

# Research Brief

## Building Cultural Bridges

**Question:** Are there school districts that use the materials found in a program for cultural studies titled “Building Cultural Bridges” as the text? What educational institutions currently have programs based on this specific material? What would be salient components for culturally appropriate course(s) or programs offered for high school students?

### Summary of Findings:

#### In a Nutshell

The book “Building Cultural Bridges” is designed to increase multi-cultural awareness and sensitivity. There are supplemental materials available that include a leader’s guide, reproducible student workbook, readings, worksheets, and activities. This material is recommended for use with students in grades 7 – 12. The materials included with this program can be used as stand alone units and selectively introduced as a part of an existing course or expanded to provide lessons, activities and projects. [www.solution-tree.com/Public/Media.aspx?ShowDetail=true&ProductID=BKF092](http://www.solution-tree.com/Public/Media.aspx?ShowDetail=true&ProductID=BKF092).

Solution Tree Publishers identified three customers that have recently purchased the materials. The publisher was unable to provide detailed information about the experience in these districts. In addition to Tucson USD, districts in Florida and New York purchased the materials. These districts were unable to provide any detail about their experience with the program. A district thinking about purchasing this program should contact the publisher, or local sales representative, directly and ask for information about experience with the program. It is clear from this research that this material is not widely used at this time.

In a review of the TUSD policy for the development of equity and equality for individuals and the organization, the intent is to promote a climate of intercultural proficiency. Given the inclusiveness of the policy language, a review of the literature supports this intention and provides many resources that complement both the policy and the development of an appropriate pilot project utilizing the materials found in the text *Building Cultural Bridges*.

Researchers have worked to bring conceptual clarity to the field of multicultural education. In an analysis of multicultural education in the United States, Christine E Sleeter and Carl A Grant selected and reviewed 89 articles and 38 books and identified five different approaches to multicultural education:

- *Teaching the Culturally Different* is an approach used to assimilate students of color into the cultural mainstream by offering transitional bridges within the existing school program.

- *The Human Relations Approach* is designed to help students of different backgrounds get along better and appreciate each other.
- *Single Group Studies* foster cultural pluralism by teaching courses about the experiences, contributions, and concerns of distinct ethnic, gender, and social class groups.
- *Multicultural Education* is the phrase chosen by the researchers to describe approaches that promote cultural pluralism and social equality by reforming the school program for all students to make it reflect diversity. This includes school staffing patterns that reflect the pluralistic nature of American society; unbiased curricula that incorporate the contributions of different social groups, women and the handicapped. There is an affirmation of the languages of non-English-speaking minorities.
- *Education That is Multicultural and Social Deconstructionist* prepares students to challenge social structural inequality and to promote cultural diversity

The Office of High School Instruction and K – 12 Curriculum Services in the Fairfax County Schools (VA) developed a number of initiatives to help create a culturally responsive school setting. Characteristics of successful programs included:

- Elective courses designed to help students from diverse backgrounds get along, such as Combating Intolerance.
- Peer mediation to allow students from diverse backgrounds an opportunity to talk about potentially divisive issues.
- Student clubs that help large groups of students retain cultural identity (e.g. Muslim Student Society).
- Openness to starting new clubs to reflect the interests of the student body.
- Parent liaisons that are paid to work with families who would not otherwise have a traditional involvement with the school.
- Home visits by parent liaisons.
- Telephone tree in multiple languages.
- Minority parent committee that organizes evenings for minority parents to come to school in smaller groups and learn about the college admissions process, SAT prep classes, scholarship and grant opportunities, and so forth.
- Letters sent home and phone contact with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure a good turnout in parent meetings.
- Open communications with students.
- Quarterly meeting between a randomly selected group of students from each grade level and their administrator to obtain feedback on how school is going for them and what specific things can be improved or changed.
- Effort awards honor breakfast for students who have had trouble but who have raised their grades; each teacher nominates two students from his or her class.
- Establishment of a Hispanic PTSA with business discussion and programs in Spanish.
- Initiation of a “challenge” program to invite promising students to enroll in honors and Advanced Placement classes.
- Culturally competent schools strive for the highest result of education, which is tolerance. To reach this point the goals must be set that establish settings where all students are

made to feel welcome; are engaged in learning and are included in the full range of activities, curricula, and services. (Mary Beth Klotz. Pg. 280. (Roundtable viewpoints: Educational leadership. First Edition. [www.mhhe.com](http://www.mhhe.com))

In *A More Perfect Union: Building an Education System that Embraces All Children*, the National Association of State Boards of Education (2002) discussed culturally competent schools. The report described the nations growing diversity among schoolchildren, the challenges and opportunities this diversity presents. All in all, the report in its conclusion offers the following recommendations for school leaders:

- Use high academic standards as the basis of instruction for all students
- Adopt a curriculum that fosters cultural competency
- Demonstrate respect for students' identities and welcome a diverse community to participate in schools. (Roundtable viewpoints: Educational leadership. First Edition. [www.mhhe.com](http://www.mhhe.com)

#### **Resources:**

#### **Teaching Tolerance**

Tolerance.org ([www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)) sponsored by the Southern Poverty Law Center is an online destination for people interested in dismantling bigotry and creating, in hate's stead, communities that value diversity. (Read more about [how we define "tolerance."](#)) Through its online resources and ideas, its expanding collection of print materials, its burgeoning outreach efforts, and its [downloadable public service announcements](#), Tolerance.org promotes and supports anti-bias activism in every venue of [life.http://www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org).

#### **Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture**

The Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture (ISPRC) was founded in 2000 at Boston College, under the direction of Dr. Janet E. Helms, to promote the assets and address the societal conflicts associated with race or culture in theory, and research, mental health practice, education, business, and society at large.

ISPRC attempts to solicit, design, and disseminate effective interventions with a proactive, practical focus. Each year the Institute will address a racial or cultural issue that could benefit from a pragmatic scholarly focus through its **Diversity Challenge Conference**. [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/isprc/](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/isprc/)

#### **An Analysis of Multicultural Education in the United States**

[Sleeter, Christine, E., and Carl A. Grant. "An Analysis of Multicultural Education in the United States." \*Harvard Educational Review\*. Vol. 57, No. 4, November 1987, pp. 421-444. \(As summarized in \*Effective Schools Research Abstracts Volume 5, Issue 2\*\) Harvard Educational Review has a web site at <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hepg/her.html>](#)

<http://www.educationpartnerships.org/>

### **Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education**

Website: <http://www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/>

As an open-access e-journal, EMME published almost 100 articles and reviews of books and multimedia material in 18 issues between 1999 and 2006. In fall 2007, International Journal of Multicultural Education (IJME), an open-access peer-reviewed e-journal, succeeded it.

### **Successful K-12 Programs**

The Center for Multicultural Education (<http://depts.washington.edu/centerme/k-12.htm>) at the University of Washington, Seattle WA provides a list of Successful K-12 Programs:

#### **Accelerated Schools** (<http://www.acceleratedschools.net>)

An approach to school reform that aims to enhance academic growth for students placed "at risk" through challenging and stimulating activities that build on students' strengths. A key idea behind the approach is that rather than remediating students' deficits, students who are placed "at risk" of school failure must be accelerated by providing them with high expectations and curriculum typical of programs for gifted and talented students. Through shared inquiry, the accelerated school takes stock of the current status of the school, forges a vision for change, sets priorities, and establishes governance structures that focus on participatory decision-making.

**The Algebra Project** (<http://www.algebra.org>) is a school mathematics curriculum created by civil rights activist Robert Moses to help inner-city African American students in the Boston area achieve proficiency in math so that they can successfully enter and complete college preparatory math and science courses in high school. It is founded on the belief that all students can learn algebra if given the proper instructional context, and it utilizes a five-step Transitional Curriculum which Moses developed to help students make the conceptual leap from arithmetic to algebra. The program utilizes experiential strategies, social construction of knowledge, teacher education, and community empowerment. The Algebra Project has continued to target students from under-represented ethnic minority groups as it has expanded to include schools in urban areas around the US as well as rural schools in the Mississippi Delta.

#### **Achievement Via Individual Determination** (<http://www.avidonline.org/>)

A program to motivate and prepare underachieving students from linguistic and ethnic minority groups to perform well in high school and seek a college education. It began in San Diego's Claremont High School in 1980 and is now implemented in 120 high schools in San Diego County and many more across the nation. Low achieving students are placed in college preparatory classes with high achieving students and participate daily in an AVID elective class that emphasizes writing, inquiry, and collaboration. Local college student's act as tutors and AVID students collaborate in study teams. Case studies of 248 AVID students (Mehan et al., 1996) found that their college enrollment rates were higher than the local and national rates. Researchers conclude that the academic success of AVID students is the result of institutional practices such as explicit socialization into the implicit academic culture, and teacher advocacy and mentoring to mediate the college entry process.

#### **The Comer School Development Center** (<http://www.med.yale.edu/comer>)

The Comer Process or the Comer Model, was developed to improve the educational experience of poor ethnic minority youth by improving school climate through a collaborative, consensus-building, no fault approach to problem solving between parents and school staff. The nine component process model includes three mechanisms (a School Planning and Management Team; a Student and Staff Support Team, formerly known as the mental health team; and a Parents' Team); three operations (a comprehensive school plan, staff development activities, and ongoing assessment); and three guiding principles (a no-fault attitude toward solving problems, decision-making by consensus, and collaborative participation that does not paralyze the principal). Initially developed by James Comer and the Child Study Center of Yale University in 1968, the program is now being implemented in over 563 schools in 21 states. Studies of selected SDP schools in three cities (New Haven, Benton Harbor, and Norfolk) showed significant student gains in achievement, attendance, behavior, and overall adjustment in SDP schools. Comer and his colleagues believe that improving school climate is the key to school improvement.

**The Hualapai Bilingual/Bicultural Education Program (HBBEP)**

(<http://depts.washington.edu/centerme/hualapai.htm>)

Began in 1975 when a linguist, Akira Yamamoto, began to learn and document the Hualapai language and culture with the intent to produce materials that could be used to help children maintain their home language (Watahomigie & Yamamoto, 1987). The program started with a three-year grant from Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act, to develop orthography, a dictionary, and instructional materials in Hualapai. Over the next three years, (1978-1980) the *Hualapai Social Studies Curriculum Guide*, a *Language Arts Curriculum Guide*, the *Hualapai Reference Grammar* and other readers and books about the local area were produced and staff training provided.

**The Mathematics Workshop Program** (<http://depts.washington.edu/centerme/math.htm>)

Developed by Uri Treisman at the University of California, Berkeley. Its purpose was to reverse the low success rate in entry-level calculus, and the high attrition rate in math-related fields, for African American and Latino/Latina students who entered the university interested in careers in math, science, or engineering. In no way remedial, the Mathematics Workshop Program was designed as a voluntary honors program that supplemented the students' regular calculus classes. In workshops, small groups of students were given challenging problems that they solved through collaborative efforts with their peers. The program achieved dramatic results. Highlighting that success, the Mathematics Workshop Program counts among its workshop alumni Michele deCoteau, the first African American and the first woman student at Berkeley to be awarded a Rhodes scholarship.

**The Multicultural Literacy Program** (<http://depts.washington.edu/centerme/mlp.htm>)

(MLP), a three year project funded by FIRST (Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teachers) of the U. S. Department of Education, was designed to address the needs of the changing racial and cultural demographics of school districts. The program used a holistic approach to reading/writing instruction, integrating multicultural literature into the existing reading program to increase reading achievement and engagement.



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