

# Creating a culturally responsive schools:

Educating children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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# Technical vs. Adaptive work

- Technical work - A focus on managing the operations of the system, insuring that procedures are working and that employees are in compliance with policy.
- Adaptive work - A focus on the dynamic and complex nature of the work, its substance, meaning and purpose. Work guided by a long term vision, with medium and short term goals. An awareness that we are trying to achieve our goals in a constantly changing environment
  - Ron Hieftz - Leadership on the Line

# Adaptive Challenge:

What does it take to educate the student you serve?

- Key Questions:
  - What are their needs? - academic and social/emotional
  - What are their strengths and interests?
  - What challenges confront them and their families?
    - What are their hopes and dreams?
  - How do they learn outside of school?

# Reflection:

- How are race, language and socio-economic status implicated in patterns of achievement and discipline at your school?
  - How predictable are the patterns?
- How does your staff understand the causes of under-achievement?
- Does your school culture promote collaboration, positive relationships and student empowerment?

# I. Creating Culturally Responsive Schools Requires a Critical Understanding of race and culture

- Culture - the system of ideas that enable us to make meaning of the social world (Horowitz, Rosaldo)
  - Customs and artifacts are symbols of culture – food, dress, music, etc.
- Race – social construct rooted in historical notions of group membership
  - Toni Morrison: profoundly important and meaningless
- We learn through shared cultural understandings
  - Vygotsky - zone of proximal development
  - Teaching is a cultural transaction (Boykin)

# Why educating across cultural differences is often a challenge

- Ethnocentrism/bias
- Cultural differences often contribute to challenges in communication and cohesion
- Teachers who have an inability to transcend cultural differences often experience more behavior problems with their students
  - “Color blindness”
  - Too much emphasis on cultural assimilation instead of empowerment

# Confronting stereotypes

- Race, gender and national origin stereotypes often undermine student performance
  - Steele and Aronson: stereotype threats
- Added burden: Students who are not members of the dominant group must become bi-cultural to succeed
  - Delpitt: Learning the codes of power
  - Assimilating can be stressful for students
- Successful schools are inclusive and make it possible for students to move beyond stereotypes
  - “Acting White” is not an issue, no trade off
  - Perry, Hilliard and Steele - Young, Gifted and Black

## II. Creating powerful school cultures

- Defined: Beliefs, attitudes, norms, expectations and assumptions that guide actions
  - Ethos - the character, customs, habits that distinguish a school/community
- Sarason's axiom: If you attempt to implement reforms but fail to change the culture of a school, nothing will change
- Highly successful schools are distinguished by a culture that reinforces core values and promotes intellectual development



# Signs of a healthy school culture:

- Staff takes responsibility for student achievement
  - Does not blame students and parents for low performance
  - See teaching and learning connected
  - School has a coherent strategy for delivering instruction
- School is not racially stratified or segregated from within
- Staff is willing to collaborate and open to change
- Relations with parents are strong, genuine partnership
  - Based on respect and empathy. Educational goals are reinforced at home
- School rules and procedures are aligned with educational goals
  - Discipline is rooted in values, focus is on changing behavior

## Normative patterns among students reinforce academic achievement

- Students think it's cool to be smart
- Strong relationships between adults and students
- Deliberate strategies to counter stereotypes related to race, class, gender and academic achievement-  
“stereotype threats” addressed
- Disruption and defiance from students is rare
  - Numerous adults with moral authority

# Reflection:

- How would you characterize the culture of your school?
  - Do your students think its cool to be smart?
  - Does your staff collaborate? Do they take responsibility for student learning outcomes?
  - Do you have strong, constructive partnerships with your parents?

# III. Transform school cultures from the classroom

- Positive relationships between students and teachers can reduce disparities in outcomes:
  - **Empathy** - Teacher sensitivity to a student's needs e.g. mood, interests, challenges etc.
  - **Interest** - Teacher interest in knowing and understanding their students
  - **Community** – creating a positive classroom environment
  - **Firm and clear** - Teacher deployment of classroom management marked by clear yet flexible expectations and behavioral guidelines.

## School-wide rituals and practices that reinforce core values

- Renaissance HS – Wearing hats in the hall
- PS 138 - Student caretakers of school museum
- Excellence Charter - “Scholars” provided recess, extended learning and opportunity to act like animals
- IS 223 - School bucks to reinforce good behavior
- City on a Hill - student-run town hall meetings
- School of the Future - Student exhibitions
- Landmark HS - daily faculty meetings

# Address school culture as part of a broader reform strategy

- Focus on student peer culture - engage students through extra curricular activities
- Show students how academic knowledge can be applied in the real world on issues they care about
- Set high standards - Provides access to rigorous courses and support to succeed
  - Eliminate the track to “no-where”
- Encourage teachers to serve as advocates, counselors and coaches who demystify success

# Other Changes that Can Support Higher Levels of Achievement

- Develop early intervention systems – identify students who are not making progress early
- Develop partnerships with community based organizations - case management and social work, immigrant services, health and social services
- Increase access to counseling for students
  - Help students to set future goals early
- Hire individuals from diverse backgrounds in professional roles
  - Mentors, role models, moral authority, bridge builders

# Cultivate Agency:

Influence the choices that are made by students

- Educate students about their history and culture
- Provide opportunities for students to become involved in community service and leadership
  - Utilize community-centered problem-posing curriculum
- Channel the energy, don't crush it
  - Sports, music, art
- Listen: provide students with opportunities to have input on what is happening in their schools