

August 2015



IMPACT: Educate, Engage, Empower - for Equity

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"Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it."

~ Freire, 1998

Educate

What Is It? Getting to Know Your Students and Their Families

As teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, counselors, psychologists, staff, and community and family volunteers prepare to welcome another academic year, so do they prepare to welcome their students. This traditionally culminates in getting-to-know-you activities such as ice-breakers, games, and activities all geared toward classrooms sharing characteristics about each other in

Meet the Authors

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order to build rapport at the start of the year.

Why Is It Important? Troubling Traditional Methods of Getting-To-Know-You Activities

Often when educators facilitate getting-to-know-you activities, tremendous opportunities are missed. First, getting-to-know-you activities are frequently removed from thoughtful, complex development of curriculum and the preparation for instruction. Instead, they are seen as "warm up" or auxiliary lesson plans or activities before the instruction of content begins. Second, getting-to-know-you activities are not regularly utilized as rich opportunities to learn more about students' lived experiences, home practices (Garcia, 2008) and funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001). Intentional practice of this information fosters educators' recognition of student assets, in turn allowing them to be more responsive to student learning needs and create more relevant curricular decisions. Lastly, getting-to-know-you activities are often positioned as a process that begins at the start of the calendar year and not as an ongoing approach that should be deeply wed to pedagogy in response to the everyday world of all students (Ladson Billings, 1994).

How Do You Do It? Toward Culturally Responsive Curriculum Development

Schools and classroom environments that deliberately incorporate the cultures of their students into the curriculum and pedagogy are more likely to be successful (Banks, 1981; Boykin, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1992, Noguera, 2003). For example, schools that incorporate students' heritage languages (Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014) not only in instruction, but curricular materials demonstrates an appreciation and affirmation of students' ever changing context and identities (Paris, 2012; Waitoller & Thorius, under review). Thus, in order to realize the success of all students in a school community, the total school context must accept students' lived experiences in and out of school as legitimate knowledge (Irvine 1990, Ladson-Billings 1992) to contribute the reciprocal exchange (Perrone, 2015) that is teaching and learning.

Shifting from engaging in getting-to-know-you activities as a surface level interaction to more intentionally and authentically building relationships; seeking to understand students' multiple identities, varied cultural context(s), and sociopolitical realities (Ladson-Billings, 2014), reflects culturally responsive and sustaining practices (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McKinley, 2005; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997; Howard, 2007; Paris, 2012).



Dr. Nadine Dolby is Professor of Curriculum Studies and a University Faculty Scholar at Purdue University. She has researched and published widely on study abroad, international education, and multicultural education. Her most recent book is *Rethinking Multicultural Education for the Next Generation: The New Empathy and Social Justice* (Routledge, 2012).

Her research and commentary on empathy and undergraduate education has been published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Journal of College and Character*, *About Campus*, *Liberal Education*, *Community Works*, and *Teachers College Record On-line*.

Dr. Dolby has conducted research and lived and worked in South Africa, Australia, and the United States. Her current research is focused on empathy in undergraduate education, the human-animal bond, veterinary education, and sustainability education,

Useful Strategies for Developing Relevant Curriculum

Educators can further these ends if they spend time in their students' community(ies) and apply what they learned in the classroom. This can be done by educators:

- Taking neighborhood walks(McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004)
- Gathering oral histories (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004)
- Conducting consistent three-way conferences that include the educator, the student, and the student's family member(s) to co-decision make (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004)
- Learning and applying the use of their students' home languages in class to promote safety in bilingualism and biliteracy (Hornberger, 1988; Scanlan & Lopez, 2012)
- Cultivate a mindset of "insatiable curiosity about students as individuals: who they are, the experiences they have had (Aronson, 2008, p. 67).
- Provide students the opportunity to learn about you as an individual as much as you seek to learn about them as individuals (Pleasants, 2008).

Conclusion

Getting to know students is a dynamic and engaging journey throughout educators' and students' experience and is not a static, one-time event that starts the school year. Explicitly developing curriculum in response to, and reflective of all student's lived experience is not "a separate, isolated, once-a-year activity" (Ladson Billings, 1994, p. 23). Getting-to-know you activities are a regular component of curriculum and should inform the ongoing inclusion of cultural perspectives, linguistic and cultural experiences (Lee, 2004), community and heritage practices (Paris & Alim, 2014), focus on building trusting relationships (Aronson, 2008) and partnerships with community/family (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Guo, 2009) in curriculum development and decision-making.

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Engage

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within a larger framework of social justice.

She is the recipient of the 2011 Marcile Eddy Shining Light Community Service Award from the United Way (co-award, with her friend, Connie Lagally), and the 2012 Purdue Community Spirit Award. Dr. Dolby lives in Lafayette, Indiana with her husband, Stephen, her eight-year-old daughter, Natalie, and four fabulous felines: Orié, Helio, Bubba, and Pizzazz.

Upcoming Events

2015 Equity Leaders Institute

Equity Leaders Institute: Equitable Distribution of Effective Educators

When:
September 14-15, 2015

Where:
IUPUI — Indianapolis, IN

Themes:
Addressing challenges to achieving educator equity

Expanding understanding of educator quality

Ensuring the recruitment, distribution, and retention of effective educators

Developing Empathy Through Service-Learning for Pre-Service Teachers

In the winter of 2012, five undergraduate pre-service teachers taking Dr. Dolby's Multiculturalism and Education course at Purdue University had the unique opportunity to participate in a service learning project with a local alternative high school. The purpose of the project was to:

- 1) Give Dr. Dolby's freshman and sophomore undergraduate students the much needed "chance of interacting in personal, rich ways with K-12 students";
- 2) Support the undergraduate students in developing skills to collaborate with and develop real solutions to issues in partnership with students and communities they may eventually serve as educators; and
- 3) Challenge and unearth the deficit-oriented and often unconscious misconceptions, stereotypes, and biases students harbor about people and communities that are different from them or their own experiences via developing empathy.

As Dr. Dolby noted, "*Most of the teacher education students in our course have little to no experience with people and communities that are different from themselves - what they know, they learn from television - and often what they learn is stereotypes, which breed both misconceptions and sympathy... This project came about because many Purdue teacher education students cling to what we often refer to as 'deficit' perspectives of students, families, and communities who are of different races or socio-economic backgrounds than they are.*" Dr. Dolby went even further in her write up of the experience to note, "*When teachers feel sympathy, they might try to "help" someone else, but often that "help" comes without complete understanding of the others' situation. Even more sadly, when teachers feel only sympathy for poor children, they often lower their academic expectations, thinking that poor children cannot achieve to the same level as middle class children. In contrast, I was hoping that through this experience at [the high-school], my students would develop something more critical to their future, and the future of the children in their classrooms: empathy. To develop empathy, however, my students would need to learn to listen carefully and with respect to the experiences of people who are different from them.*"

The service-learning project paired Dr. Dolby's undergraduate students with students from a newly formed, small alternative high school to develop and complete a project that would have mutual benefits for the high school and immediately surrounding community. Dr. Dolby noted

Illinois

Fall Youth Summit
November 6-8, 2015
Chicago, IL

Indiana

State School Bus Committee Meeting
Sept. 1, 2015
Indianapolis, IN

Empowerment Fair and Awards Reception
Sept. 11, 2015
Martin University,
Indianapolis, IN

Families Navigating Life Together
Sept. 12, 2015
Martin University,
Indianapolis, IN

Million Women Mentors Summit and Gala
Sept. 21, 2015
Washington, D.C.

Ohio

Ohio TESOL Conference
October 30 - 31, 2015
Columbus, OH

Michigan

Fall 2015 School Improvement Conference
November 16-17, 2015
Lansing, MI

Minnesota

2015 Back to School Leadership Conference
Minneapolis, MN
August 4 - 5, 2015

Wisconsin

4th Annual Colloquium on Black Males in Education
October 6-9, 2015
University of the West Indies- Mona

that they also "brought in representatives from local neighborhood associations, the mayor's office, and other city offices to collaborate on the project. In this project, no one was an "expert" or a "helper"- everyone came together as equals to learn from each other."

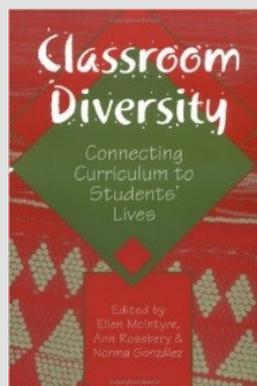
Dr. Dolby describes how the project evolved and concluded: *"We met as a group all day on several Saturdays...We definitely ran into some bumps very early on! By the first morning, the Purdue students, who were very accustomed to seeing themselves as the ones who "know", had identified a problem in the neighborhood, and were busily trying to "fix" it. However, because they had not yet developed an understanding of what empathy is, they had moved too quickly - they had not consulted the people who lived in the neighborhood, or other stakeholders to see what they thought. Through many long conversations that Saturday - and subsequent Saturdays - the Purdue students began to understand that their initial response was grounded in sympathy, and while well-intentioned, may have actually been harmful to the neighborhood. We were all able to grow together as a group, and to see that the real solutions to the problems in the neighborhood were much more complex than they appear to be on the surface. And we learned that it is important to talk to people, gather perspectives, work together, respect people with different life experiences and backgrounds, and actually LISTEN, before acting. This is empathy in action."*

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To find out how the project concluded and what the outcomes were, read Dr. Dolby's brief [write up](#) of the experience.

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Empower



Something to Read!

Classroom Diversity: Connecting Curriculum to Students' Lives

Classroom Diversity takes a sociocultural approach to

curriculum design, which provides minority and working-class students with the same privileges that non-minority and middle-class students have always had: instruction that puts their knowledge and experiences at the heart of their learning. It presents both the theoretical framework for linking students' lives with curriculum and specific strategies from teachers who have done so successfully. Their stories show African American, Haitian American, Latina/o, Native American, and rural white students of Appalachian descent engaged in contextualized learning as they read and write and do mathematics and science across the grades. All of the classrooms described share one important characteristic: they use students' household-based funds of knowledge as resources for school-based funds of knowledge, building bridges in nontraditional ways.

Something to Watch!

Diversity in Alberta Schools: A Journey to Inclusion



This clip illustrates how the government of Alberta has begun implementing a single inclusive education system that meets the learning needs of all students, including those with diverse learning needs. Inclusive education, as articulated in Setting the Direction Framework, Government of Alberta Response, is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students, with the starting point being the student's home school. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice.



Something to Use!

Using a Neighborhood Map a Get-to-Know-You Activity

One of the simplest ways to foster compassion and understanding in our classrooms is to give students opportunities to share stories about their lives. By communicating and listening, students can break down stereotypes and see each other as real people. This can be done through curriculum-related projects such as personal narrative and poetry or as part of a daily class meeting. Sarah Anderson a middle school teacher used this simple yet effective activity to get to know her students and allow students to get to know each other. Use [this blog entry](#) by Sarah to learn more about how she uses a "neighborhood

map" activity with great success.

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