

Engaging Families in Cross-cultural Connections Through a School-based Literacy Fair

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This paper describes how 20 pre-service teachers enrolled in two social studies methods courses at Buffalo State College worked collaboratively to produce a Cross-cultural Literacy Fair at an urban-based elementary school. The participatory activities created for the event were provided in conjunction with a community after school program and directed at promoting literacy and cross-cultural understandings not only for the children enrolled at the school but for their parents, as well. Events yielded a positive venue for Teacher Candidates to interact with parents and children and demonstrated ways literacy and other cultural understandings can be successfully and appreciatively supported at home. The authors are educators in the Department of Elementary Education and Reading and work with students enrolled in social studies /literacy methods courses that are infused within their first field based practicum at Enterprise Charter School (ECS), an urban based professional development school with demographics generally indicating high percentages of minority children from high poverty families.

The Case of Engaging Parents

As one aspect of our course requirements, and in line with the National Association of Professional Schools' (NAPDS) essential 1: the fostering of “ a school – university culture committed to the preparation of future educators who embrace active engagement in the school community,” the teacher candidates (TCs) are directed to design and carry out project related activities that develop the literacy and culturally responsive citizenry of the school children as well as that of their families and/or caretakers. Our commitment to this goal is grounded in research that supports the engagement of parents in their children’s literacy and appreciation of diversity. For example, Feuberstein (2000) and Benjamin (1993) have demonstrated that involving parents in their children’s academic accomplishments generally results in higher literacy scores, heightened self-confidence, and improved satisfaction with the school on the part of the students.

Unfortunately, urban parents of poverty often feel powerless in making a contribution to their children's school success (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). Feelings of exclusion due to ethnic, income, and cultural differences pervading their own school experiences often instigate a lack of participation in their children's academic lives. Yet, Banks, (2009), Gay, (1994) and Saracho, (2011) have shown that family resistance to school involvement can be reversed when culturally responsive methods are used to connect with low income urban parents. Family literacy programs can be engaging when parents and children are provided with opportunities to interact together on school based projects (Britton and Brooks-Gunn, 2006; LoBionco, (2008) Chasek and Rosen 2011). McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) suggest holding celebrations of children's achievements in community-based settings so that parental notions about school can be positively impacted.

Teacher Candidates and Parental Engagement

Both national and state standards illuminate the need for beginning teachers to know how to establish and maintain relationships with families that promote students' academic achievement and well being (Standard 5.1 of ACEI, and INTASC Standard 10). Yet, the ability to develop such know-how is infrequently achieved at the pre-service level. Barriers to realizing this ability most often arise from a lack of opportunity on the part of TCs to deal with parents in collaborative enterprises. This lack of opportunity is exacerbated when pre-service field experiences take place where marginalizing factors such as poverty, language differences and cultural racism discourage parents from making connections with their children's educators (Oaks and Lipton, 1999). According to Alvarez and Williams (1998) and Sarachio (2011), it is crucial that teacher education programs provide TCs with opportunity to learn and use culturally responsive and collaborative strategies for working with low income, urban parents.

The Context of the Project

Enterprise Charter School has been a member of the Buffalo State College Professional Development School Consortium (PDS) since receiving its charter in 2003 (<http://www.buffalostate.edu/pds/>). The PDS currently enrolls 406 children, 94% of whom, are African American or Hispanic and all of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch.

(<http://www.movoto.com/public-schools/ny/buffalo/primary/360007305551-enterprise-charter->

school/275-oak-st.htm.) The project-based approach serves as the foundation of the school curriculum with a reading/writing workshop program (Calkins, 2003) currently being employed.

TCs enrolled in two sections of a three-credit elementary social studies methods course, each section facilitated by one of the authors, worked to realize the project. We collaborated in writing a proposal, which garnered a \$2000 mini-grant from the PDS consortium for subsidizing various facets of the project. Other support was obtained from Project FLIGHT (<http://www.projectflight.org/>) with their donation of 500 books to be given away at the fair.

Cooperative Planning with the School

Prior to the beginning of the semester we met with the principal, instructional coordinator, and the director of the after school programs to plan the logistics of the proposed fair. Holding the fair as an aspect of parents' night was welcomed by the group, noting that the event would easily extend the school based social studies curriculum. The day of the fair was scheduled and plans were generated for space utilization in the school *cafetorium* where the fair would be held. Also discussed were ways of promoting student and parent attendance, efficient movement of families from one station to the next, and ways in which grant monies would be used to support the creation of stations and purchase of books and materials.

We decided that we would use "passports" to simulate the notion of recording travel to unfamiliar places. Children's passports would be stamped to indicate that they had not only visited a station, but had also participated in the cross-cultural activity provided. In addition to organizing efficient movement from one station to the next, the passports could be used as a source of data. For this latter purpose, the passports, as we would design them, would include a short questionnaire on which children could easily indicate the foods they tasted, the activities they participated in, and things they saw and learned at each of the stations they visited. By turning in a passport at the culmination of the fair, each child would receive an "extra" free book, complements of Project FLIGHT.

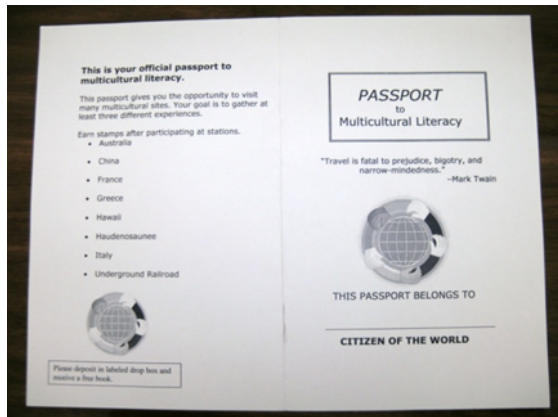


Figure 1: Outer cover of the passport

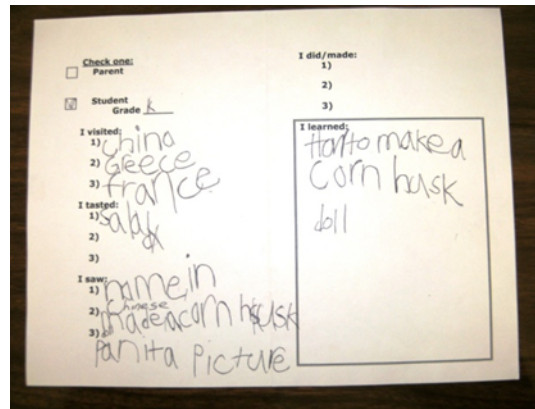


Figure 2: First graders responses on the passport questionnaire

The director of after school programs indicated that, normally, the older students did not frequent the after school programs to the extent that did the younger children. It was thus decided that fifth and sixth grade students would be solicited to participate as student ambassadors who would help check in families and escort them from one station to the next according to established time frames. In consideration of the dominant culture of the families associated with the school, a performance by the West African Drum and Dance Club from Enterprise would also be incorporated into the program. As a backdrop for the performance, the sixth-graders would create a display that included West African symbols of wisdom from Ghana. Finally, we discussed and agreed upon the expectations for TCs. Three goals would direct the launching of the Cross-Cultural Literacy Fair project at the PDS.

- Goal 1: To improve literacy and cross-cultural understandings among the children at the school.
- Goal 2: To enlist parental support for literacy and cross-cultural knowledge at home.
- Goal 3: To raise pre- and in-service teacher awareness of ways parents can be involved in their children's literacy and cross-cultural understandings.

Expectations for the Teacher Candidates

We agreed that the TCs in each of their respective courses should work collaboratively in small groups, each group designing a station that would highlight a selected culture and/or country. Eventually, this would result in the creation of eight thematic stations, each arising from cooperating teachers' and TC conversations. Each station would focus on a culture and include

traditions associated it. In designing the presentations, the TCs were asked to keep in mind the three previously mentioned goals of the project. To enable TCs to meet specific standard based requirements (New York State Core Curriculum for both the social studies and English language arts) each station was expected to include:

- A literacy based activity that enabled reading and or listening to a text pertaining to the culture being portrayed.
- An activity focusing on one of the arts aligned with the traditions of the culture (e.g. dance, painting, calligraphy etc.).
- An electronically created poster displaying the key features of the country or culture being represented (flag, tradition, historic site, geographic feature etc.).
- A snack/food presentation representative of the culture being portrayed.



Figure 3. One of eight electronic posters created by Teacher Candidates

Each group of TCs received an average of \$200 to purchase materials, books, foods, and other resources, defraying the use of TCs personal expenses for the creation of the stations. All children and parents who attended would create lesson plans, approved by the instructors, to ensure active participation. We designed rubrics that would be used to guide the design of the stations and the lesson plans associated with them. (See Appendix A for rubrics used to evaluate lesson plans, learning stations, and posters).

The Stations

Five stations were created depicting the selected countries and distinctive cultural practices associated with them. These included France, China, Italy, Greece and Australia. Three other stations highlighted specific multicultural groups within the United States such as the Underground Railroad of the pre-Civil War period, the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations of the Iroquois), and the May Day tradition of Hawaiian children. At these stations, the arts were represented in a variety of ways. In France, for instance, the commercial art of fashion design was highlighted along with Seurat's fine art painting style of pointillism. The children and parents who visited this station ultimately created and/or observed the development of a painting using pointillism—albeit with finger paints.



Figure 3: TC helps child create Pointillism of the Eiffel Tower



Figure 4: Finished painting using fingers for points of color

The Greek station featured dance with TCs leading all of the visitors in dancing the Zorba. Representing a culture in our own United States, the Haudenosaunee station engaged families in the oral tradition of storytelling and creation of cornhusk no-face dolls while at the Hawaiian station children created Keiki Leis as do Hawaiian children on Lei Day (May Day).



Figure 5: Child with completed kiki lei



Figure 6: TCs teaching children the Zorba

Children learned about an historical culture when they participated in the creation of quilt squares depicting “secret” symbols thought to have been used by slaves on the Underground Railroad to gain their freedom in the North and Canada. Traveling to China, children were enraptured by a description of the practice of Chinese calligraphy and seeing their own name written in pictorial script. Scholars from the China Studies Center on campus assisted the TCs in this endeavor. On their visit to Italy, the participants went to the Carnival of Viareggio where they designed masks in the traditional style. And finally, their journey to the land-down- under gave the participants the opportunity to engage in a Readers’ Theatre presentation of a traditional Australian tale. Each of the stations featured a children’s book with the TCs employing a research-based strategy for presentation of the text and a snack representative of the culture portrayed. The following table displays the literature, instructional strategy, cultural food and activity presented by the TCs at each of the stations designed for the fair.

Station	Literature	Strategy	Snack	Arts Activity
France	<i>Adele and Simone</i> (McClintock, B.,2008)	Interactive Read-Aloud (Fountas, I.& Pinnell, G. 2007)	Baguette rounds with cheese	Group produces a painting of the Eiffel Tower using Seurat's style (Pointillism)
Italy	<i>Clown of God</i> (Depaola, T. 1989)	Interactive Read Aloud (Fountas, I.& Pinnell, G. 2007)	Pizza and Cannoli	Each student creates a carnival mask
Greece	<i>King Midas and the Golden Touch</i> (Demi, 1999)	Directed Listening Thinking Activity (Gillette & Temple, 1994)	Greek Salad	Groups learned the steps to the Zorba and danced to Greek music
Australia	<i>Snap!</i> , Ballinger, M (1994)	Repeated Reading (Samuels, S.J. 1979)	Vegemite on Toast	Readers' Theater
Haudenausonee	Why Corn Dolls Have No Features. From <i>Children of the Earth and Sky</i> (Levine, 1991)	Storytelling/ Improvisation (Bedore,B.2004)	Ghost Bread	Children created no- face corn husk dolls
Underground Railroad	<i>Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt</i> (Hopkins, D. 1995)	Read-aloud w/DLTA Gillette & Temple, 1994)	Grits	Children designed quilt squares and produced a quilt.
Hawaii	<i>Luka's Quilt</i> (Guback, G. ,1994)	Read-aloud w/DLTA Gillette & Temple, 1994)	Pineapple	Children made keiki leis
China	<i>Liu and the Bird:A Journey into Chinese Calligraphy</i> (Louis,C., 2009)	Powerpoint w/DLTA Gillette & Temple, 1994)	Chinese Dumplings	Children had their names written in Chinese calligraphy

Table 1. Cross-cultural Literacy Fair Station Summary

The Impact of the Fair

Over 65 parents and caretakers accompanied their children at the fair, many of them participating with their children in the activities provided at various stations. In light of meager attendance at previously offered family literacy functions, this participatory outcome was viewed as a success. Parents as well as children participated in a variety of presentations that enriched their views of other cultures. Additionally families observed demonstrations of literacy promoting strategies that could easily be replicated at home. Both the parents and children left the fair with several children's books they could read together and/or share with others at home.

Some evidence of the fair's impact on children's learning was revealed through the comments on the passport questionnaires turned in at the culmination of the event. Over and over the children reported how much they enjoyed dancing the Zorba, making no-face (corn-husk) dolls, quilts and masks, and having their names written in Chinese script. In several cases parents were noted helping their children fill in the questionnaires included in the passports; this was another observation of parents subtly demonstrating the importance of literacy.

An indicator of the impact of the stations and entertainment were the testimonials made by some children several days after the fair. After brainstorming about topics for a writing activity, a TC assigned to a 2nd grade classroom at the school received several paragraphs written by the children in her classroom, each telling about their experiences at the fair. For example, Nasia wrote:

I saw Mrs. K (the TC) at the fair on Friday. She was doing her project on France. My mom and Rakia went to France. We finger painted the Eiffel Tower. And after finger-painting we ate cheese and crackers and we had a good time.

Regina wrote:

When I went to the fair I saw different places. It was nice. It was like it was real. All my friends were there like Rakia and Nasia.

Other primary graders also had opportunities to write about their experiences. Janya, another kindergartener succinctly wrote and drew about his experience doing the Zorba. "I learned a dance." Noah, a first grader, wrote: "When I was at the fair I made a mask and I painted a *pontis*" (referring to the pointillism presentation).

Preparing for the fair had positive learning effects on the TCs as well. This was noted in unsolicited statements written by them in a common writing assignment known as the Culturally

Responsive Education Embracing Diversity (CREED) paper focusing on global education and culturally responsive pedagogy as they perceived it during their Social Studies methods course experience at the PDS (NCATE requirement).

Amanda wrote:

The multicultural fair on April 24th will be an incredible experience for the students at Enterprise; each student will get a trip around the world and a chance to experience other cultures. Each student will have time to sample food, create art or music and even dance like other cultures do.

Reflecting on her experiences at the PDS, Lindsey remarked:

My partner and I decided to choose Greece. Greek dancing is an important part of Greek traditions today, and has been for hundreds of years. Therefore, my partner and I chose to teach the students a Greek dance called The Zorba Dance. I feel that each student felt what it might be like for children in Greece. Every child showed great enthusiasm for this important Greek tradition. I feel that the Multicultural fair is a great way to help children respect, appreciate, and embrace diversity.

Conclusions

There were obvious successes in implementing the fair. Considering the attendance and level of engagement shown by the children as well as the parents, we felt that we had provided a successful family literacy event that generally fulfilled our goals. Awareness was raised among participants about ways to foster literacy and cross-cultural understandings at home. Within the context of the fair itself, our pre-service teachers had an opportunity to interact with families in ways that were supportive and enlightening.

However, while our TCs met certain expectations, in the process of working with them, we noted misconceptions about the meaning of multiculturalism versus globalism with their thinking the two terms are synonymous. Certainly our TCs need to realize that difference between concepts such as multiculturalism (the practice of appreciating and/or giving equal attention to people of diverse backgrounds within a particular settings) and globalism (the understanding of the responsible interconnectedness of people and places around the world). Multiculturalism and global perspectives are interrelated in that both can develop the cross-

cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to teach in diverse classrooms. Teacher candidates need to develop an understanding of the relationship of globalism to multiculturalism in the United States as well as the interplay between national identity and cultural practices. Without this understanding students' fail to appreciate their place as global citizens.

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Appendix A

Cultural Literacy Poster Rubrics

Criteria	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Target
Organization	While most expected components are present, the layout of the poster is confusing to follow. Visual clues are poorly laid out or not existent. Text is barely readable and/or too ornate.	Poster is organized with sufficient space between columns. Sequence is easy to follow using visual clues that may include numbers, letters, or arrows. Text is simple and large enough to be read from a minimum of four feet away. A standard, easy to read text is used. Both capital and small-case letters are used.	Poster is well organized with ideal spacing and there is no doubt where one column ends and another begins. Visual clues are extraordinary in guiding the audience. Fonts and font size of the text used enhance audience participation with the theme and presenters. The poster conveys high interest.
Presentation	Text dominates the poster visually with graphics playing a supporting role. Differentiation of important elements including the title is unclear. Artistic elements of the poster detract from the message of the poster.	Graphics dominate the poster visually with text playing a supporting role. Graphics, cartoons, artwork, and figures are utilized whenever possible. Relative importance of poster elements is graphically communicated. More important information is presented with larger graphics and text. The title clearly describes the theme/activity presented. Artistic elements of the poster support rather than detract from the message of the poster.	Exquisite theme-related graphics provide the focal point for conceptual understanding. Related text further supports content and concepts. Font size and style support clarity and readability. The theme/activity is evident through the brief, but effective title. Exception artistic elements convey the message of the poster. Audience could independently decipher the message without a formal presentation.
Content/Information	Some of the expected components of the theme are present, but poorly presented and difficult to understand. Little or no background information and an apparent lack of research are apparent in the inaccuracy of information	The theme is covered on the poster. Details indicate that the activity and topic were sufficiently researched and accurate information is presented. The title communicates the cross-cultural connection. Brief directions for the activity are	The theme is well covered on the poster. Details indicate the activity and topic were well-researched and quality, accurate information is presented. The title is explicit, communicating the cross-cultural connection. Brief directions for the activity

	<p>presented. The title fails to explicitly communicate the cross-cultural connection. Directions for the activity are confusing. Poster and/or handouts reflect spelling errors, typos, and other issues with the conventions of language.</p>	<p>included. Reference to selected literature is made. Handouts include all directions and necessary materials to complete the project. The conventions of language are followed in all written materials with only minor errors.</p>	<p>provide focus for the presentation. The overall content message of the poster is obvious. Selected literature is highlighted. Handouts include all directions and high-quality materials to complete the project. The conventions of language are followed in all written materials with no errors.</p>
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Lesson Plan Rubric

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target	Your Score
<p>Instructional Goals (S) ACEI: 1, 3.1</p>	<p>Instructional goals are written as measurable outcome statements of expectations for student learning. They do not reflect the NYS Learning Standards.</p>	<p>Instructional goals are broad general statements of lesson understandings. Most are clear and indirectly correlate with NYS Learning Standards.</p>	<p>Instructional goals are broad, general statements of expectations for learning. They coincide with the NYS Learning Standards.</p>	
<p>Performance Objectives (S) ACEI: 1, 3.1</p>	<p>Objectives are not valuable, developmentally inappropriate and/or represent low expectations or little conceptual understanding. They are not measurable or observable. They fail to connect to assessment.</p>	<p>Objectives are developmentally appropriate and reflect learning and conceptual understanding. Most are clearly stated and connect to student assessment</p>	<p>Objectives are developmentally appropriate, reflecting important learning and conceptual understanding. They are clearly stated and directly connect to student assessment strategies.</p>	

<p>NYS Standards (K) ACEI: 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1</p>	<p>Selected NYS Standards are not reflected in the lesson goals and objectives. A description of how students will meet the selected standards is unclear or missing.</p>	<p>Most selected NYS Standards are reflected in the lesson goals and objectives. A description of how students will meet the selected standards is included.</p>	<p>Selected NYS Standards are clearly reflected in the lesson goals and objectives. A clear description of how students will meet the selected standards is included.</p>	
<p>Materials (K, S) ACEI: 1, 3.2</p>	<p>Materials and resources do not support the performance objectives or engage students in meaningful learning. Sources are not identified.</p>	<p>Materials and resources support the performance objectives or engage students in learning. Most sources are identified.</p>	<p>Materials and resources support the performance objectives and highly engage students in meaningful learning. All sources are identified.</p>	
<p>Physical Space (S) ACEI: 1</p>	<p>Candidate shows lack of planning for efficient arrangement of furniture and other materials to enhance student learning and safety.</p>	<p>Candidate shows evidence of planning for efficient arrangement of furniture and other materials to enhance student learning and safety.</p>	<p>Candidate shows clear evidence of planning for efficient arrangement of furniture and other materials to enhance student learning and safety, as well as maximize instructional time.</p>	
<p>Initiating Strategy (K, S, D) ACEI: 3.3, 3.5</p>	<p>Candidate fails to plan for an initiating strategy or introduction to the lesson.</p>	<p>Candidate shows evidence of planning for an initiating strategy. Some attempt is made to focus the students' attention on the lesson concepts and connect to prior knowledge.</p>	<p>Candidate shows clear evidence of planning for an initiating strategy. Students' attention is focused in an exciting way on the lesson concepts and connections to prior knowledge.</p>	

<p>Teaching Procedures/Instructional Events (K, S, D) ACEI: 1, 2.4, 2.5</p>	<p>The lesson has no clearly defined structure. Lesson activities fail to match the performance objectives of the lesson.</p>	<p>The lesson has a clearly defined structure. Lesson activities match most of the performance objectives of the lesson.</p>	<p>The lesson has a clearly defined structure. Lesson activities match the performance objectives of the lesson. Activities highly engage students in meaningful learning.</p>	
<p>Closure (K, S, D) ACEI: 5.1</p>	<p>Closure is omitted or inappropriate.</p>	<p>Closure is apparent, but performed primarily by the teacher candidate.</p>	<p>Closure is clearly used to extend and refine learning. There is provision for student performed closure.</p>	
<p>Assessment of Student Performance (K, S, D) ACEI: 4</p>	<p>Assessment criteria are lacking or fail to relate to the objectives.</p>	<p>Assessment criteria are congruent with most of the performance objectives, both in content and process. The assessment criteria are communicated to students.</p>	<p>Assessment criteria are completely congruent with the performance objectives, both in content and process. The assessment criteria are clearly communicated to students.</p>	
<p>Teacher Candidate Self-evaluation (K, S, D) ACEI: 5.2</p>	<p>Candidate failed to identify strengths and weaknesses with no suggestions about how the lesson might be improved.</p>	<p>Candidate identified strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. A few specific suggestions of modifications if given a second chance are included.</p>	<p>Candidate made a thoughtful and accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. Specific alternative actions with probable results are included.</p>	