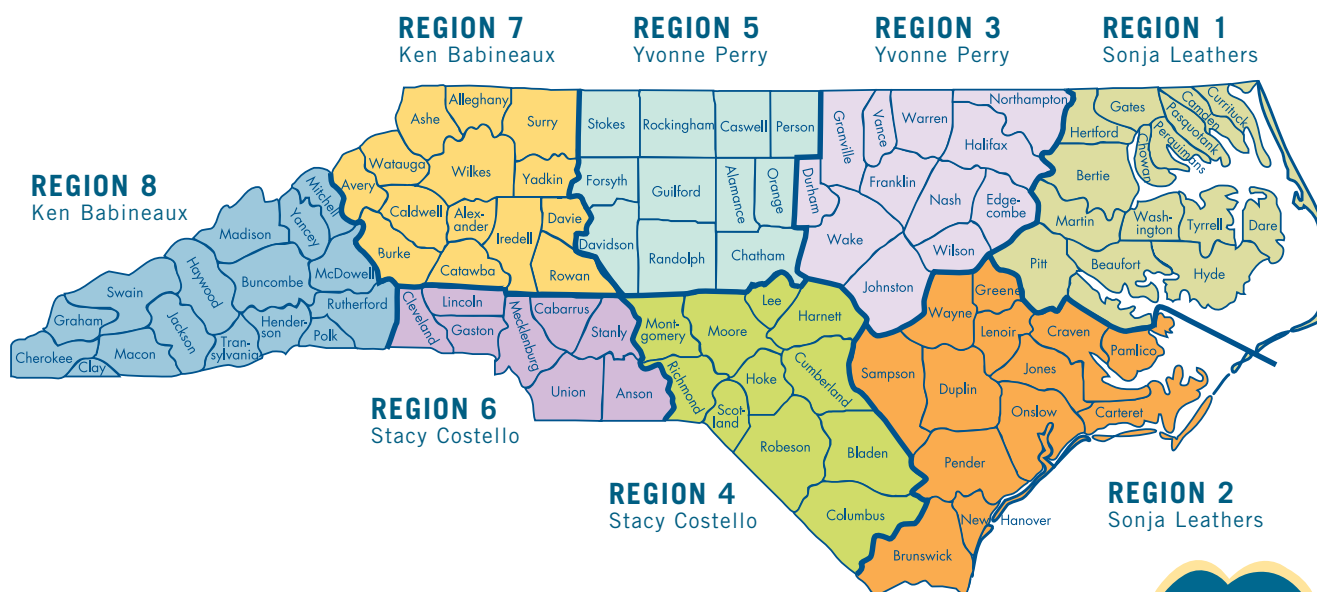
In this instance, the biggest obstacle facing you is...you. Now that you know where to start, what are you going to do about it?

*This article was submitted by Timothy F. Johnson, Ph.D. Dr. Johnson is President and CEO of Leadership 101, LLC.*





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### IMPORTANT DATES

**Cultural Responsiveness in Education**  
July 29-30, 2009 | DPI Building  
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RAISING ACHIEVEMENT  
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