Piecing Together the Diversity Puzzle

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Current literature focuses on the importance of listening to students’ voices and the insights they have on their experiences. According to Dewey (1916/1944), having interactions with other groups helps in the process of democratic growth because one is better able to understand other perspectives. Freire (1985) added another layer of richness to Dewey’s ideas about reflection and experience. He believed that people exist “in and with the world.” Fraser (1994) describes the need for different voices and different views in educating children in a public sphere of critical inquiry and multiple voices (different genders and people of all colors).

In order to initiate a dialogue between teacher education students and diverse groups in the community, the College of Education Committee on Diversity has put together a series of on-campus activities and encouraged involvement in community events to piece together a multicultural puzzle and to provide support for students so they can excel in both course work and in field experiences.

• Project ACE (Avenue for a Culture of Excellence). The Committee on Diversity established Project ACE primarily to improve the retention of lower division education majors. Faculty, upper division students, and members of the community provide support and mentoring for freshmen and sophomore students enrolled in their initial education coursework. Relationships are developed and activities scheduled to encourage academic success.

• Study Room. A classroom in the College of Education has been designed as a study room for teacher education students. It is a place students may go to read, study for exams, and work on class assignments. Workshops are conducted in various content areas, but most notably, workshops are used to prepare students for the Praxis I Examination. Practice tests are available as well as resource persons who are willing to work with students helping to prepare them for the exam.

• The Committee on Diversity sponsors presentations to Diversity in Education classes. The first talk was made by Cheryl Renee, Morning Anchor for the WTVM Morning Show. Ms. Renee spoke about diversity in Columbus, which was shown on the evening news in April, 2005. Future speakers include Rabbi Max Roth and Imam Farhan Alifarhani.

• The Hispanic Club. Through a grant from the Goizueta Foundation, recruitment of Hispanic students has increased. The purpose of the student organization is to promote higher education among the local Hispanic population. Activities include hosting informational programs about the college to prospective students and their parents, mentoring middle school and high school students, and many more events. Hispanic students in education are encouraged to participate.

• Building Bridges is a national program sponsoring Study Circles in an effort to obtain grass-roots involvement in improving race relations. Study Circles involve students, staff, and faculty in discussing case-study types of scenarios, encouraging individual participation with the ability of all to express feelings and the opportunity to bond with people of many races and differences.

• One Columbus is a non-profit community organization that promotes unity in Columbus and harmony and understanding among people of all races, religions, ethnicities, and other forms of diversity. One Columbus sponsors dialogue groups at various locations in the community such as the public library, hospital meeting rooms and churches. Each dialogue group meets once a week for five weeks for an hour each, has between 5 and 12 participants, and discusses a plethora of topics. The current dialogue group’s topic is, “What Do Muslims Really Think?”

It is critical that CSU teacher education students become culturally responsive teachers. This
pedagogy affirms the cultures of students, views the cultures and experiences of students as strengths, and reflects the students' cultures in the teaching process. It is based on the premise that culture influences the way students learn (Smith, 1998). It is important for our teacher education students to learn that individuals from other ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups often have perspectives in issues and events that are different from their own. It is a goal of The Committee on Diversity to help students gain a deeper appreciation of themselves and others.

References


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