

COMMENTS ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY, TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ENVIRONMENTS*

From: Marisol Rerucha, Career Technical Education Specialist, Juvenile Court and Community School, San Diego County Office of Education

I am an experienced educational leader in Southern California who has had the honor to serve as an administrator in district, charter, and now County Office of Education systems. My experience spans K–12, traditional, alternative and continuation, and now includes juvenile court and community schools. My life’s work has been dedicated to serving the needs of all students in San Diego, specifically those living on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border.

On July 1, 2015 I took on the role as the Career Technical Education Specialist for the Juvenile Court and Community Schools with the San Diego County Office of Education. According to the 2013–2014 School Accountability Report Card (SARC), students in these highly restricted programs were 67.8% Latino, 11.5% Black, 43% English language learners (ELL), and 99.9% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Our court schools include 24-hour maximum-security facilities, a 24-hour minimum-security facility, 24-hour substance abuse facilities, 24-hour immigrant youth shelter, and day treatment programs. Our community schools include a program for pregnant and parenting teens, blended and independent study programs throughout the county for students who are referred by probation, social services, school district officials, or self-referred. In the community schools the students are 79.1% Hispanic, 35.8% ELLs, and 82.8% socioeconomically disadvantaged. San Pasqual Academy is a first-in-the-nation residential education campus designed specifically for foster teens. At San Pasqual Academy the student



population is 46.2% Latino, 25.8% Black, 12.9% ELLs, and 100% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Monarch School offers a comprehensive program for students and their families who are impacted by homelessness. Monarch students are 69.3% Latino, 19.1% Black, 39.2% ELLs, and 100% socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Most recently, I was Principal of MAAC Community Charter School (MCCS) a high school located in Chula Vista, California. MCCS is seven miles from Downtown San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico. MCCS is the only charter high school in the area that targets at-risk students ages 14–24 who have struggled to succeed in large, traditional public schools for a variety of reasons. MCCS population is 97% Latino, with 81% of students at the federal poverty level, and 72% of students are English learners.

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I submit these recommendations on the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with the hope that policymakers are ready to meet the needs of our most under-resourced and vulnerable students.

The Missing Piece, Culturally Responsive Teaching

In the 1990s Black males and Latinas were at the greatest risk of not graduating from high school. Over the last 20 years the educational system has made strides in reducing the number of dropouts through a number of policy, programmatic, and systemic changes. No Child Left Behind brought high-stakes accountability and focus on meeting the needs of our most marginalized student populations, which includes English language learners, special education students, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, Black, and Latino subgroups. The recent focus on restorative justice and positive behavior intervention supports and the establishment of the College and Career Readiness Standards are an acknowledgment that our system recognizes the need for student voice and myriad opportunities for high-level critical thinking, listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Although the achievement gap has been narrowed there is still a great disparity of academic success between Latino students with 71% graduating high school on time compared to 83% of White and 94% of Asian students graduating on time.

According to the National Council of La Raza's Statistical Brief 2015, the cultural make-up of the American classroom is 24% Latino.¹ English learners are the fastest-growing population in the United States and by 2025 will represent 25% of K–12 enrollment. Spanish is the top language, followed by Chinese, Vietnamese, French/Haitian Creole, and Hindi. It is projected that Latinos will make up 30% of students in our K–12 educational system by 2023. It is clear Latino students and English learners are core groups of students who are critical to our national success.

In the Senate's Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA) of 2015, there is an extensive focus under Title VII: Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Native Education on including culture. Throughout this section there is explicit direction that cultural experiences, native language, culturally based education programs, culturally informed curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, cultural diversity, and cross-cultural learning opportunities be provided by Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to these students groups. This language needs to be imbedded throughout ECAA for all students, inclusive of all cultures, especially for Latino and English learners who will make up the highest student population within the next 10 years.

Progress has been made but the reality is that public policy and the educational system continue to fail Latino students. We have yet to make the transition, as a system, from treating Latino student's language and culture as deficits to treating and valuing them as assets. I believe our failure lies in national denial of the importance of cultural and linguistic responsive teaching, learning, and environments.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that: uses students' cultural knowledge experiences, prior knowledge, and individual learning preference as a conduit to facilitate the teaching and learning process (curriculum and instruction); incorporates students' cultural orientations to design culturally compatible classroom environments (classroom management); provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned using a variety of assessment techniques (student assessment); and provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to function in mainstream culture while simultaneously helping students maintain their cultural identity, native language, and connection to their culture (cultural enrichment and competence).²

Recommendations

I believe the three following recommendations will best serve the needs of our students:

- Maintain current authorization for 21st-century community learning centers (21st CCLC) grant and require culturally responsive strategies in program design.
- Authorize culturally relevant drug and violence prevention, drug and violence intervention, and school-based mental health services.
- Ensure Title II professional development for teachers and principals includes intensive, and researched based, culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

Response to Current ESEA Proposals and Rationale for Recommendations

21st Century Community Learning Centers Program

In the current Senate proposal Every Child Achieves Act of 2015, authorization is maintained for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st CCLC). This program ensures funding for expanded learning. However, in the Student Success Act, proposed by the House, the 21st CCLC is block granted into the Local Competitive Grant Program. 21st CCLC must be reauthorized and funding must be maintained at \$1.15 billion so that the more than 117,000 students currently enrolled can remain in a 21st CCLC program.

The California Department of Education published the benefits of expanded learning in *A Vision for Expanded Learning in California, Strategic Plan 2014–2016*. The following excerpt provides evidence as to the need for continued reauthorization of 21st CCLC:

“It is widely agreed that many students need more time for learning, and that additional time for learning needs to happen

in engaging and relevant ways. High-quality after school and summer programs can be particularly effective in engaging students who have not succeeded in school, because these programs offer them a different learning environment that caters to their interests, are staffed by people who can pay close attention to relationships, can focus on project-based activities, and can often work more closely with families. Expanded learning opportunities play an important and unique role by providing learning opportunities that are active, collaborative and meaningful, that support mastery, and that expand young people’s horizons. Research from California after school programs has shown positive impacts on school day attendance, reduced high-school dropout rates, reduced juvenile crime, and increased academic success.”³

The 21st CLCC has provided many Latino and ELLs with quality expanded learning programs. As the regular classroom experience should be infused with culturally responsive teaching, it is equally important that this program also integrate culturally responsive pedagogy, learning, and experiences in its design. Along with continued authorization of 21st CCLC, there must be a requirement that systems accepting funding for this program must prove how they will embed culturally responsive pedagogy, learning, and experiences in the program design.

Drug and Violence Prevention, Intervention, and Mental Health Services

Although there has been an overall decrease in school violence, and use of drugs, these are still issues in our school communities that must be addressed by ECAA. The following data is from the National Center for Education Statistics published report, “Indicators of School Safety and Crime.”

In 2013, about 22% of students, ages 12–18, reported being bullied at school during the school year. Higher percentages of females than of males reported that they were made fun of, called names, or insulted (15% vs. 13%); were the subject of rumors (17% vs. 10%); and were excluded from activities on

purpose (5% vs. 4%). In contrast, a higher percentage of males (7%) than of females (5%) reported being pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on.

In 2013, higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students than of White students reported being afraid of attack or harm both at school and away from school. Additionally, higher percentages of students in urban areas than of students in suburban areas reported being afraid of attack or harm both at school and away from school.⁴

President Obama's budget includes allocations for safe and drug-free schools and elementary and school counseling. I recommend restored authorization for drug and violence prevention, drug and violence intervention, and school-based mental health services, all of which should have a culturally relevant focus. Lastly, I recommend funding be competitive so institutions that are committed to high-quality programs receive appropriate and extensive funding.

I applaud Senator Murphy, Senator Booker, and Senator Murray for introducing Bill S.118 or the, "Supportive School Climate Act of 2015." This bill requires states applying for a grant to create a plan to provide positive and proactive measures, including a clear and tiered system of interventions, which promote a positive school climate. There is a clear focus on minimizing the time students are removed from instruction and learning due to discipline. The proposal pays special attention to the most vulnerable: students entering and exiting the juvenile justice system and those who receive services under IDEA or Section 504 plans. The bill requires states develop comprehensive, evidence-based professional development and training programs that includes, "training in prevention of racial bias and culturally responsive pedagogy." Accordingly, I would like to see similar language in the final ESEA authorization bill.

Professional Development for Teachers and Administrators

Under Title II funding professional development is guaranteed and the need for highly qualified teachers and administrators is outlined in the current house bill. Diversity is a foundational component of any civil society and is a global necessity.

According to the National Education Association (NEA) report, Promoting Cultural Competence To Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students, only one-third of states require teacher candidates to study some aspect of cultural diversity in their core courses or have a teaching practicum in a culturally diverse setting. The Center for American Progress reports that at the national level, students of color make up more than 40% of the public school population while teachers of color are only 17% of the teaching.⁵ While some studies show that students of color who are taught by teachers of color do better on a variety of academic outcomes, the reality is that for the anticipated future the majority of teachers will be White.⁶

Today's educational systems benefit from ethnically and linguistically diverse populations that need to be supported so they can reach their full potential for themselves and our communities. Classroom teachers and administrators need to meet the culturally and linguistic demand of our diverse student population, in order to ensure student success. It is critical that culturally relevant strategies and practices be included in teacher and administrator preparation programs.

Summary of Recommendations

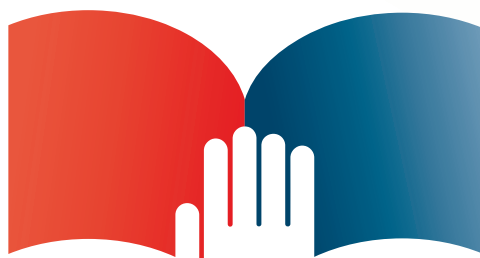
Just as the cultural and linguistic needs of our Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Native students are recognized, so must the needs of our Latino and ELL students. By considering and including the following recommendations, we ensure the success of our nation. I encourage the following:

- Maintain current authorization for 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant. This funding stream needs to be maintained with culturally relevant strategies embedded to ensure that students are supervised while parents work and are receiving extended and experiential culturally based learning opportunities.
- Restore authorization for drug and violence prevention, drug and violence intervention, and school-based mental health services and add that programs must include a culturally relevant focus. Funding must be competitive so institutions committed to high-quality programs receive appropriate and extensive funding.
- Ensure Title II professional development for teachers and principals includes intensive, and researched based, culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

I strongly urge you to give these ESEA recommendations your highest consideration to make a dramatic impact on student success and program effectiveness. I welcome the opportunity to work with Congress to ensure that a reauthorized ESEA accomplishes our shared goals. Please contact me at marique@cox.net or call (619) 778-6656 if you would like further information or to set up a meeting to continue the conversation.

Endnotes

- 1 Brenda Calderon, *Latinos in New Spaces: Emerging Trends & Implications For Federal Education Policy*, (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 2015).
- 2 Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).
- 3 California Department of Education After School Division, *A Vision of Expanded Learning in California*, Strategic Plan 2014-2016. Washington, DC, 2014.
- 4 U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, *Indicators of School Safety and Crime 2014: report from National Center for Education Statistics*, Institute of Education Sciences. Washington, DC, 2015.
- 5 Ulrich Boser, *Teacher Diversity Revisited: A New State-by-State Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2014).
- 6 National Educational Association, *Promoting Cultural Competence To Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students* (Washington, DC: NEA, 2008).



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