6

What Do We Need to Know About Culturally Diverse Learners?

Learners enter our classrooms with a diversity of experiences. They may differ from you and each other in ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, learning modalities, cognitive development, and social development (Tileston, 2004; Tileston and Darling, 2008). This chapter examines some of these differences and offers strategies to use in your classrooms. In no way can we cover comprehensively every cultural group of students; however, we offer cultural homogeneities, or norms, for student cultures you may most likely encounter in your classrooms. Included also are strategies suggested in this chapter and throughout this book that are cited in the research as effective for these students.

Our job as teachers is to reach and teach all learners. What might seem an overwhelming task can be better accomplished through understanding ourselves, as well as understanding the cultural practices of the learners in front of us. Experts on culture, such as Sonia Nieto, share with us that culturally diverse students often practice different communication styles from the dominant culture (Nieto, 2000). As a result, we know we may need to use additional teaching strategies from those we have been using with the dominant culture (Marzano, 2004). In addition, our culturally diverse students may require a relationship with us, their teacher, before they decide to learn from

us (Haycock, 2001), and they may be confronting personal issues about which we are unfamiliar.

Some of the differences culturally diverse learners experience are common to *all* learners, and some are specific to culturally diverse groups and individuals. Peer pressure is an example of one experience that occurs in all groups, including students of the dominant culture, but it also varies from group to group. Communication style is another.

The more you know about the cultures of your diverse learners, the better equipped you will be to teach them. One of the best ways to bridge cultural gaps to your diverse learners is to find out as much as you can about them.

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

Level: Elementary/Middle/High
Subject: Cross-curricular

- Begin with students' names. Ask students to share what their names mean. Teach the class to pronounce each name correctly, and then display them in the classroom in several ways. Introduce the topic by reading "My Name" in Sandra Cisneros's book *The House on Mango Street* (1984, pp. 10–11). This book is available in English and Spanish. Ask for a student volunteer who speaks and reads Spanish to read "Mi Nombre" in the Spanish version (1994, pp. 10–11). This honors the cultural capital of the Latino/a student and allows the student to shine in front of the class. Ask students from other cultures if they have poetry or literature in their home language they can share with the class.
- Ask students to bring in a family item and share it with the class.
- Ask students to draw self-portraits and then display them in the classroom. This allows you, the teacher, to observe how the student "sees" his or her skin color.
- Ask a general question at the beginning of class, such as "What is your favorite food?" "What do you enjoy doing in the evenings after you finish your homework?" Have students each share round-robin.
- Invite parents into the school to interact with staff and students.
- Begin your year by having students write personal narratives about themselves. If you are teaching content other than English in middle or high school, you can tie this assignment to your subject matter and classroom goals. Ask students to write their "math history" or their "science history" (or whatever subject you teach) and tell you how math or science has been a part of their lives. Have them end their history with goals for your class.
- Call each student's family before the year begins and introduce yourself, expressing how excited you are to have their child in your class. Although this is time intensive, the payoff is immense.

CULTURALLY DIVERSE LEARNERS' COMMUNICATION STYLES

Think about your classroom communication style. How would you describe it?

_____

_____

_____

Keep your communication style in mind as you read the following. How does your style compare with the communication styles of your culturally diverse learners?

Communication styles differ among groups and within groups. Understanding student communication styles is critical. When we don't understand our students' cultural communication style, we may be contributing to their school failure. Some of the things that make up communication style are our nonverbal gestures and our preferences for interacting with others. Even the traditional seating arrangement of our classrooms is not necessarily the best for all students. Some cultural groups tend to learn better in groups and nontraditional seating patterns (Nieto, 1996).

Simple instructional strategies we use may conflict with some students' cultural communication styles. For example, teachers who use short wait times (the time a teacher gives a student to think of an answer after the teacher asks the question) can put some students at a disadvantage, because their cultures may teach them to think deliberately and respond more slowly after considering all options.

When you ask a question of the group, count aloud: 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, 1006, 1007. Tell the students you are doing this to give all students an equitable amount of time for their brains to process the answer. Do not use a student's name in your question. When the seven seconds are up, have the students either write their answers on white boards or paper, share with a partner, or raise their hands for you to call on them. Use a stack of index cards or Popsicle sticks with student names on them as you call on students. Draw one and call on the student whose name appears on the card or stick. You will get a response from someone if you allow enough wait time. Consider role playing the first couple of times, answering questions, sharing with students the types of questions that require more thought and those simply needing a simple answer. (Of course, if you are asking many lower-level questions, you may want to examine why you are spending your time at that level.)

Cooperative learning is one strategy worth exploring with Latino/a, African American, and some American Indian students, as well as other

cultural groups who tend to focus on cooperation rather than competition (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 1998).

USE OF RHYTHM

Another instructional tool, the use of rhythm, may vary between the culturally diverse learners' culture and that of the dominant teacher's culture. For example, African American adults and children may use a "contest" style of speech, based on the call-and-response patterns found in Black music (Nieto, 1996) and preaching. Teachers who are aware of this can incorporate it successfully into their lessons. You might ask students to create a study guide using a call-and-response mode and create opportunities for students who respond to this cultural mode to use their oral skills as often as possible in your classroom. They can do this through oral presentations and performances. Capitalizing on student cultural capital is one of the best ways to improve achievement and reduce behavior issues. Warning: remember, every student who self-identifies as African American may not know and respond to call-and-response patterns, so don't assume you can implement a one-size-fits-all strategy for any cultural group. First and foremost, each learner is an individual brain, and we must get to know the individual child.

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

- Use upbeat music to welcome learners into the classroom. Stop the music at the bell. Play calming music at a low volume while students complete a "Do Now" activity.
- Use music as a mental break at intervals throughout the class. Give students thirty seconds to stretch to music.
- Teach call and response. Use it to go over factual material before a quiz.
- Use music for "thinking" breaks or quiet meditation. Teach students how to breathe deeply and relax; then play soothing music and give learners a two-minute mental break to recharge their brains.

MISREADING CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Misreading cultural communication cues can result in behavior issues and incorrect feedback about learning. One EL teacher misread the nonverbal cues of her Puerto Rican students. When they exhibited a "wrinkling of the nose," she did not know they were signifying they did not understand the material. In some Alaska Native cultures, a wrinkled nose often means no and a raised eyebrow often means yes (Nieto, 1996). Not knowing the nonverbal cues of your students might cause you to assume they are acting in a disrespectful manner or not paying attention, rather than simply following your instructions. In addition, when we do not understand the communication cues of our culturally diverse learners, we may be telling them (unintentionally) that we

don't care enough about them to learn about them. Consider asking students about their nonverbal communication and their latest slang. They usually enjoy sharing what is important to them and playing the role of the expert in the classroom.

In addition to asking the students, another method to learn about cultural communication cues, especially those ELs with special education needs, is to assess students in their homes and communities. By involving parents as participants in these evaluations, educators can "minimize misdiagnoses and inappropriate special education placements" (Garcia, quoted in Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 23). When the values of the educators and the parents differ, there may be cultural discomfort. If educators learn and understand the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic influences of their students and families, they probably will experience improved communication.

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

- Ask learners to write about and share one nonverbal communication their culture deems important. This can be a folding of the hands in prayer, a friendly gesture, a family gesture to get attention, and so on.
- Ask learners how they signal to others when they want to communicate the following: praise, displeasure, a greeting, boredom, and so on. Make it a fun activity where you and students laugh but learn about each other.
- Have students choose a culture not present in the classroom and share its communication styles.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

Culturally diverse learners bring with them expectations for classroom communication with their teacher and classmates, especially how they are expected to answer questions in class. Does the student expect to give an individual answer in front of peers, use eye contact, guess an answer, or volunteer in class? These behavior expectations vary among diverse learners. Students also vary as to the amount of teacher guidance they expect (Cloud, quoted in Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). It is up to us to clearly explain when and why we offer individual guidance and help. Once again, unless we make our expectations clear and model them for students, we may be placing our culturally diverse learners in an uncomfortable classroom situation. For the past three years, I have worked in six urban high schools with a large number of culturally diverse students. As we sit in these classrooms and observe the patterns of classroom behavior, we see cultural differences among groups of students. Some tend to be more boisterous; some tend to be quiet; some tend to interact just with peers. Strong teachers in this environment have mediated this situation by using a group structure comprised of different cultural groups. By doing this, we don't see all the Asian students sitting in one area of the room, the African American students in another, and so on. Of course, you must teach students how to work with each other and include a reason for them to do so. Creating a positive

classroom culture where students know and like each other supports this process, and rotating students in the groups throughout the school year eliminates most student objections. The more the students complain, the more feedback you have for the necessity of working on your class culture.

Time on task is another way that culturally diverse students often differ from the dominant culture. How do you expect students to begin class work? Do you expect them to listen to your directions and begin immediately? Or do you take into account group styles? For example, your African American students, because they "have expressed an orientation toward collective responsibility and interdependence" (Hale-Benson, 1986, p. 16), may first interact with others, rather than immediately beginning academic work. If you are a teacher whose style is "Get to work NOW!" you may find yourself frustrated and assume that the students are attempting to avoid doing the work. Being aware of this style difference allows you to make the necessary accommodations that best fit all the students in your classroom. Begin class before class begins to alleviate this issue. Stand at the door, no matter how busy you are, and greet each student with a smile and a welcoming sentence. Allow students to talk until the bell rings; then add your own nonverbal signal. This can be music playing that you stop at the bell or a gong you use to call students to attention. At this time, students begin a "Do Now" activity you have on the board—one they know must be done in total silence. After a five-minute Do Now, begin a general activity to focus the class. One way to do this and incorporate talk and socialization at the beginning of class is to give a question to the class and allow the students to answer one at a time with the option of saying "pass." This builds community and gets each student's voice in the air, thus eliminating some of that need to socialize among friends during class time. You will find more examples of how to begin class in the next section of the book.

CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLES

In a culturally diverse classroom, you will find every learning style, yet students from particular ethnic cultures may respond more willingly to the kind of instruction that is reinforced by their culture. For example, African American learners tend to be multimodal (Hale-Benson, 1986). Their involvement with classroom instruction is cognitive, emotional, and physical, all at the same time. If you are a teacher who learns cognitively, not needing the emotional and physical modes, you may have trouble understanding why some African American students may need emotional and physical connections to the material in order to learn it. You can capitalize on students' multimodal needs by assigning tasks to students. Active students might get the classroom ready for learning. You might have a student who is a "greeter" and makes sure everyone is relaxed and ready to learn. You might have another who is a "materials" student who gives out textbooks and other materials, and so on.

In her book *The Power of One: How You Can Help or Harm African American Students,* Gail L. Thompson (2010) states that African American learners say that

boredom is one of the main reasons they disengage from class. They want to learn, but they too often feel bored and not challenged. She suggests interviewing your students and asking them what they would do if they were in charge, and then allowing them to create lessons and actually teach them to the class (pp. 90–91). Capitalize on student strengths and embed their strengths into your procedures as well as your content instruction.

In contrast to many African American learners, a newly arrived Vietnamese immigrant learner might feel uncomfortable in an informal classroom where students are expected to ask questions and work together, so you must find ways to respect that student and offer support for becoming part of the classroom culture. Once again, the secret is to know the cultural homogeneities of cultural groups while keeping in mind that each student is a unique brain and may not adhere to his or her cultural norms, as well as learning about each student as an individual.

It is obvious the quiet, traditional classroom in which many of us learned, quietly seated in rows of desks and raising our hands to answer the questions the teacher posed, does not match the cultural communication styles of many of our culturally diverse learners. What can we do?

In *Educating Latino Students,* Gonzalez and colleagues (1998) suggest developing a "learning context that is multiculturally sensitive, where differences are acknowledged and appreciated and where opportunities do exist for learning in nonmainstream patterns" (p. 31). The following are aids for learning about the communication styles of our culturally diverse learners.

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

- Observe your students' cultural group in your classroom and throughout the school.
- Adapt your instruction and the curriculum to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners. Instruct them using a range of different modalities and include examples from all the cultural groups in your classroom when you tell stories, use metaphors, and teach the histories of your discipline. To teach math without sharing the contributions of Africans to mathematics misses an opportunity to build awareness of cultural capital.
- Hold meetings at school for parents so you can interact with and learn from them.
- Read books on body language and cultural communications.
- Hold professional workshops about diverse learners in your school.
- Ask your students about their communication styles.
- Ask students' parents to share their professions with a class.
- Attend conferences that include workshops on your student populations.
- Talk with educators from culturally diverse cultural groups.
- Do home visits and observe your students with their families.

In addition to these suggested strategies, Tharp (quoted in Artiles & Ortiz, 2002) developed several guiding principles for effective pedagogy when working

with ELs with learning disabilities in general education, suggesting we work collaboratively with students; incorporate language and literacy across the curriculum; connect classroom learning to students' lives; and teach higher level thinking through conversation (p. 140).

PEER PRESSURE

Even when we understand the communication patterns of our culturally diverse learners, we still face the effects of peer pressure, both positive and negative, in our classrooms. There are many peer pressure challenges in cultural groups that I, as a White female teacher, may be unaware of, and yet I often succumb to peer pressures of my cultural group—White females. For example, as a White female, I am acculturated and encouraged to

- Not "rock the boat"; to avoid conflict and maintain the status quo of my dominant culture
- Not say what I really feel in public but rather talk behind others' backs or in the parking lot
- Not be too loud, bold, challenging, or confrontive
- Be *nice* at all times

Of course, these messages have changed from the 1950s to the present day. However, when I work with school staffs, I hear complaints about "bossy" White women, as well as the quiet "niceness" of school staffs during faculty meetings who then eviscerate their administrators afterwards rather than speaking up about their needs. Unfortunately, also, I still see White girls who do not assert themselves academically for fear of being labeled by peers.

IMPACT OF PEERS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In "The Canary in the Mine: The Achievement Gap Between Black and White Students," Mano Singham (1998) writes of the impact of peers upon student achievement. Examining college students, Singham, using the research of John Ogbu and others, found that Chinese students often studied together and shared tips and strategies for success. African American students, on the other hand, partied together but seldom studied together. Black students often had no idea where they stood with respect to others in the class, and they usually were surprised when they received poor grades, thinking they had done exactly what was expected of them. In addition, Kunjufu (1988) examines negative peer influence on Black students who exhibit "acting White" behaviors. They may be ridiculed by their peers for buying into the dominant culture if they choose to listen in class, do their homework, and make good grades. At the runaway shelter where I taught, young men had to hide their schoolbooks from the neighborhood gang members or risk getting beaten up or killed for "acting White." To these students, acting White meant they adopted the cultural norms of White culture if they achieved in school. One young man

related that he had to sneak down the back alley to attend the GED program for fear of his life.

Often, students lack the understanding of what it takes to make As and Bs in a rigorous academic setting. Students need to hear that in order to make As and Bs in high school, they must study hours a night, limit phone calls, texting, time on the computer, and television, and set up a schedule for homework. Some students are unaware of what honor roll students actually do in order to make the honor roll. Once again, there are "hidden rules" of academic achievement that must be taught to our children if we want them to achieve academically.

SKIN COLOR PREJUDICE

Another negative peer culture pressure is skin color prejudice. Why is skin color so important? It is important because it has assigned value and affords privilege to those with White skin (Singleton & Linton, 2006). When my son was growing up, I used to try to figure out just what it was that made others see him as Black. Was it the shape of his nose, his hair, or his skin color? I'm not sure of the answer in his case, but the fact that his skin color is darker than what most define as White makes a difference in the ways others categorize him. And since skin color is an external, physical attribute, we can use it to classify others into groups of the powerful and the not so powerful (Davis, 2009, p. 87).

What color is your skin? Does it give you power?

_____

Has skin color ever robbed you of power?

_____

Have you been stopped by the police because of your skin color? Refused service in a restaurant? Passed over for a position? I know none of these things has happened to me.

Others have stories that differ. In St. Louis, where I live, African Americans share stories of the "paper bag" test. They share they were placed into certain public schools based on their skin color. If someone was "light" enough—lighter than a paper bag—they went to different high schools than those with skin darker than a paper bag. They also relate that the test was used for certain sororities and other social groups, and even mate selection. This is a phenomenon many Whites know nothing about, yet my adult African American female friends share stories of how they were included in social groups they can name because their skin was light enough (my friend Dorothy, whose story is told in Chapters 3 and 5), or they were excluded from social groups they can name because their skin was too dark (my friend Roberta, who shares information about her student group in Chapter 17). Unfortunately, families (and society) may still give favor to lighter-skinned children and are more critical of darker-skinned children.

What decisions, knowingly or unknowingly, are made based on skin color? Do I tend to favor lighter-skinned Students of Color because I find them more attractive? Are blond-haired White children preferred over dark-haired children? Is inclusion in particular groups, whether they be cheerleaders or social clubs, ever based on skin color? Educators may deny this occurs, but we need to examine our own preferences and biases and ensure we do not act out on them.

Skin color tension in our schools tends to be more prevalent among females. Prejudice is more prevalent in females because the worth of a female is tied to her physical appearance (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). You only have to look at the magazine covers at the nearest store to see that light skin is valued over dark skin in our society, as evidenced by the sheer quantity of covers featuring light-skinned women. Hopefully, First Lady Michelle Obama and other Women of Color will change this as they grace the covers of popular magazines. Yet presently, it is no surprise that we have internalized the racist message that White skin is superior to dark skin, and the ideal beauty is still one who possesses White skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. As a result, if we possess White skin or blonde hair and blue eyes, we may feel a false sense of superiority to those with darker skin. This false sense of superiority may translate into our body language and cause hostility from those with darker skin with whom we interact.

COLORBLINDNESS

Often in workshops, I hear educators, who are good people, talk about how they "don't see color" and consider themselves "colorblind." They see this as a strength, and they believe it speaks to their equitable treatment of all children. I believe they mean well. However, at the same time, Children of Color see color because of the meaning attached to skin color in this country. Because of their personal experiences and probable incidences of discrimination based on their skin color, they bring that history with them into your class. If you do not recognize they have experienced life differently from the White children in the room, then you deny the Students of Color the truths of their experiences. They look at me, a White teacher, and see I am White. They see which peers are White and which are Students of Color. A very simple strategy for a White teacher to use when working with Students of Color is to acknowledge one's Whiteness early on in the relationship. That tells the students you know who you are. Skin color carries power and meaning in our society. If you are White and you don't believe that it does, then shadow an African American teacher for a few days and notice the different experiences she encounters, even though she is an educated woman, just like you.

Skin color as a descriptor is used differently in cultures. With my White friends, we usually use the terms *light, medium,* or *dark* to describe a White friend's tan, and that is only when we are talking about tans, not part of our usual description of a White person. However, among Students of Color, there are scores of words to describe varying shades of the color of one's skin. Another interesting phenomenon is that my Latino/a and African American friends often describe another's skin color when talking about them. My son does the same thing. For example, "Sonia has skin the color of

mine," my son announced when telling me about a college friend. Think about the last time you heard a White adolescent describe another White person. Did she or he add a descriptor of the shade of that person's whiteness? Listen to your Students of Color when they talk about other Students of Color. What do you hear?

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

You can fight against skin color prejudice by doing the following.

- Educate yourself about this phenomenon.
- Post pictures of people of all different skin shades in your classroom.
- Build a classroom library of books with Students of Color on the covers and inside the books.
- Post self-portraits of your students on the walls of your classroom.
- With older students, consider discussing racism in its externalized forms and internalized forms as it centers on the issue of skin color. (You may want to show the video of the doll experiment posted on the Web that deals with internalized racism.)
- Continue to reflect and question yourself on your own perceptions of skin color.

If you choose to change a negative peer culture at your educational site, you may want to find students who will work with you (see Chapter 17 for info on student support groups). The key to building the critical mass of students goes back to relationships. If you have a good relationship with your target students, you can begin to build a critical mass of students to focus on achievement goals. The research (Singham, 1998) presents the idea of a "critical mass" of students who need to buy into the idea of academic achievement and who, therefore, create a *positive peer culture* for achievement. Creating that critical mass in your classroom provides a supportive peer network for diverse learners. How do you do that? (See the box.)

Level: Elementary/Middle/High
Subject: Cross-curricular

- Call on all students equitably.
- Ensure that your lessons include role models from the cultural groups represented in your classroom.
- Use student names in your examples.
- Impress upon students the necessity of book knowledge so they can't be cheated in their lives.
- Use cooperative learning.
- Emphasize cooperation and de-emphasize competition.

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Use a "We're all in this together" classroom approach.
- Build a classroom community that expects excellence from each student and allows a flexible time frame for achieving excellence.
- Talk explicitly about the negative effects of peer pressure and how students can counteract them.
- Sponsor clubs (see Chapter 17 for a model) that support academic excellence and offer a support group to students willing to fight negative peer pressure.

The negative peer culture exists because of perceptions and belief systems; a positive peer culture can exist because of perceptions and belief systems too. You and your colleagues can find the ways that work best for you. When you put your plans into action and see the results, you will begin to see the changes in the perceptions of students, as well as changes in the perceptions of the staff.

Describe the peer cultures at your educational setting.

_____

_____

_____

What strategies might you employ to create a critical mass of positive peer support in your classroom or in your school?

_____

_____

_____

THE STEREOTYPE THREAT

Have you ever been stereotyped? For example, if you are a woman, did others assume you could not change a tire, fix a leaky pipe, or run a business? If you are a male and an elementary teacher, did others assume that you would not be as adept at the job as the females in your building? Think about a time you were stereotyped by others.

_____

_____

_____

When you performed under this stereotype, how did it affect the outcome?

_____

_____

_____

Stereotypes are perceptions, and perceptions create our reality. Just as our cultural lens largely determines what we see and how we interpret it, our students' perceptions of themselves may affect their academic achievement. Claude Steele (1999) defines the _stereotype threat_ as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 46). Exploring the impact of the stereotype threat on Black college students, Steele found that when students were presented with a difficult verbal standardized test as a test of ability, Black students performed "dramatically less well than White students," even though the groups were "matched in ability level" (p. 47). But when they presented the same test as a laboratory task that was used to study how certain problems generally are solved, the Black students' performance equaled that of the White students. Steele suggests that "race consciousness" brings about impaired achievement (p. 47).

Steele and Aronson (Steele, 1999) went on to test their hypothesis with a group of White males. They told the group that they were taking a math test on which Asians usually scored higher than Whites. The result? White males who heard this comment scored less well than the White males who did not hear this comment (p. 48).

The stereotype threat most affects the academically able students. On tests, Black students tried too hard, rereading the questions and rechecking their answers more than when they were not under the stereotype threat. Searching for solutions, Steele (1999) found that Black students who participated in discussion groups in an informal dormitory setting improved their grades and reduced their feelings of the stereotype threat. Steele suggests that we educators might spend more time in developing the trust in our schools with our African American students if we hope to see the academic achievement that our students are capable of demonstrating (p. 54).

You can help students diminish the stereotype threat in their lives by beginning academic support groups to support them by building a peer support network to diminish the stereotype threat. In Chapter 17, you read how these groups teach students how to "do" school in order to academically achieve. You can also discuss with your colleagues ways to build safe spaces for students to discuss these issues in the context of some classes or school forums.

THE "MODEL MINORITY" STEREOTYPE THREAT

Asian Americans suffer a different stereotype threat. They often are perceived as the "model minority" and depicted as diligent, quiet, intelligent, and academically able, and they are often seen as immigrants or foreigners, rather than

minorities (Ogbu, cited in Singham, 1998). Stacey J. Lee (1996), in *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype,* finds that the stereotype silences the voices of low-achieving Asian students and denies the complexity of higher-achieving student experiences. In addition, the stereotype reinforces the "racial order by focusing on Asian American success and redirecting attention away from Whites" (p. 99). Lee argues that African American students' failure to "challenge White success is related to the silence that surrounds Whiteness in general" (p. 99). Since the model minority stereotype consists of a comparative and competitive nature, Lee found many African American students in his study who believed Asian American students were a threat. Some even believed that Asian American success was achieved at the expense of African Americans and that they were one more group who had climbed over African Americans to pursue the American dream. Moreover, Lee found a direct link between a "racial group's perceptions of their own position and their attitudes toward Asians/Asian Americans and Asian American success" (p. 121).

Interestingly, most groups of Asian-identified students blamed themselves for the challenges they faced and did not expect the dominant group to accommodate them. Of all the Asian-identified groups Lee studied, only Asian Americans challenged the dominant group. Ultimately, the model minority stereotype has been used to "support the status quo and the ideologies of meritocracy and individualism" (Lee, 1996, p. 8).

While acknowledging that being seen as a model minority carries with it a kind of privilege, Lee states that the dangers exceed the privilege. This stereotype is dangerous because of the way it has been used by the dominant group to silence Asian Americans and their experiences and against other minority groups to silence claims of inequality (p. 125). The research clearly points to the dangers of the stereotype threat experienced by some of our diverse learners.

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

The following are strategies to support students in combating the stereotype threat.

Level: Elementary/Middle/High
Subject: Cross-curricular

- Learn about each student as an individual.
- Do not lump students into one ethnic group. Korean students differ from Chinese students. Puerto Rican students differ from Mexican students. Immigrant children face different issues than second-generation Asian Americans or Mexican Americans. The list continues; do not assume all children of any one ethnic group are alike.
- Talk about stereotypes with your class.
- Have students share their cultural experiences.
- Do a daily check of your perceptions. Have student behaviors reinforced stereotypes? Negated them? We tend to see that which reinforces our stereotype, so we must be vigilant in doing daily perception checks.

- Include a variety of role models from the cultural groups of your students, continuing to emphasize that not all Blacks are alike, not all Whites are alike, not all Asians are alike, and so on.
- Share the literature of each of your students' cultures. Poetry, short stories, folk tales, and novels are wonderful ways to learn about cultures and to support positive dialogues.
- Encourage student forums to discuss the issues of stereotypes.
- Invite the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference presenters to work with students and staff.
- Encourage students to write their stories and share them in a writers' showcase (see Chapter 13).
- Use cooperative learning to allow students to get to know each other as individuals.
- Create classroom projects that allow students to get to know each other as individuals.
- Start an academic achievement group for students (see Chapter 17).

This research has profound implications for our school settings. It offers a wonderful vehicle for staff discussion and problem solving. Consider using the Claude Steele (1999) article in a whole-staff discussion (you could also use this in a senior high contemporary issues class, or English or history class). Encourage staff to reflect on times when they felt a stereotype threat. Encourage them to share this with their high school students and ask their input. Discussions about this article with groups of students might encourage an honest look at this dilemma and provide opportunities for problem solving.

Understanding the communications styles of our diverse learners and the effects of peer pressure and the stereotype threat upon them allows us to become more culturally proficient.

HOW-TO STRATEGIES

The following are strategies to reach diverse learners.

Level: Elementary/Middle/High
Subject: Cross-curricular

- Place value on students' home languages and cultures.
- Acquire a basic command of the language of your diverse learners. This may seem extreme, but learning to speak only a few words to your diverse learners in their native language usually will bring smiles to their faces.
- Integrate the culture, experiences, and language of diverse learners into your classroom lessons.
- Set high expectations for all diverse learners.

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Communicate these expectations to your diverse learners.
- Include professional development focusing on the cultures of your diverse learners.
- Check your instruction to see if you are following the suggestions found in *Educating Latino Students* (Gonzalez et al., 1998): Are you using a learning context that is multiculturally sensitive? Are you acknowledging and appreciating differences among your diverse learners? And are you creating opportunities for learning in ways that differ from the mainstream?

Which suggestions in this chapter might you consider for your classroom?

_____

_____

_____

Set a goal to implement one to three suggestions or strategies you found in this chapter.

_____

_____

_____

In this chapter, you read about many influences on our students' lives, from peer pressure to the stereotype threat. In the next chapter, we closely examine one family's experience with education. Brenda Alvarez, a Latina, shares her family's powerful struggle with acculturating to the educational system in the United States.

❖   ❖   ❖

SUGGESTED WEB SITES

Principles for Culturally Responsive Teaching (www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl/tl-strate gies/crt-principles.shtml)

Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education (www .ncte.org/cee/positions/diverselearnersinee)

Why Is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Important? (www.tolerance.org/tdsi/crp_why)