

**A Common Intent to Understand:
Boston Pilot School Directors Talk about Diversity**

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing educators of today is to create and sustain high-quality educational environments for low-income students and students of color. Research describing the educational experiences of students of color show that they fare poorly on critical factors that determine whether students will be academically successful (ACE, 2000, Gordon, et al, 2000, Oakes, 1995, Polakow-Suransky, 1999, Wheelock, 1986). Progress in raising student achievement has been slow and incremental. A stubborn gap in standardized test results between Black, Latino, and low-income students and white and more affluent students suggests that there is a continuing lack of equity in educational access and negative stereotyping for Black, Latino, and low-income students.

That schools have difficulties in meeting the needs of low-income students and students of color is apparent. While there are cases of a single successful school in an urban district, these schools are often the exception rather than the norm. The future success of public education is dependent upon crafting new models of learning communities that can meet the needs of all students. The Boston Pilot Schools Network, a network of eleven small, innovative schools within the Boston Public Schools, can be a model for other schools and districts as to how to create schools in which students of color can achieve at the highest levels.

Students in Pilot Schools, which serve a student population generally representative of the Boston Public Schools, perform well on all available measures of student engagement and performance, and are among the top performing of all Boston Public Schools (CCE, 2001a). Pilot Schools have among the highest attendance, lowest transfers out of the school, fewest suspensions, and highest wait lists of any school in Boston. Further, Pilot School students score higher than most of their Boston counterparts on the Stanford 9 and the state's high stakes exam, MCAS, and have higher graduation and college going rates (CCE, 2001a).

There are several factors that contribute to the success of Pilot Schools. Pilot Schools operate within the Boston Public Schools, but have autonomy from the district over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar. Pilot Schools use their autonomies and increased flexibility to organize their schools to meet two conditions known to support high student achievement (Hawley-Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998; Newmann, 1996) —creating environments where students are well known to their teachers and providing teachers with adequate time to collaborate (CCE, 2001b). Pilot Schools also use their autonomies to engage parents in the school (Ouimette et al, 2002), and parent engagement is linked to high student achievement, especially among students of color (Moles, 1993).

Another proposed reason for the success of Pilot School students is that most Pilot Schools actively talk about diversity, and these conversations influence the structures, staffing, professional development, pedagogy, and curriculum of the school. The goal of this paper is to show the broad range of how and why Pilot Schools engage in these conversations. After presenting information on the history of the Pilot Schools, this paper will describe research that examines the impact of diversity conversations in schools and the negative consequences for students when those conversations are silenced. Next, the results of a study examining how Pilot Schools think about and engage in diversity discussions will be described. The paper will conclude with a discussion of implications for schools to develop the ability to engage in diversity conversations.

The Boston Pilot Schools Network

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) serve 64,000 students in 130 K-12 schools, with approximately 53% Black, 28% Latino, 7% Asian, 11% White students, and 52% students enrolled in the free/reduced lunch program. Eighteen percent of the district's students are designated as special needs, and 16% are bilingual students. The district has been historically low performing on standardized tests, similar to most urban districts.

The result of a unique partnership among the Mayor, School Committee, Superintendent, and Teachers Union, Pilot Schools were created in 1994 through the Boston Teachers Union contract to promote increased choice options within the school district. This agreement came about largely in response to 1994 state legislation creating first-time charter schools and the subsequent loss of Boston students to area charter schools. An additional reason for establishing Pilot Schools was "to provide models of educational excellence that help to foster widespread educational reform in all Boston public schools" (BPS, 1995).

Starting with five schools in the 1994-1995 school year, the number of Pilot Schools has slowly grown. There are currently eleven Boston Pilot Schools spanning grades K-12, including three K-8 elementary schools, one middle school (grades 6-8), six high schools (grades 9-12), and one secondary school (grades 6-12). Each Pilot School is small, democratic, and personalized, with enrollments ranging from 100-500 students. These schools enroll approximately 2,600 students, or about 4% of the total BPS enrollment. Pilot School enrollment matches that of the Boston Public Schools by race, gender, and income status. This demographic information is critical in demonstrating that small, personalized schools can be more successful in raising student performance and in engaging families than larger, more impersonal urban schools.

Previous research on the implications of diversity conversations in schools

Many researchers and educators believe that, while race and diversity are essential components of students' educational experiences, discussions about race and diversity in schools are infrequent or suppressed (for example, Fine, 1987; Shor, 1980). This

silence of diversity conversations in schools has been linked to why many urban public schools are not providing students, particularly low-income students and students of color, with an equitable, high quality education. Fine (1987) discussed silencing in schools as “a process of institutionalized policies and practices which obscure the very social, economic, and therefore experiential conditions of students’ daily lives, and which expel ... critical ‘talk’ about these conditions. (p. 157).” In her studies, she links silencing to student disengagement and, ultimately, dropping out of schools (1987, 1991).

Those discussions that are most often silenced in schools—discussions of race, power, and living in a diverse society—are risky, contradictory, and challenging to dominant assumption. Silencing conversations about race, power, equity, and diversity applies equally to conversation among students as well as adults. For educators to help students have these conversations, they need to engage in similar conversations themselves (Schultz, Buck, & Niesz, 2000). Cochran-Smith (1995), among others, has argued that these conversations must be central components of any teacher education program.

Not having these conversations are more likely to affect those students who are not part of the dominant culture, namely, students of color (Fine, 1987, 1991; Schultz, Buck, & Niesz, 2000). To keep children’s experiences in silence disempowers children to explore who they are and their place in the world (Freire, 1970). It is only through an understanding of their experiences that children can begin to think critically and participate fully in society.

For schools to meet the needs of urban students, race, diversity, class, gender, and power must be addressed in all aspects of the school. Children need to have their experiences spoken, and adults need to understand how to engage in such conversations with students. The Boston Pilot Schools Network, a network of eleven small, innovative schools within the Boston Public Schools, is a unique endeavor that embodies these principles and places these conversations as a central component of its’ work.

METHOD

Interviews

Interviews lasting for 45-60 minutes were conducted with directors of nine of the eleven Pilot Schools. In one K-8 school, the director of both the K-5 and the 6-8 school were interviewed. In addition, the assistant director at two schools were interviewed, one with the director and the other separately. In all, twelve administrators were interviewed. Eight of the directors are white and two are people of color; both assistant directors are people of color.

Analytic process

Although qualitative data analysis can be discussed in terms of separate components, in actuality it is an evolving process in which the components are not distinct but rather merge into one another as one analysis leads to questions suggesting a new analysis. The major goal of an analysis of this sort is to extract some general ideas and principles from the interviews.

To begin to extract ideas from the data, we looked for patterns in the data using the method of open coding (Strauss, 1987) and a start list (Miles and Huberman, 1994). First, the interviews were read in a non-directed manner, noting general ideas, with a goal of generating ideas. Each interview was then reread multiple times using this list of ideas to direct the readings, looking for both positive and negative examples. Each idea that was generated from this process suggested new ways of understanding the data. Consequently, the analytic process was repeated for each idea. This approach to analyzing qualitative data is consistent with that described by Miles and Huberman (1994).

RESULTS

Definition of diversity

Many, but not all, of the diversity discussions in Pilot Schools focused on race. Pilot School directors discussed diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, learning styles, socioeconomic status, religion, and educational experiences. As one director said,

“We look at racism in part because of the demographics of the school... But race and racism having the history [it has] had in education and the impact it has on kids' outcomes and kids' experiences in school seems to us, although we are committed to anti-bias work on all levels, to be essential and central to the experience of kids, our kids in our school and kids in public schools in general in urban settings.”

No Pilot School director stated that their school had an explicit definition of diversity. Instead, Pilot Schools are more likely to name an issue for what it is. As one director stated,

“If it's an issue of race then we use the word racism. If it's an issue of sexual orientation, we use the term homophobia. So we kind of spell them out, because we want students [and staff] to understand what a particular issue is.”

Pilot School directors felt that the purpose of diversity professional development is to develop a shared understanding and a common language among the school

community. Directors felt that the process of talking about, exploring, and increasing their understanding of diversity deepened relationships in the school, increased teacher trust and sharing, and deepened teachers' understanding of its complexity. For Pilot School directors, the issue of diversity is ongoing, ever changing work with no endpoint nor definition.

"[The purpose of diversity professional development is to develop] not a common understanding, but a common intent to understand."

"We weren't trying to reach a conclusion so much as to widen our sensitivity to the fact that we're giving off messages when we're not aware of and kids are picking up messages that we're not aware of."

"In the work that we've done you could argue that what diversity means has gained complexity, so as people have deepened their understanding. We ... understood the differences around our take on diversity rather than built a common definition. One might also argue that's part of building a common language."

Desire for a diverse community

This section describes Pilot School directors' beliefs about the need for a diverse community and the resources they devote to it. A priority of all of the Pilot administrators interviewed was to have a diverse student body and staff. Like BPS, Pilot Schools do have a diverse student body, by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (CCE, 2001a). However, Pilot Schools have a more diverse staff than does the Boston Public School district (42% of Pilot School¹ teachers are people of color, compared with 39%² for the district) and a significantly higher percentage of administrators of color (61% of Pilot School³ administrators are people of color, compared with 38% for the district).

Diversity of school staff

The Pilot Schools directors believe that a diverse staff provides students with role models and increases the chance that diversity conversations will happen, and happen at deep levels, by avoiding stereotyping and increasing the richness of the community's experiences. To attract a diverse staff, though, requires that schools change their recruitment policies.

Pilot School directors want their staffs to reflect their student body. This allows students to have adult role models who look like them and share their culture, provides

¹ These numbers represent 8 of the 9 Pilot Schools studied. There is no data for the ninth school.

² These numbers are from boston.k12.ma.us/bps/bpsglance.asp

³ These numbers represent 8 of the 9 Pilot Schools studied. There is no data for the ninth school.

a measure of comfort and familiarity to students, and helps to ensure that all students see some of their experiences reflected in staff.

“[We hire a diverse staff] because the vast majority [of] our student population are students of color, and we're in a community of color. It's just out of respect. “

“We want to make sure that our population of educators is diverse, and we can see that our teachers reflect our student body. We feel that's really important, because if you want a diverse population of kids, you should also have a diverse population of educators [who] will motivate and be role models, and have at least some understanding of the child's frame of reference and perspective as a learner.”

Underlying the need to have a representative staff is the idea that having a diverse staff allows for a broader range of conversations to occur in schools. The greater the diversity among staff at the school, the greater chance that diversity will be raised in an engaging manner. Having multiple staff of color deepens the conversation by not relying on one person's experience to speak to that groups' whole. This avoids stereotyping and reduces intense scrutiny for one person to speak for the experience of others.

“In yesterday's conversation we didn't just have the black experience but we had X's experience as contrasted to Z's experience, which is 20 years apart, in different parts of the world. Z was raised in Mississippi and X in Boston, Y from a Muslim family. There are different shifts in how people experienced growing up as black, which enriches the faculty's thinking about what's happening in different families and kids and that [it] isn't ... aha, black family, now I do this.”

Conversely, students whose ethnicity is not reflected in the school staff may be deprived of certain conversations:

“We have about the same number of Latino kids as white kids, but the white faculty are well-represented and the Latino [faculty] are not. So that literally deprives the conversation of experiences.”

In addition to hiring a diverse staff, Pilot School directors believe that staff must be willing to engage in diversity conversations. When hiring staff, few schools specifically ask that applicants have experience in exploring or teaching equity or diversity. Some schools specifically ask a question about teachers' understanding of diversity in their interview process. One school not only requires that teachers have a willingness to focus on equity, but makes this requirement an explicit part of their teacher evaluation

process. By doing so, the school ensures that discussing diversity is a daily part of the life of the school.

“You have to buy into how we want to work with students. You have to. There is no diversity about that.”

Diversity of student body

Pilot School directors spoke of their deep commitment to a diverse student population, the challenges they face in ensuring one, and the need to provide appropriate support for students from a range of backgrounds and educational experiences.

“One of the things that [we are] really committed to is [to] reflect the diversity of the city of Boston.”

Two directors talked about how their schools have tried to reach out to students of color. For them, recruiting students of color is about providing opportunity and access to an underserved group. According to one elementary school director:

“We put together a recruitment task force to try and go out into the neighborhoods of color and actively recruit parents to select our school. We ... put leaflets in health clinics and day care centers, after school care centers, those kinds of places, and restaurants and stores. Last year, also, we had parent volunteers talk to parents as they were waiting in line, those high traffic days for assignment, especially in kindergarten. We've got a lot of people who are interested.”

When a school accepts students from many diverse backgrounds, that school also accepts students with a range of educational experiences. Pilot Schools recognize the need to provide support for students in order to ensure that students with different educational experiences can succeed. Pilot Schools support, and support well, students from diverse backgrounds (CCE 2001a).

“We try to look for potential. We look at kids who seem really passionate, who seem like they have the interest and the passion to accept instruction, take direction, and grow.”

“Not that we think that these kids can do less, but we know that we have to provide more.”

“We talk about differentiating instruction, scaffolding. Because when you think of diversity, you're usually thinking about kids who need more, because they haven't had positive educational experiences. They've had bad education for years. Then, we demand all these things from them.

We want them to write and to think critically, and all these other things. If they haven't had prior experience, they definitely won't be ready. So we really talk about how we address these diverse learners. If we have common goals, these goals for all our students, how do we get them there? And that has to do with being able to scaffold, and to provide support, so that kids who have different entry points can still reach this particular bar."

Professional development for teachers

Pilot School directors believe that professional development on race, diversity, power, gender, and class will help make teachers more responsive to students and to student needs. Teachers working toward common understandings and raising hard questions about diversity is necessary if diversity professional development is to have a positive impact on students.

"The need to do the work of talking together, coming to some common understanding of what we're trying to do, how to support each other and enable each other to have the most effective practice we can with and for [low-income students and students of color] is often a conversation that includes race."

Pilot School directors believe that schools must continue their commitment to diversity conversations and professional development, even if the conversations do not feel like they are having an impact on all members of the community or in the school practice. By showing a commitment, and continuing to have these conversations, Directors believe that they will reach all members of the community and positively impact practice and student lives.

Eight of the nine Pilot Schools in this study currently provide some form of diversity professional development for their staff. Pilot Schools have devoted parts of after-school full faculty meetings, in-service workshops, and summer and before-school professional development to engage in these conversations. There are three types of professional development in the Pilot Schools that focus on helping teachers explore diversity--Ways of knowing others: ways of teaching and learning; and ways of thinking about one's own organization. Schools typically use a combination of these methods in their work.

Ways of knowing others

This type of professional development requires that teachers reflect on their own cultural biases and assumptions. Teachers need to become familiar with the experiences, norms, and communication methods of different racial and ethnic groups. Activities focus on assessing the school's norms and whether communication methods are culturally relevant.

“What does it mean for people of one culture to be [educating people of another culture]? Do we understand things? Do we misunderstand things? Do we not know how to acknowledge strengths as they may appear in certain people that are not the same as they appear in others?”

“We had a discussion about what are some of the norms, like calling teachers by their first name, how we dress. We made a long list of all the things that might appear to some families as practices in this school that might be discontinuous with our families or with our own histories. ... We were trying to think where it's just different and when it is disrespectful and ... when it is just because there are differences in our histories, and when are those differences likely to be ones that have something to do with racism.”

Ways of teaching and learning

This type of professional development is focused on how students learn and how staff can change their pedagogy to better meet student needs. Professional development provides teachers with opportunities to develop more culturally relevant curriculum and interactions with students.

Many of these conversations help teachers to look internally and to think about how their own experiences affect the way that they interact with, and teach, students. For example, when teachers at one school were in a professional development session discussing a case study of a teacher,

“We didn't know the ethnic background of the teacher, or the socioeconomic background of the teacher or the students involved. But we assumed, and it turns out our assumptions were right. We talked a little bit about the teacher being white, working with students of color. It was obvious there were some issues around the fact that the teacher wasn't dealing with the reality of the students. It became more about the teacher's response than the students' reality, meaning, the student had to work, and wasn't doing homework. And the teacher was like, “Oh my God, your life is so hard. I'm so sorry. Let me change the standards for you.” Then that really evoked a conversation around white privilege, dominant, subdominant, which I think is all part of diversity.”

This theme of how teachers from the dominant culture work with students of color was reflected in other schools as well.

“The way that we ... discipline kids, sometimes we have to be aware of our own expectations. I think these kids don't mean to be disrespectful,

but this is the way they're used to speaking to adults ... I think the other way, too. Sometimes kids need more structure, and they're used to clear boundaries. I think sometimes faculty who are used to being more friendly, more relaxed, they're not as successful with these kids, because they don't take them seriously. You're a buddy. And then when you try to pull back, it doesn't work. I think some of that is cultural, and has to do with your expectations of being a student, and what you expect from an adult, in terms of how they respond to you."

"[We are] beginning to talk about what are the differences for adults in terms of access to kids and what does it mean to be a white teacher in this school, what does it mean in your management style, in your relationship with children. Is there a privilege to being an African-American teacher in this school in terms of cultural connection? How do we ally to each other across those lines?"

Pilot Schools believe that teachers and staff need to explore their own biases, expectations, and ways of interacting with their students. By personalizing their understanding, teachers will be more likely to develop deep understandings and to change and take responsibility for their own actions.

Two schools have examined their own student achievement data to determine whether their curriculum and pedagogy is reaching all students. In one elementary school, teachers began to look at math data, thinking "that math ought to be less race and class influenced than literature and history because it's more neutral." Instead, these teachers realized that their math curriculum was heavily language based, and wondered whether that disadvantaged some students.

"Early studies [were done] to explain why black kids were less good at language. These things were on the assumption they talked less at home. It was always...this theory of language deprivation, and therefore that was assumed to be an explanation for why kids were not doing as well. Then as some other people started to study kids' natural language [and discovered] how much language [black kids have] and yet it has turned off in school, so there was something about the school that made kids look more language-deprived. That's partly what I'm trying to get here. Yes, there is definitely a correlation between race and class and competence in math right now in our school the way we count it, but the question is, are we not picking up mathematical clues because we're not looking at real math [but at a highly language-based math program]."

At another school that is “just beginning to talk about race and class, and how that impacts how you teach, what you teach, who you call on, who you don't call on, how you address kids,” the school looked at grade data:

“Sometimes you make the assumption that it's mostly the young black males that are struggling and having a hard time. We're finding that it's not just that. That's a population that we always worry about, but we feel that there's more to focus on than that. ... Because what we're finding is that families of color ... who seek us out tend to be in the higher socioeconomic/income group. [We are finding that it is more along the lines of class.]”

The entry points that Pilot Schools use to help teachers better understand their students differ. Some use a highly internal and personal process, while others use a data process. Both provide pathways to examining diversity and equity in practice. Both allow for teachers to examine their own practice.

Ways of thinking about one's organization

Directors of at least three schools believed that their staff needed to have diversity conversations that first focused on the adult dynamics of the organization before they in turn would be able to help their students have purposeful conversations. They believed that teachers and administrators could develop comfort and experience in diversity conversations by examining shared experiences. For example, one director stated,

“The conversation ... that I think is most important to our school is how do we perceive race playing itself out here in terms of how people feel their voices are part of the group or not part of the group, do people feel that there are issues related to power that have to do with race. ... So it's a conversation about race, it's not a conversation about racism. It's a conversation about how race plays itself out.”

By seeing how diversity, equity, and voice play itself out in their own organization, teachers can deepen their understanding of diversity. One director described how going through the process of having staff talk about diversity and equity within the context of the school has made the school a healthier place to have such discussions.

“An internal conversation about race and diversity is impossible to separate from the overall internal adult dynamics of the school. This year we are in a much, much healthier place in terms of clear process for how decisions get made, how do you get access to decisions, how do you get your views on the table, am I heard. We're a much more mature, well-functioning institution in those kinds of ways.”

Who leads these conversations

Much of the diversity professional development for teachers is led by an external facilitator, although most schools believe that some combination of internal and external facilitator is important.

Conversations at the school are originated by a combination of staff and/or administrator voice. At three schools, staff needed to talk about the dynamics in their own relationships that they believed influenced how voices were heard in the school. At the other schools, teachers or administrators raised diversity as a means of helping them to better support and teach their students. One school discussed the role of the Pilot School network as one way that this issue has stayed in the forefront. A particular emphasis of network work has been to ensure that people of color hold positions of responsibility and have access and opportunity to raise their ideas at network meetings.

Although there are many white directors of Pilot Schools, the issue seems to be led or organized by Assistant Directors of color. One white director, in responding to the researchers request for an interview, stated,

“I could certainly [answer] these questions, but it's yet again [an] empowered white person answering, and part of what I'm very interested in is leaders of color having their voices heard. So it's often hard, I think, for white people who are in positions of power to say, "I'd like to step back. I'd like someone else to step forward." Because it means I'm giving up power. So I don't get to talk to you right now, because I'm reigning myself in, because I think the only way someone else is going to gain power is if I give up power. So I'm trying to walk the talk by saying I'd really like you to talk to [the assistant director] ... because I'm trying to be conscious about sharing power.”

Schools need to have conversations about diversity and they need to ensure that people of color have access to leadership positions within the school. But people of color need to have access to leadership beyond speaking about and promoting an awareness and acceptance of diversity, just as white staff need to speak about diversity to ensure that it is not seen as only a person of color concern.

Impact on students

Pilot School directors discussed three ways that their staff's diversity professional development has impacted their students. These include through (1) the development of a school-wide culture that allows these conversations to occur, (2) students developing leadership skills, and (3) curricular changes and initiatives.

Creating a common language and a school-wide culture

In general, schools believed that staff needed to have conversations about diversity first before they could have these conversations with students.

“It’s been primarily an adult conversation and students have benefited as we as an adult community have grown healthier in our ability to talk about these issues.”

Some schools are further along in the process of exploring their understanding of diversity in their school. In these schools, students have benefited from having the opportunity to talk about diversity. Students come to school with many questions about race, diversity, power, gender, and class and they need an environment where they can freely discuss their beliefs. As one director stated,

“This is a school and these are young people, they make a lot of mistakes, they come with erroneous information, they’re checking their own stuff out. How can we not have these very intense, powerful episodes happen and then not follow it up with discussion? The discussions sometimes need facilitation, we need outside expertise, they need time, they need candor, they need risk-taking, they need follow-up, they need research, they need sensitizing, they need conversation, conversation, conversation.”

When schools can create such a safe, supportive culture, students can talk both about societal issues and how it plays out in their daily lives. Because schools are able to create a culture in which these conversations can and do occur as a natural part of the school, students and teachers are better able to respond to significant events, such as the Rodney King verdict or the events of September 11th.

“When the [Rodney King] verdict came out ... we had a [message] from the superintendent by e-mail and courier, phone calls, saying, don't let any kids talk about Rodney King, do not discuss it in the classroom. Anyone who violates this should be sent immediately to the office, have your teachers on patrol. In other words, it's too sensitive, it's too volatile.

What did we do? We called off classes and brought all 300 kids together and I facilitated a town meeting for us to talk about Rodney King. And young black men got up and screamed and ranted and cried and said, this is what happens to me every time I drive to [the suburbs], a cruiser follows me and my kid, my boys, because we drove into their town. I've been arrested, I've been stopped, I've been searched. America should know this. And girls crying and kids getting up and saying how bad they feel, other kids like totally silent and scared.

But it was in a safe, contained, supportive setting where you could say what you wanted to say. You could curse, you could cry, you could do whatever you needed to do. It was what the community had in front of it and in it at that time. How could you not pay attention to it?"

The school culture does not just support the discussion of larger societal issues. Just as staff need to understand how dynamics play themselves out among adults, students also need a way to understand how diversity plays itself out in their own experiences. For example,

"There was an incident with a white student who ... felt that she was being targeted because she's white ... [The student] brought up incidences of where she felt targeted when kids said that white people don't understand how it feels to be targeted and tracked.... She took that on personally as, I'm a white person, I haven't done anything to black people. How do you make those conversations safe for white children in the classroom who feel like when you say white people you're saying me, when they don't have power in this environment and certainly don't have power as poor white children in an urban environment, sort of larger societal power. So that's the impetus for these conversations and trying to do something in terms of working with students around that."

Students develop leadership abilities

When a culture of dialogue exists, students can explore their understanding of diversity by taking leadership roles within their school and their community. At one school, "It's everyone's responsibility to take ownership for breaches in community values." (8) In that school, all students are trained in safety language to facilitate conversations about diversity.

"No shame, no blame. Take 100% responsibility. Confidentiality only. Try it on. Try it on means, I want you to put yourself in my shoes, I want you to think about what it's like for me to be a gay student. Try that on. Or try it on that you're a gay student and you hear somebody down the hall say, oh you fag. And 100% responsibility means you can't rely on rumor, you can't say, well I think people here feel..., no, it's I feel, I think, I'll do this.

So those things are really helpful to make conversations safer and really clear about what the issues are."

Students who want to explore diversity more deeply are supported by their schools. Some students have worked to form groups to discuss a particular issue or experience. In some schools, students took leadership roles in running events or determining topics and speakers.

“The Anti-Defamation League ... trained [about 25 of] our ... students in a peer leadership format in which they focused around diversity training ... Then those students came back here and organized a round of workshops that they did on the advisory levels.”

“We hosted a city-wide Gay Straight Alliance conference, which was the first one that ever happened in the city. That group of kids designed and organized workshops and did them throughout the school and on advisory levels as well, addressing issues of homophobia. It went a long way to raise people's consciousness about those issues.”

Addressing diversity through curriculum

All Pilot Schools develop curriculum that asks students to consider the complexities of diversity. Pilot Schools embed diversity within the context of their curriculum, believing that meaningful curriculum must raise such issues.

“Our Humanities curriculum is a response to our mission of having a just community [that is] socially committed, morally committed.”

“There's a curricular lens to the race and diversity issue, and that's [how] our students [see] themselves in our take on historical studies, our take on who we're holding up as role models and what we're exposing kids to in terms of life opportunities..., and our core curriculum, what is it and does it reflect our kids and their histories. “

Many Pilot Schools use a project-based approach or focus on essential questions to guide their curriculum because these approaches embed diversity and multiple perspectives in the curriculum.

Specific courses or curriculum offered by Pilot high schools includes:

- A project based unit on the essential question, “What makes life worth living?” To ensure that students take multiple perspectives, they address this question from three different areas (South Africa, Haiti, and Europe).
- A course on entrepreneurship that asks about the role of culture and race when starting a business. For example, in computer technology, the class addresses the digital divide and talks very explicitly about race and economics.
- Partnering with an organization that is looking at health issues in poor communities. The students conducted surveys looking at heart disease, high

blood pressure, and different health problems that are over-represented in communities of color and examine how race and racism play a role.

- Two schools use the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, which explores the Civil Rights Movement, the “forgotten” Armenian suicide, the Holocaust, and Apartheid in South Africa, among other complex social events.

Pilot elementary schools believe that it is never too early to address social justice. Specific courses or curriculum offered by Pilot elementary schools include:

- One school uses the Responsive Classroom curriculum, which deals with the issue of acceptance of everyone, and a community of learners.
- One school uses a four-year cycle curriculum that requires them to address race. For example, they choose to study ancient civilization from each continent, and in each case make some connection between contemporary and ancient times.
- When one school studies American history, the question of social justice and diversity is central. One topic is the African-American experience; a second is on questions of different identities that people have, what it means to be an American, where did we come from; a third is on politics and power; and a fourth is the economy. They encourage discussions on diversity by bringing in experts about issues and making sure the entire school reads common literature.
- To teach farms and markets in first grade, students visit an apple orchard, a farm, and a distribution center to see where all the apples go. In this ten-week long course, students also study the migrant workers who pick the apples, where they come from, how they get here, what they get paid, where they live, and what their houses look like?

Autonomies allow for conversations

Pilot Schools have autonomies over budget, staffing, calendar, governance, and curriculum that allow them to create the conditions that best promote teaching and learning. Pilot Schools use their autonomies to help them realize the vision that they have for teaching and learning (CCE, 2001b) in a number of innovative ways. Pilot Schools make full use of these autonomies in helping to facilitate conversations about diversity. As one director stated,

“As a pilot school [we] get to define ourselves around a particular vision of education. [This] means that people [who] come here share certain values. So we tend to be a community of people that places a great deal of

importance on things like equity, issues of equity as they play themselves out in race and diversity, people who have a strong ethos about voice and democracy.”

The Pilot School autonomies both necessitate and facilitate discussions around diversity. By virtue of being small schools with small staffs, by having lots of common planning time for teachers, by having shared governance among staff, and by having curricula freedom to address concepts and themes each school believes is meaningful, teachers at Pilot Schools collaborate with each one other in many meaningful ways. Race, diversity, and power have more avenues to be expressed. This level of conversation requires that teachers feel comfortable with one another and able to share and discuss with one another. Developing curricula that engages race and diversity requires that teachers can share honestly with one another their own views on those issues.

“I think the level of adult contact is much more intense because of our schedule. Adults have much more [contact], there are many more issues created by that contact time, by the friction of diversity, than if you only have a 40-minute planning time. Because people also spend time in each other's classrooms and do a lot of planning together, all that stuff comes to bear.”

Because Pilot Schools believe that exploring diversity is necessary for urban schools, Pilots provide time, resources, and flexibility to have these conversations. They hire external facilitators. They use retreat time, common planning, and full faculty meetings to discuss these issues. They change the schedule to have student meetings to discuss issues that arise.

Even with these resources brought to bear, and with the commitment of staff to discuss diversity, the challenge is enormous.

“I think we're on the vanguard of being able to confront issues because we're small, we're intimate, we're committed.”

IMPLICATIONS

To meet the needs of low-income students and students of color, schools must give voice to their experiences. Schools must create cultures in which the community talks about diversity, racism, classicism, and other issues of power and voice. The Boston Pilot Schools provide a model for other schools in thinking about the range of ways to engage in such conversations, regardless of where schools are currently in their ability to engage their school community in diversity conversations. In this section, we will

discuss aspects of Pilot School culture that promote diversity conversations and their implications for practice.

1. Match student diversity with staff diversity.

A primary strategy to create school cultures which value diversity is to hire a diverse staff. All directors spoke of the need for a diverse staff to provide students with role models. Diverse staffing also builds a richer faculty perspective on students' cultural backgrounds and academic achievement. Pilot Schools attempt to hire teachers and administrators who reflect the backgrounds of their students. They average 43% teachers of color and 61% administrators of color, while the district averages 39% and 38%, respectively.

If you want a diverse population of kids, you should also have a diverse population of educators that will motivate and be role models, and have at least some understanding of the child's frame of reference and perspective as a learner. Pilot School administrator

2. Help adults in the community to become comfortable addressing race, culture, and socio-economic status.

Pilot Schools use professional development to examine diversity issues, including issues of race, power, gender, and class in their schools. Diversity-focused professional development may be facilitated by an external consultant, members of the school community, or a combination of both. Professional development is structured so that faculty discuss the role of diversity in their individual schools, deepen their understanding of the diversity of the school community, and improve communication with each other and with their students. Professional development ideas are staff-generated, and opportunities are centered around ways of knowing others, ways of teaching and learning, and ways of thinking about one's organization.

- *Ways of knowing each other:* Staff examine cultural differences in communication and values, including taking a critical look at what it means for "people of one culture to be [educating people of another culture]." Activities focus on assessing the school's norms and whether communication methods are culturally relevant.
- *Ways of teaching and learning:* Professional development provides teachers with opportunities to develop more culturally relevant curriculum and interactions with students. Case studies, student performance data, and examples from their own schools provide a framework for staff to address these issues.
- *Ways of thinking about one's organization:* Staff examine the internal adult dynamics, the decision-making structures, and issues of power and voice within the school community as it relates to diversity and equity.

3. Establish a common language for discussing diversity.

Pilot School staff develop a common language to use in conversations among and between faculty and students. This common understanding of diversity helps to create a safe environment in which school community members can discuss the sometimes sensitive topics associated with race, culture, and class which can arise in students' daily lives and in the larger world. In one school, all students are trained in a language of safety to facilitate conversations about diversity. In another, "it's everyone's responsibility to take ownership for breaches in community values." Each school develops its diversity language differently.

If it's an issue of race, then we use the word racism. If it's an issue of sexual orientation, we use the term homophobia. So we spell them out, because we want students [and staff] to understand what a particular issue is.

Pilot School administrator

4. Address diversity through curriculum and extracurricular activities for students.

Pilot Schools embed race and culture topics into their curriculum, not only in their core subjects but also through special course offerings and projects. Extracurricular activities also raise diversity conversations, for example, student discussion groups that focus on culture and gender issues. Other examples of diversity courses and projects in Pilot Schools include the following:

- Core humanities curriculum that reflects the students and their histories
- Examining how race and racism play a role in the health of poor communities through surveys of heart disease, high blood pressure, and other health problems that are over-represented in communities of color
- Studying migrant workers who pick fruit on the farm as part of a course on farms and markets

5. Structure diversity conversations with "a common intent to understand."

Conversations around diversity should be structured to deepen people's understanding of diversity, not necessarily to create definitions of diversity. A "common intent to understand" is the ongoing process of talking about, exploring, and increasing an understanding of diversity which in turn helps deepen relationships in the school, increase teacher trust and sharing, and deepen teachers' understanding of its complexity. School communities must be open to an evolving conversation without set definitions or time frames.

6. Discourage "colorblindness" in schools.

Schools attempting to deepen their appreciation of diversity must avoid the pitfall of colorblindness and make explicit cultural differences between and among students and teachers. Many school communities silence these discussions under the guise of treating all students as the same. Acknowledging the discomfort of naming differences, Pilot

School staff delve deeply into how their cultural backgrounds and understandings influence their relationships with diverse students, their families, other teachers, and their practice. Teachers serving primarily low-income students and students of color should work towards understanding how silencing conversations about race, class, and other –isms is counterproductive to student success. Student behavior and curriculum development are both areas in which Pilot School diversity professional development assists staff in serving student needs.

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