Did You Know?

*Cultural brokers* are individuals with strong ties to and extensive knowledge of both the cultural groups within a school community and the norms and expectations within the school system. These individuals help mediate understandings between students and teachers, families and schools, and families and communities in order to advance equitable schooling policies and practices (Bass, 2012). Any individual can serve as a cultural broker, including school personnel, students, or community members. For example, students whose parents speak a language other than English often serve as cultural brokers in translating information between school and family. Individuals who understand special education (e.g., former teachers, administrators, parents of students with disabilities) can serve as cultural brokers by attending Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings with families they know well to foster two-way communication. Teachers can serve as cultural brokers for students by implementing culturally responsive curricula and instruction. Collectively, cultural brokers can help students and families navigate the educational system and ensure that educators understand families’ needs, beliefs, values, concerns, assets, perspectives, and expectations. In so doing, cultural brokers can be effective negotiators for change, helping to create more mutually collaborative and democratic learning environments.

Why it Matters:

Over the past decade, racial and ethnic diversity in the United States has increased enormously, especially among the nation’s youth; populations of people younger than 18 increased in all racial groups with the exception of Whites and Blacks (Frey, 2011). This trend is expected to continue to accelerate, such that by 2021 it is estimated that the number of Hispanic students will increase by 24%, Asian/Pacific Islanders by 26% and bi- or multi-racial students by 34% (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). Such trends in student diversity have not been mirrored in the teacher workforce. The composition of teachers continues to be predominately White (83%), female (75%), and middle-class (NEA, 2012). Given such differences between teachers’ and students’ culture and backgrounds, providing equitable education to students becomes very challenging without the aid of cultural brokers.

For Equity Now:
Identify individuals at your site who could serve as cultural brokers and places where it may be helpful to involve a cultural broker (e.g., parent-teacher conferences)

- Ensure that cultural brokers are at the table whenever important decisions are made in the school
- Increase your own ability to serve as a cultural broker by getting involved in cultural organizations in the community (Here is one example of a community-based organization active in cultural brokering: http://www.bcceindy.org)
- Foreground and integrate social, linguistic, and historical cultural factors throughout every aspect of continuous improvement efforts so that the school accommodates the needs of all students
- Learn about how students may already be assuming cultural broker roles
- Learn more about how other fields such as health care services support the use of cultural brokers: http://www.culturalbroker.info/

References:


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