


## “Rethinking Urban Education:


Recognizing & Capitalizing on the Gifts, Talents, and Strengths of Children From Culturally & Economically Diverse Families”

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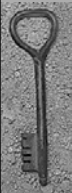


## Introductions



Cirecie A. West-Olatunji, Ph. D. is Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at the University of Florida. Her current research focuses on special education placement, counseling, and culturally diverse young children. Dr. West-Olatunji is a nationally recognized speaker, practitioner, and author in the area of culture-centered theory, research, and practice.

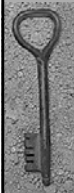
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## Overview

- I. Current Challenges in School Communities
- II. Traditional Responses
- III. Innovative Perspectives & Interventions
- IV. Case Illustrations/Exemplars
- V. Resources

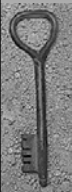
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## I. Current Challenges in High Poverty Schools

- ◆ Low Academic Achievement
- ◆ Increased Complexities Faced by Teachers
- ◆ Disproportionate Placement in Special Education
- ◆ Multi-layered Obstacles

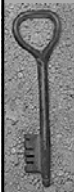
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## Increased Complexities Faced by Teachers

- Teachers are increasingly faced with complex problems presented by diverse student needs in the classroom (e.g., language, disability, familial stressors, etc.)
- School accountability standards and procedures may be creating an interaction effect when viewing performance outcomes for various diverse learners

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## Poor Children

*Low-income students are disproportionately placed in special education compared to middle-income and high income students (Olatunji, 2003).*

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## Multilayered Obstacles:

Culturally & economically diverse students have a multi-layered set of obstacles to overcome in order to succeed in the school environment (Olatunji, 2000).

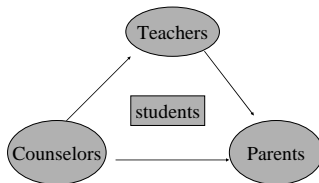
1. The clashes between the students' socially constructed knowledge and that of the school (Gordon, 1997).
2. Prevailing socio-political conditions that predispose teacher attitudes and expectations about the students.
3. These conditions also dictate:
  - the quality of the physical environment,
  - accessibility to educational materials and resources.

## II. Traditional Responses

- ◆ genetic or biological inheritance (Jensen, 1969; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994)
- ◆ “cultural deprivation” (Crow, Murray, & Smythe, 1966)
- ◆ organizational frameworks examine three major areas: family background, student traits, and school factors (Henderson, et. al., 1996)
- ◆ developmental needs of adolescents (George & Alexander, 1993)

## III. Innovative Perspectives & Interventions:

### *Collaborative Learning Communities*



## Teachers in Collaborative Learning Communities


- ◆ Paradigm Shift Needed
- ◆ Effective Models/Approaches
- ◆ Culturally Appropriate Pedagogy
- ◆ Recommendations

## Shift in paradigm is needed

1. Children may fail in school due to variety of factors such as inadequate school resources, poor teacher expectations, and inequitable education – all of which are beyond their control
2. Children need to be viewed as having strengths rather than deficient or problematic
3. Schools need to become child- and family-centered rather than *school-centric*

## Effective Models/Approaches


- ◆ Culturally Responsive Educational Systems
  - Facilitate teacher inquiry, support, and collaboration around issues of cultural differences (Klinger et al., 2005)
- ◆ Early Intervention
  - Focusing interventions and supports for students who are encountering difficulties in school is imperative
  - Current “wait to fail” model is not effective and places children at higher risk for failure
- ◆ Out of School Time (OST) Programming (e.g. rite of passage programs)



## Culturally appropriate pedagogy

*...assumes that children are socialized into cultural modes of behavior that express a full range of developmental competencies*


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## Culturally appropriate pedagogy (cont.)

*It is argued that, if African-American students arrive in the school environment with a set of unique and legitimate ways of being that are cognitively, linguistically, and behaviorally different (Phillips, 1993), perhaps even oppositional to the normative school context.*


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## Culturally appropriate pedagogy (cont.)

*Thus, the school failure might be the result of the cultural incompatibility of the schooling environment (structure, content, curriculum, teaching practices, materials, organization, etc.)*


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## Recommendations

- ◆ Increased Accountability for Multicultural Competency at the Policy Level
- ◆ Applying What Works
- ◆ Re-definition of Parent Involvement
- ◆ Re-thinking the Role of School Counselors


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## Parents in Collaborative Learning Communities

- ◆ Parents as Primary Transmitters of Knowledge
- ◆ Parents as a Subset and Active Agent in Communities
- ◆ Parents are Funds of Knowledge
- ◆ Parent Involvement Correlates With Student Academic Success

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## Parents as Primary Transmitters of Knowledge

- ◆ Parenting with a firm, but nurturing hand
- ◆ Using Resources
- ◆ Fostering cultural identity

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## Parents as a Subset and Active Agent in Communities

- ◆ Being involved in community matters (such as, housing, safety, health issues, etc.)
- ◆ Becoming aware of political and economic forces impacting communities (business and corporate actions that affect neighborhoods and jobs, for example)
- ◆ Participating in school board issues to be proactive in policy decisions that affect your child



## Parents are Funds of Knowledge

- ◆ Sharing a wealth of experiences that are relevant to the curriculum by personalizing the educational content
- ◆ Dictating the context of the learning experience by collaborating with educators in and outside of the classroom
- ◆ Demonstrating the depth and breadth of resources in the community as a source of pride




## Parent Involvement Correlates With Student Success

- ◆ Having control over your child's education (asking questions of school personnel)
- ◆ Daily follow-up with your child
- ◆ Having high expectations for your child
- ◆ Making sure that your teacher's child has high expectations for your child



## The New Role for Counselors in School Settings

- ◆ Cultural Brokers
- ◆ Pedagogical Brokers
- ◆ Safety/Nurturance Brokers




## The Counselor as Cultural Broker

- ◆ Serving as an advocate for low-income families
- ◆ Being a liaison person to key stakeholders in the community
- ◆ Teaching mediation and recovery skills



## The Counselor as Pedagogical Broker


- ◆ Conducting professional development workshops
- ◆ Serving as in-house consultants
- ◆ Acting as *professional life* coaches
- ◆ Partnering with teachers to aide in cultural competence



## Counselors can Foster Safety and Nurturance in School Communities

- ◆ To Provide and Promote Early Interventions to Prevent Developmental and Academic Delays
- ◆ To Reduce Anxiety Caused by External and Internal Stressors
- ◆ To Promote Collaborative and Constructive Engagements


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## IV. Case Illustrations/Exemplars

- ◆ Duval Elementary School (Gainesville, FL)
- ◆ Excel High School (Oakland, CA)


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## V. On Line Resources


- ◆ National Association for Multicultural Education ([www.name.org](http://www.name.org))
- ◆ The Education Trust (<http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/>)
- ◆ The Comer School Development Program (<http://info.med.yale.edu/comer/>)
- ◆ The Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (<http://www.amcdaca.org>)

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## Questions & Answers

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