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OSDeveloper

-Strengthening the knowledge, skills, and practices of
Montgomery County Public Schools' staff and stakeholders

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Working With Diverse Learners

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“Nothing influences behavior so strongly as the clear expectation of a significant other.” Jim Steffen’s words have profound implications for educators working with diverse learners. Teachers are significant others in the lives of students. Our daily interactions with students, conscious and intentional, or unconscious and unintentional, communicate our beliefs about students’ capacity to learn and succeed. Our words and actions are never neutral; they either affirm or deny, value or devalue, enable or disable student learning.

Decades of research have confirmed that teacher expectations and beliefs about students’ learning potential have a dramatic effect on student achievement of diverse learners (identified by race, ethnicity, socio-economics, language, or disability). Ronald Ferguson at Harvard University has described how achievement gaps emerge and evolve based on teacher expectations and beliefs. Children enter school with differing levels of preparation. Teachers learn to expect these patterns but may misinterpret students’ intentions, behavior, and abilities. The result could lead to low expectations for students and classroom interactions not attuned to the students’ family and community norms.

As students age, they become aware of the correlation between achievement and cultural group characteristics and the stereotypes in the broader society. These stereotypes may be internalized by students and reinforced by teacher expectations. The consequence is that low achieving students feel less confident in their abilities, become less engaged in schools, and may not exert effective effort. Teacher expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If having high expectations for all learners is the goal, what do they look like and sound like in the classroom? Fortunately, there is considerable agreement in the research on the practices that demonstrate high expectations. None are new or a quick “fix,” but frequent use of the strategies can and do make a positive difference for diverse learners.

To demonstrate high expectations, teachers:

- provide equitable opportunities for students to respond and participate (*Instead of calling only on students that raise their hands, use a structure, such as Numbered Heads, that communicates everyone is expected to participate. In Numbered Heads, students count off in groups. The teacher calls a number randomly and all the students with that number are expected to respond. To avoid “putting students on the spot,” allow students to reflect individually or talk with a partner before numbers are called,*)

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Working With Diverse Learners (Continued)

- provide ample wait time for thinking and responding (*Give students at least 3-5 seconds, or more depending on the level of question, for private thinking before requiring them to answer a question. Give students a specific prompt for thinking and remind them often that you value high quality thinking over speed.*),
- provide specific and timely feedback to students about their work (*Provide feedback that indicates what students did or did not do related to the standard, which helps students improve more than telling them if their answer was right or wrong.*),
- ask high-level, open-ended questions that require students to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate (*Consider asking high-level questions even if a student has not answered recall questions. Students from some cultures consider answering recall questions unnecessary and are eager to make connections between the new concepts and prior knowledge. Students who are not asked higher-level questions may interpret this as a low teacher expectation.*),
- use effective praise as a motivational tool in helping students take responsibility for learning (*Praise effort instead of ability or intelligence. The comment, “You must have worked really hard to get a test score this good” praises effort, instead of the typical comment, “You’re so smart.”*),
- promote talk in schools reflecting the belief that “all children can achieve at high levels.” (*View children as “at-promise,” not “at-risk.”*), and
- demonstrate persistence in helping students meet standards by using a variety of instructional approaches to meet the

needs of each student (*Students who get individual help from the teacher believe that “My teacher cares about my learning and will help me to be successful.”*).

Given the persistent achievement gaps that exist between diverse groups, our school system is committed to ensuring success for every student. Teachers demonstrating high expectations for all learners is a key component in this endeavor.

For more detailed information on working with diverse learners, visit the OSD website and download Donna Graves’ full-length article. Taking the *Studying Skillful Teaching* course will also provide an opportunity to focus on explicit ways to study the strategies discussed in this article. In addition, you may email questions to Donna Graves or SST instructors via First Class.



Resources / Bibliography

Delpit, Lisa. *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflicts in the Classroom*. New York, New York: The New Press, 1995.

Denbo, Sheryl J. and Beaulieu, Lynson Moore (editors). *Improving Schools for African American Students: A Reader for Educational Leaders*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, LTD., 2002.

Fashola, Olatkunbo S.; Slavin, Robert E.; Caldron, Margarita; & Duran, Richard (1997). *Effective Programs for Latino Students in Elementary and Middle Schools. Prepared for the Hispanic Dropout Project.*

Gonzalez, Norma, Greenberg, James, & Velez, Carlos. *Funds of Knowledge: A Look at Luis Moll’s Research Into Hidden Family Resources*. *North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)*.

Lockwood, Anne T. *Caring, Community, and Personalization: Strategies to Combat the Hispanic Dropout Problem*. *U.S. Department of Education/ Hispanic Dropout Project, Summer 1996.*

McLeod, Beverly. *School Reform and Student Diversity: Exemplary Schooling for Language Minority Students*. *National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, University of California, Santa Cruz.*

Learning Opportunities and Updates

A&S PGS Meetings

- A&S PGS Steering Committee: January 27, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM @ CESC

New Educator Orientation

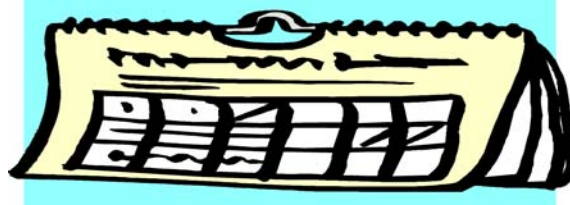
- For new hires after August 18, 2003
- February 17, 2004, 7:30 AM – 3:30 PM @ Lathrop E. Smith Environmental Ed Center
- Will focus on instructional strategies, lesson planning, and classroom management
- To register, email name, school, & grade/subject to Susan Mitchell or go to <http://coldfusion.mcps.k12.md.us/cfms/training> and click on *School-Year 2003-2004 Calendar*. Scroll down to *Date* and enter 02/17/04.
- Participants secure their own substitutes & professional leave is available through OSD.
- Send leave forms to Nancy Austin at OSD.
- Snow date: March 1, 2004

Mentor Stipends

Mentors who have not yet received payment or who have questions should email Susan Mitchell.

The Special Education Teacher Immersion Training Program, (SET-IT)

- Interest meetings: February 3, 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM @ Johns Hopkins, Shady Grove Center
- Information re: the Praxis & program components will be provided
- Contact Judy Webster, 301-353-8556
- Cohort participants will work for MCPS as paraeducators for two years while earning their Master of Science Degree and Special Education certification.



Curriculum Implementation Training

- **English 7, 8, 9:** February 4, 4:00 PM. - 7:00 PM @ MCEA
- **Reading 6, 7, 8:** January 29, 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM @ MCEA

Technology Training

Opportunities abound! Contact your eLearning specialist, or check the eLearning website for a complete list of learning opportunities: <http://mcps-elearning.us/training/training.cfm>

SST Follow-Up Support

The Center for Skillful Teaching staff have been involved in doing a variety of post-course (SST 1 & 2) work with SST participants. Their efforts include, but are not limited to, working with teachers on:

- Providing follow-up support on planning for the alignment of standards, mastery objectives, criteria for success, formative/summative assessments, and classroom activities,
- Facilitating peer visits with reflection, and
- Facilitating study groups.

If you are interested in this support, please call or email Margaret (Peg) Donnellon or an instructional specialist at 301-601-4800.

Learning Opportunities (Continued)

Staff Development Teacher Training

For information about all modules, including locations and contact people, go to:

<http://coldfusion.mcps.k12.md.us/cfms/training/search.cfm?segment=14>



January 30, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

Quad-Cluster/Consortium meetings

- Blair/Einstein/Kennedy @ Saddlebrook
- Northwest/Poolesville/Quince Orchard/Seneca Valley @ Century 21
- Churchill/R. Montgomery/Rockville/Wootton @ MCEA, rooms A & B
- Damascus/Gaithersburg/Magruder/Watkins Mill @ Center for Skillful Teaching
- BCC/WJ/Wheaton/Whitman @ MCEA - Room D
- Northeast Consortium/Sherwood @ Westfarm

February 5

- Evidence of Student Learning-Elem. (Day 3 of 5)
- Reaching All Students: Matching Learning Styles with Instructional Strategies (Day 3 of 5)

February 12

- A Deeper Look at Studying Skillful Teaching
- Supporting Teachers of Math A in Elementary Schools

February 12 and February 19

- Developing Culturally Competent Schools (2-day module - both days required)

February 13, 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM

"Level-Alike" training, secondary

- Middle School @ Century 21 Building
- High School @ Thomas Edison High School

February 19

- eLearning Tools to Support Writing Skills for Staff Development Teachers
- A Deeper Look at Facilitative Leadership

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