DECONSTRUCTING DEFICIT THINKING
Working With Educators to Create More Equitable Learning Environments

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Studies of comprehensive school reform suggest that such efforts often fail because of educators' unwillingness to examine the root causes of underachievement and of failure among students from low-income and racially or ethnically diverse backgrounds and because of their tendency to locate the problem within students, families, and communities. Drawing on their research and professional development experiences, the authors present a conceptual framework for the deconstruction of deficit thinking through staff development. Next, they discuss assumptions and beliefs about culturally diverse students and families that they have encountered in low-performing schools, and they illustrate how such beliefs may be successfully challenged and reframed.

Keywords: *beliefs; school reform; diversity*

After more than 30 years of educational reform, there continues to be a significant and persistent achievement gap between White, predominantly middle-class students and their poor and/or non-White peers (Berman, Chambliss, & Geiser, 1999). Despite some evidence that more recent comprehensive systemic reform (CSR) efforts may be raising passing rates on statewide achievement tests across all demographic groups (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001), many schools and districts are still not achieving success with all students (Berman et al., 1999; Haney, 2000; Little & Dorph, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999).

Many educational change efforts appear to stall or to come to a halt because educators are unwilling to assume responsibility for students' low achievement and failure (Berman & Chambliss, 2000). Working toward systemic change in low-performing schools, Berman et al. (1999) found that efforts to raise achievement were hindered by school districts' and educators' tendencies to place the problem within the student (and family) or within the

school, without examining the links between school practices and student outcomes. These researchers suggested that there is insufficient "exploration of the institutional and individual practices, assumptions, and processes that contribute to and/or fail to weaken these patterns" (p. 10). As a result, reform efforts are undermined by educators' deficit views and by their beliefs about the children who become the targets of reform (Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2001). They believe that the students and the families are at fault because, from their perspective, "these children" enter school without the necessary prerequisite knowledge and skills and that so-called uncaring parents neither value nor support their child's education (Betsinger, García, & Guerra, 2001; Valencia et al., 2001). Because these educators do not view themselves as part of the problem, there is little willingness to look for solutions within the educational system itself.

An unwillingness to undertake change can often reflect attitudes of complacency on the part of educators, that their school is doing an adequate job in educating its students, or resignation that they can do no more to educate them more effectively (Finnan & Swanson, 2000). Such assumptions often lead to efforts to superimpose programs designed for historically successful students and families on students and on families from low-income and culturally/linguistically diverse (CLD) communities. When these efforts do not produce the desired success, deficit beliefs are likely to be reinforced, and the cycle repeats itself. In other words, school reform efforts stall or fail because deficit beliefs become a filter that blocks educators' abilities to examine their assumptions and to look beyond traditional solutions for real and meaningful change.

Although the phenomenon of deficit thinking has been extensively documented (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Pohan, 1999; Valencia, 1997), there are few studies of the transformation process involved in developing an additive view of diversity and even fewer empirically supported guidelines for what works. As Rosa Hernández Sheets (2003) observed, "Diversity ideologies are primarily conceptual and unsupported by the empirical research needed to improve the actual schooling experiences of children from underrepresented groups" (p. 111). This critique is particularly relevant to the deconstruction of deficit thinking, as we have yet to establish research-based evidence related to the following questions: What types of staff-development experiences (content and process) lead to the development of critical, intercultural knowledge and skills related to school and to classroom practices? Given prevailing deficit views among many teachers about CLD students and families, to what extent and how can staff development effectively address these beliefs? And how can staff development in intercultural competence be

linked to school-wide reform efforts to close the achievement gap experienced by CLD students?

In this article, we draw on our research, our development activities, and our field-based experiences with teachers and principals to begin to develop an empirically based framework for the deconstruction of deficit thinking among educators. We begin with a brief overview of these collaborative staff-development projects focused on improving educational outcomes for CLD students. Next, we outline five major assumptions we have gleaned from our work, which serve as the foundation for our collaboration with schools to close the achievement gap. Finally, we show how we have begun to deconstruct deficit thinking with participants, and we show the influence of the overall staff development on their beliefs and on their assumptions about CLD students and families.

OVERVIEW OF THE
ORGANIZING FOR DIVERSITY PROJECT
AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Since 1996, we have collaborated in a series of activities focused on improving educational outcomes in schools with high enrollments of students from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. This work began with the Organizing for Diversity Project[1] (ODP) at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in Austin, Texas (Betsinger, García, & Guerra, 2000, 2001). Using a sociocultural framework, we began to challenge teachers'—and subsequently administrators'—deficit views about CLD students and families and to redefine the presumed interrelationships between culture, teaching, and learning so that culture is viewed as the context in which teaching and learning occur for all students, not just children from subordinate sociocultural, racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups (see García & Domínguez, 1997).

A research and development project, the ODP emerged in response to a request from superintendents of the largest urban school districts in the Southwest region served by SEDL (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas). They believed that the achievement gap experienced by poor and by CLD students in urban public schools was in great part because of the inadequate preparation by institutions of higher education of their predominantly White, middle-class, female teachers to work with this population. This project resulted in the development and the validation of a

33-hour staff-development program focused on addressing issues of diversity and of equity, Understanding the Cultural Contexts of Teaching and Learning (Guerra & García, 2000). In all, 69 teachers across three elementary schools participated in the development and the validation phases of the project over 2 years. The majority of our participants across sites were Caucasian and female.

Since the conclusion of the ODP, we have continued to replicate and to build on the original work, including (a) a district-wide, 2-year training-of-trainers project in a school district in central Texas, involving a district-wide (K-12) cadre of 29 teachers, 15 principals, and 2 central office administrators; (b) staff development for teachers at so-called low performing schools in Arkansas ($N = 20$) and in Georgia ($N = 56$ [over 2 years]) and for teacher educators and community leaders in Montana ($N = 20$); and (c) exploration of the interface between our work and comprehensive school reform, specifically using the Accelerated Schools Process ($N = 50$). As we critically examine the results of these projects and reflect on our own professional experiences across the various sites, we have begun to identify elements that are central to our staff-development efforts across schools, districts, and states. Project evaluation continues to be an important component of our subsequent work to provide formative and summative data on the effectiveness of the staff development. Although our analysis of this work is in progress, preliminary patterns appear to be strikingly similar to the original data, particularly in the area of educators' beliefs about CLD students and attributions related to their educational performance.

A FRAMEWORK OF OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOCUSED ON EQUITY-ORIENTED PEDAGOGY

The knowledge base in multicultural education is extensive and reflects multiple perspectives about the education of CLD students, often grounded in very different philosophical and theoretical perspectives (Sleeter, 1992). Yet relatively little empirical research is available that links these approaches to successful school-based practices or to teacher preparation in multicultural education (Artiles & Trent, 1997). On the other hand, there is a well-established body of literature, theoretical as well as empirical, on intercultural communication theory and methods for intercultural training (e.g., Brislin & Yoshida, 1994a, 1994b; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Landis &

Bhagat, 1996). Though these works have generally targeted intercultural communication in international contexts, their relevance and application to intergroup dynamics in U.S. public schools has been noted in this literature. Based on our reviews of these respective disciplines, we sought to integrate components of effective intercultural communication training (content and process) with elements of effective staff-development design drawn from multicultural and from general education (e.g., Sleeter, 1992; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Over time, this integrated framework has evolved into the five underlying assumptions discussed here: (a) deficit thinking permeates society; schools and teachers mirror these beliefs; (b) professional development in diversity is not just for White educators; (c) intercultural communication permeates every aspect of schooling; (d) cultural sensitivity and awareness do not automatically result in equity practices; and (e) professional development activities must systematically and explicitly link equity knowledge to classroom practices.

DEFICIT THINKING PERMEATES SOCIETY; SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS MIRROR THESE BELIEFS

Rather than make educators the new targets of deficit thought, our work reinforces the importance of professional development that identifies elements of the school culture and the school climate that lead to institutional practices that systematically marginalize or pathologize difference. We have found that the majority of teachers are well-intentioned, caring individuals but are unaware of the deeper, hidden, or invisible dimensions of culture (Hollins, 1996), which have a significant influence on their own identity, educators' role definitions, and instructional practices. Consequently, it is important to avoid centering on teachers as the problem, which detracts from the critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. That is not to say that personal and individual prejudices should not be addressed, but rather that these should be viewed in the context of similar patterns of prejudice in larger society and therefore addressed in that context.

Staff development related to diversity should foster teachers' abilities to think in terms of the culture of the school because, as educators, they enact roles that may systematically favor some groups more than others. Awareness and understanding of this dynamic in the classroom can alter their

beliefs and their attributions about success and about failure. Awareness of the school culture is also essential for any discussions of institutional practices that may be discriminatory toward specific groups of students. As teachers who see themselves as nonracist, caring, and equity-oriented begin to realize that many issues contributing to the achievement gap are embedded in systemic practices and role definitions (Cummins, 1986; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999), they can begin to redefine these roles and explore ways to serve as change agents for school-wide reform.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN DIVERSITY IS NOT JUST FOR WHITE EDUCATORS

A logical corollary to the above proposition is the recognition that sociocultural and linguistic discontinuities between students and teachers are not exclusive to White educators but are also experienced by educators of color. In spite of long-standing research to this effect (e.g., Rist, 1970), the current dialogue about deficit thinking has not sufficiently examined the intersections between race, culture, and social class and has focused predominantly on white teachers. Although this can be understood in the context that White teachers compose the majority of all teachers in U.S. public schools, it is problematic to the extent that it ignores the impact of teacher socialization to the culture of schools through teacher education and other professional experiences. In addition, it does not account for levels of acculturation and of assimilation among teachers from other racial or ethnic groups and/or the sociocultural experiences of White teachers that do not reflect the dominant cultural beliefs and values about CLD students.

Failure to broaden the examination of deficit thinking to non-White educators also reinforces, albeit inadvertently, the misconception that CLD teachers' racial, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics are sufficient to implementing equity-oriented pedagogy. Examples of such thinking include the practice among schools of calling on a bilingual secretary or on other staff members to serve as an interpreter during assessment or during parent-teacher conferences or of assigning English language learners to classrooms with teachers who are native speakers of the students' languages but not certified to provide dual language instruction.

Finally, focusing on racial and ethnic similarities between educators and students does not sufficiently acknowledge differences in social-class memberships. These differences are often reflected in the explanations provided

by non-White educators for CLD students' lower achievements. For example, an African American principal participant at one of our sites commented about her predominantly African American community, "Education is not valued in all homes therefore we as educators must "set the stage" to get students involved and motivated." It is important to note here that deficit views based on social-class differences are also reflected in the views of White teachers about their low-income White students and families.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PERMEATES EVERY ASPECT OF SCHOOLING

Given the sociocultural disparities between educators and students that persist in the majority of schools that serve CLD students, our framework reflects the assumption that all interactions, including instructional exchanges, are forms of intercultural communication (Zeichner, 1993), defined as the "transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 19). This assumption acknowledges that differences between children's socialization experiences in the home and the community, and the socialization practices of the school, can and do contribute to misunderstanding and to conflict (Betsinger et al., 2000). Intercultural communication is not limited to the classroom environment but is reflected in interchanges between the school, family, and community; between teachers and students; and in student-student interactions. Even well-intentioned educators experience culture clashes and create classroom environments that systematically deny some students meaningful opportunities to learn (Greenfield, Raeff, & Quiroz, 1995). Such well-meaning clashes result from misunderstandings or disagreements when two or more individuals from different backgrounds interact, each basing their behaviors on a different set of rules for what is expected or considered appropriate (Brislin, 1993). For example, Greenfield et al. (1995) noted that a simple question asking children to describe eggs can result in very different responses. One White student used a physical, decontextualized description (individualistic), whereas a Latino student focused on the object in its social context (collectivistic). Increasing teachers' understandings of intercultural communication is therefore expected to contribute to more culturally responsive interactions with students and with families and to enhance instruction.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND AWARENESS DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY RESULT IN EQUITY PRACTICES

In spite of the deficit views that we encounter in our work with schools, the majority of our participants are voluntarily involved in the staff-development project. They are already aware of and sensitive to the sociocultural, linguistic, racial, and ethnic diversity in their classrooms and are seeking ways to be more successful with their CLD students. A high percentage of teachers in the ODP were certified in bilingual education or in English as a second language, whereas others indicated that they had completed a course related to multicultural education as part of their teacher education. Yet these experiences were not sufficient to result in high levels of student performance in their classrooms.

Based on our data and our field experiences, we have found that equity practices in classrooms appear to be mitigated by the following factors: (a) teachers' personal beliefs and values act as a filter through which they make decisions about their classroom practices (this filter may either activate or block their use of alternative perspectives and of culturally responsive pedagogy) (Berman et al., 1999; García & Guerra, 2003; Kennedy, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1996); (b) educators' cultural awareness does not translate to practice because of insufficient cultural knowledge from which they can develop alternate explanations for the behaviors and the value systems of their CLD students and communities (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997); and (c) even when teachers possess the requisite beliefs and knowledge of equity-oriented pedagogy there may be insufficient opportunities to develop the necessary skills to implement such practices. These three factors are usually interrelated, with beliefs being the most challenging, yet critical, to address. We realize that this is a complex and challenging undertaking but consider it essential to the successful implementation of systemic change.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES MUST SYSTEMATICALLY AND EXPLICITLY LINK EQUITY KNOWLEDGE TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

I'm trying to think if I even had one class that addressed multicultural or diverse students in undergrad. We did have one as a graduate student, and it was basically reading articles, summarizing them, what did you think about it. . . . I didn't get any help with transferring it to the classroom.

This statement from one of our participants underscores a critical concern about current efforts in multicultural teacher education. That is, although there is an extensive body of literature in multicultural education that identifies best practices and that articulates the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy, there is little empirical research that links specific elements of teacher education (i.e., content, activities, or process) to explicit educational practices in CLD classrooms. An additional limitation is that relatively little attention is paid to the hidden dimensions of culture and of communication that can pose difficulties for CLD students and for their teachers in mainstream classrooms (Greenfield et al., 1995; Hollins, 1996).

The link to classroom application has been central to the design of each staff-development module. Through a variety of problem-based activities, participants are asked to analyze a specific situation, develop hypotheses about the factors involved, consider alternative cultural explanations, and identify culturally responsive strategies to resolve the problem. For instance, during the session on literacy development, participants are introduced to cultural variations in narrative styles. They analyze scoring criteria for reading and writing sections of statewide language-arts assessments and explore ways to scaffold literacy development for students whose narrative styles may be at higher risk of being scored low on such tests. Other topics for problem-based analysis include discipline and special education referrals, disproportionate patterns of achievement for CLD students, and prevailing models of parent or family involvement.

Taken together, these five assumptions act as guiding principles that influence the entire process, beginning with the identification of potential participants, staff-development content and process, as well as our responses to and assumptions about individual participants during sessions. In the next section, we illustrate their influence in the ways that we address deficit thinking during our staff-development sessions.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF DEFICIT THINKING THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Given the emphasis on educator beliefs in our staff-development design, we have been documenting the beliefs, assumptions, and attributions that are often made about CLD children's learning potential as well as the presumed

causes for their low academic performance. Given the location of our sites, participants' beliefs have primarily targeted African American and Latino students and families and predominantly working-class and poor communities. The themes presented below have emerged across sites over the past 5 years. Although the specific age, ethnicity, grade level, or ability of students may vary, these patterns seem to remain constant across these variables.

OVERGENERALIZATIONS ABOUT FAMILY BACKGROUND

Several of our participants—teachers as well as administrators—began the project with a general assumption that many of their students did not enter school ready to learn. From their perspective, CLD students' educational risks could be linked to sociocultural variables such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and racial or ethnic minority status. For example, one participant wrote, "Today a lot of these kids are from broken homes. They have parents who are criminals." Another commented, "The strongest factors are the parents. If the parents are strong believers in education, then the children will succeed." As such, these generalizations particularly perpetuated the view that CLD children and families are deficient and in need of remediation (Hernández Sheets, 2003; Valencia, 1997). Such views seem to hinder their ability to appreciate the resources or the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, & Neff, 1992) in every family and to view teaching and learning as an interactive process. Our participants also appeared predisposed to generalize these assumptions to most if not all CLD students.

When such beliefs emerge in our discussions, we deliberately and systematically problematize the tendency to label students as at risk based on their demographic characteristics. In its place, we offer an alternate, ecological view of educational risk (Johnson, 1994) that broadens the analysis of students' underachievements or failures to include school-, classroom-, teacher-, and pedagogy-related variables that could have contributed to their academic difficulties (e.g., García & Ortiz, 1989; Ortiz, 2002). In addition, through discussions about cultural variations in home-community-school patterns of socialization, participants become increasingly aware of their students' as well as their own culturally based behaviors and values and gain access to alternate explanations for academic outcomes. In the words of a participant, "The information on culture and socioeconomics helps the teacher understand response or lack of response to methods of teaching so adaptations can be made."

WRITING STUDENTS OFF
BEFORE THEY COME TO SCHOOL

Survey questions eliciting characteristics of urban students revealed that a high proportion of participants' responses reflected students' life experiences or behaviors (e.g., burdened, underprivileged, disrespectful, or disorderly) rather than their learning characteristics or needs. Examples of participants' reasoning included the following:

- If those neurons don't start firing at 8 months or 9 months, it's never going to happen. So we've got some connections that weren't made and they can't be made up.
- Some children are already so harmed by their lives that they cannot perform at the same level as other children.

Combined with a view of CLD parents as unsupportive, such views often resulted in sympathy for students, leading some teachers to assume responsibility for providing a safe and caring environment for students at school. As one participant noted, "I'm here because they need somebody on the journey through childhood which is not always easy—someone stable." In some instances, manifestations of caring and of concern seemed to disguise lowered teacher expectations; that is, they appeared to have written off the learning potential of some of their CLD students. These views were consistent with the attributes that they associated with effective teachers; that is, the majority of characteristics related more to personal attributes (e.g., patience, loving, caring, or understanding) than to knowledge or skills related to culturally responsive curriculum and instruction.

As participants became more aware of their assumptions and their expectations through staff development, they struggled to resolve the cognitive dissonance that now existed between long-held beliefs and their new knowledge. For some, an emerging cognitive shift was reflected in journals or through their responses to posttraining surveys and interviews. For instance, one teacher wrote, "In our positions as educators it is important that we understand that different cultures/groups communicate in different ways, and respect these differences rather than judge. Being mindful is imperative." Yet a few seemed to maintain their beliefs in spite of higher scores on posttest measures of cultural awareness and knowledge, underscoring the strength and the stability of their views, as well as the challenges involved in shifting teachers' thinking toward a more additive perspective.

CARING AT THE EXPENSE OF ACADEMICS

- What I've learned is that teachers are here to educate children . . . but just from my experience with these children, that can't happen until they feel safe and comfortable and cared for . . . first and foremost when they come to my room is [sic] I want them to trust me and I want them to be comfortable.
- For [some] students, school is a place to go for peace, food, stability, and love. I believe that basic needs must be met before a child is ready to learn.

As we interacted with teachers over the course of an academic year, it was evident that the majority of our participants shared a deep concern for their students and focused a great deal of their time and effort in creating supporting and caring environments for them. Over time, what became clearer is that these expressions of caring often occurred at the expense of academic instruction, which led us to question how much of the students' low academic performances, particularly on statewide assessments, was a reflection of limited academic time on task versus their learning abilities.

Even when teachers did provide instruction, their negative beliefs about students' learning potentials and families seem to have lowered their expectations for student performance as well as their response to students' underachievements. For example, during an initial session in which project facilitators meet with participants in taking-stock activities, they are asked to identify their major concerns related to student performance, as well as critical resources and programs available to assist them. To date, a striking pattern that has emerged across sites is the preponderance of student- and family focused deficits, accompanied by a number of student- and family focused intervention programs designed to "fix" them. In contrast, few have identified inadequate teacher preparation, curriculum, or pedagogy as concerns. Similarly, resources and supports related to culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy or to intercultural communication tend to be sparse.

ABSENCE OF A CULTURAL LENS

Many of our participants did not bring a cultural lens, or framework, to bear on their interpretations about student performance, parent involvement, or their own instructional styles and preferences. This is not to say that they were unaware of culture per se, but rather that their views about culture were limited to artifact and to behavior and failed to encompass its deeper hidden meaning and impact (Hollins, 1996). Additionally, social-class differences were particularly difficult for some of them to conceptualize as subcultural

differences within any racial or ethnic group. Finally, the lack of a cultural framework was not limited to our White participants. One Latina teacher wrote,

> I don't think it's anything cultural. It's just maybe personalities. But like I said, I've always been able to connect with my kids. So I get beyond the fact that they're Hispanic just like I am and we just get on to what we need to do.

The lack of a cultural lens is particularly important to our discussion, as it influenced participants' assumptions and interpretations about CLD students' behaviors and academic performances. As their awareness, understanding, and knowledge of specific variations in children's socializations across home and school increased, many began to realize that culture is the context in which we all operate, not just a phenomenon affecting CLD populations. In addition, they began to use it to frame their perceptions about schooling and education, which made more evident to them that academic performance and student behavior were not solely the result of individual attributes or of personality but a more complex interaction between an individual and his or her learning environments. Two teachers' insights toward the end of the staff development represent this growing realization, as indicated by the following:

- There are so many things I think schools do that are mainstreamed and so white culture. . . . The textbooks that we teach are mainly white history. . . . Things like that, I mean just everything.
- I notice my own "clashes" with the student and realize that they may occur because of cultural differences. I am now aware that people might react to things in a certain way because of their culture. I think that I am much more accepting of clashes being culturally based and not just personality differences.

A MONOCULTURAL VIEW OF CHILD-REARING PRACTICES AND SUCCESS

Discussions about educational goals and outcomes for CLD students challenged participants to consider how their views about success might have been shaped by their own sociocultural and linguistic experiences and assumptions about appropriate cultural outcomes for CLD students (e.g., assimilation, bicultural or bilingual competence, conformity to the dominant culture, etc.). Because participants were generally unaware of the interactions between culture, cognition, teaching, and learning, their existing

multicultural knowledge was applied in a very limited way to issues of curriculum pedagogy, classroom management, or parent involvement. Many struggled to reconcile their beliefs about the importance of valuing or of respecting cultural differences with the norms that they felt should be established in the classroom and school, such as in the following examples:

- I don't believe that we should allow students to speak incorrectly because "that's their culture."
- Some students come to school without any literacy or social skills and have less exposure to the media/books/audio resources than in different environments where kids are raised in "richprint" [sic] environments.

As they continued to participate in sessions over the year, teachers' increased knowledge of variations in cultural orientation seemed to inform their analysis of conflicts with parents and with students. We also began to see an increased awareness of their own middle-class values and of their tendencies to use these as the norms to evaluate all others, such as the following:

> I have always known that I was different from the majority of my students and parents [Hispanic], but I never realized exactly how I was different and in how many ways. Only now that I am understanding how I am different, can I work to find ways to bridge the gap.

**STUDENTS AND PARENTS NEED TO CHANGE;
THE SYSTEM WORKS**

The lack of a cultural framework, combined with their perceptions about the negative influences on students of their sociocultural and their linguistic environments, perhaps explains why most teachers did not question the effectiveness of the educational system in providing equitable, culturally responsive, learning environments in which all students can be successful. Instead, they voiced frustration with parents whose behaviors did not conform to the norms of the dominant culture of schools and of larger society and often assumed that the solution would be found in better parent training or parent education programs, as is evident in the following:

- America is a white, middle-class society and children need to learn those rules in order to be successful.
- Education is not valued in all homes, therefore, we as educators must "set the stage" to get students involved and motivated.

For them, differences in patterns of parent participation at school provided the evidence that these families did not value education. Their views about educational and cultural outcomes for CLD students were characterized more by beliefs in conformity to the dominant culture rather than to social reconstruction (Sleeter, 1992).

As they learned about cultural variations in the role definitions for teachers and for family members and as they were able to reflect on their relationships with CLD families, many realized that alternate, socioculturally responsive strategies could produce more positive results, and they began to alter their classroom practices. A striking example of changes in teacher practices as a result of discussions about cultural differences in perceptions of time was the report about one teacher who adopted an open-house approach in an effort to draw more Latino parents to school on parent-teacher conference day. Much to her surprise, this strategy was much more successful compared to the traditional practice of scheduling parents every 15 to 20 minutes apart and did not result in confusion when parents arrived simultaneously. Journal reflections of other teachers revealed similar results:

- I really benefited from the session on conflict resolution. It helped not only me in my interactions but also my students in that I am now able to understand and analyze the way they interact with each other.
- The letters that I send home to parents now are less formal. We just sent home a letter talking about time and we send home newsletters. It's just a little more informal and I think I get a better response from parents now. I get more notes back.

CONCLUSION:
TOWARD AN ADDITIVE VIEW OF
STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY

Because the staff-development experience created cognitive dissonance for some participants between their beliefs and their assumptions and those reflected in culturally responsive pedagogy, they were confronted with the task of resolving these conflicts. Participants who did engage in this process demonstrated increased awareness of culture in educational settings, were able to question and often reject their previously held negative views, and were more likely to recognize their role in student learning and success. In turn, this appeared to lead to a readiness to examine instructional practices and to a modification of those practices to be more culturally responsive.

This shift in thinking is a significant precondition for the successful implementation of systemic change (Berman & Chambliss, 2000). Berman and Chambliss concluded that CSR efforts in low-performing schools often fail because these educators lack "a willingness to undertake school reform," a "capacity to engage in a deep and searching change process," and "a shared vision for student learning and school operations that can serve as the basis for an action plan" (Berman & Chambliss, 2000, p. 4). The results of the ODP and of our subsequent work provide greater understanding of strategies that can be used to create a more receptive climate for change and can ultimately lead to improved student outcomes for all students, including CLD students who have traditionally not benefited from reform efforts.

Although the 4-year period during which the ODP was implemented did not allow for follow-up on the project's impact on student achievement, anecdotal reports indicate that participation in the project did make a positive difference in some classrooms. One of the participating schools was recognized for making the highest gains on students' scores on the state's accountability test. In addition, two participating teachers at this school reported that 100% of their students passed the state-mandated achievement test. Perhaps a recent letter from one of these teachers, who was promoted to assistant principal the following year, provides an anecdotal but compelling example of the long-term impact of her participation and ultimately of the promise of school reform:

> As a result of the training I received, I have a better understanding of how culture and language influence teaching and learning. Consequently, I was better able to serve the children in my classroom. In fact, the year that I completed the training program, 100% of my students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in both math and reading.
>
> Now that I am a school administrator of a large elementary school where the children are both culturally and linguistically diverse from the staff, I continue to use the knowledge and skills I learned through your training . . . to help the teachers on my campus improve their instructional effectiveness. Again, the results are seen in improved TAAS/TAKS scores as well as other assessments given throughout the year. Since I came to this campus, the percentage of students passing all tests has improved significantly for all student groups.

NOTES

content herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education, any other agency, the U.S. Government, or any other source.

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