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## Inspire, create, unite : celebrating diversity

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Inspire, Create, Unite: Celebrating Diversity

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### **Abstract**

Celebrating cultures in diverse schools is important for young children. Such celebrations allow children to gain knowledge and experiences with other cultures. Intolerance and stereotypes stem from ignorance, misinformation, and fear. Thus, the more exposure children have to what they do not know or have not experienced, the greater the likelihood that they will be tolerant of cultural differences. Parents and staff of Bay View Academy were interviewed to see what could be done to sustain and grow what will hopefully become an annual Cultural Day at Bay View Academy. The results show that the collaboration between parents, staff, and the community is necessary for maintaining a successful event that engages the students deep into other cultures. More specifically, the day is supplemented with learning starts in the classroom with the teachers and then, as groups from the community come in to share their cultures with the students, the hands-on experiences further drives the teachers' lessons home. The goal of this day is to create positive experiences tied with other cultures, as means of replacing negative perceptions. As a result of this project, hopefully the annual Cultural Day at Bay View Academy will continue to do such work.

### **Green with Polka Dots**

*Green with Polka Dots is a children's story based on true events from my life. Here is the text and part of the inspiration for my project*

"Mommy, is David Brown named that because his skin is brown?" Cookie asked her mom after her first day of school. "No honey," she said with a giggle, "there are people that come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. David is African-American so his skin is darker than yours. Always remember though, people are people, no matter if they are brown, white, purple or green with polka dots."

This was Cookie's first time being told that people come in different colors, but Cookie already knew that David was a person. She thought that her mom was kind of silly for reminding her of that. Still, Cookie kept that saying in the back of her mind; people are people no matter if they are brown, white, purple or green with polka dots.

When Cookie and her family moved to California, she really understood what her mom meant by all shapes, sizes, and colors. She even thought she saw someone who was green with polka dots.

As Cookie grew older, her knowledge grew too. She made new friends and dealt with new situations. In a town where everyone was so colorful, she only saw the people and all the colors were gone; even the ones who were purple or green with polka dots.

When Cookie was a teenager she would go everywhere with her three best friends. They would walk arm in arm and didn't care about how much room they took up. They loved each other. They were inseparable. One night, after going to the movies, the four of them, arm in arm, walked down the street. An older woman turned to Cookie and said, "you should really be around your own kind."

All at once the colors rushed back to the people. The colors so intense that they took over the people and everyone was now just a color blob. There were reds, yellows, blacks, browns, and whites. The lady turned to a white blob and Cookie turned into a white blob, but her three friends were all black blobs. Cookie didn't know what to say to the woman. Then it came to her, "people are people no matter if they're brown, white, purple or green with polka dots."

We are all human. We are all people. Not everyone can see past the colors. The more you learn about the people, the more the colors will stop defining them. People are people no matter if they're brown, white, purple or green with polka dots.

### **Celebrating Diversity**

Perspectives, points of view, and perceptions of different groups are constantly circulating through the world and the minds of people. The media is a big proponent of creating and perpetuating these stereotypes. The images and messages are on display for the world to see and are absorbed by the minds of the people that come into contact with them; whether the person agrees, disagrees or is neutral on the subject, the perception still had an effect on that individual. When it comes to children, they have yet to develop their own perceptions so the interference of stereotypes created by the media and the information received from the adults in their lives are factors in the development of the child's outlook on those who are different (Harkness & Super, 2010; Benton, 2006). Even before a child enters the education system, he/she has "already begun to construct their gender and racial identity" based on the previous factors (Arujo, 2003). Education and knowledge of other cultures is key in changing any negative perceptions or stereotypes.

**The Concern**

There is a lack of multiculturalism in schools today. By this I mean that children are still receiving an education based on the Anglocentric perspectives; other cultures are virtually left out of traditional schooling. The United States is an extremely diverse country and this diversity increases every day (American Association of Teaching & Curriculum, 1999). Unfortunately, the realization of this diversity is being used as a way to be seen as socially acceptable as opposed to actually accepting others regardless of their backgrounds (Benton, 2006; Powell, 2005). This is a national problem.

**The Context**

For my capstone, I knew that I would not be able to make a change on a national level, but there was something that I could do locally. I turned my attention to Bay View Academy in Monterey, California. This site was a public school that got shut down, due to budget cuts. In the year 2011, Bay View opened its doors as a charter school. I did service learning at the site for all of the 2011-2012 school year. The more time that I spent at this school, the more I saw that very little was being done to support their mission statement of “community involvement including partnerships with local educational, cultural and research organizations [that will enrich] the academic program” (Bayview-academy.org, 2011). Monterey County is a diverse area, and the children that attend this school are just that—diverse. Classrooms are where students will be learning many things from social norms, to math, and from how to write a letter to moral values; this is also the place that they should be learning about other cultures (American Association of Teaching & Curriculum, 1999; Powell, 2005).

### **The Stakeholders**

There are many people involved in the school from the obvious being students and teachers to the other staff and parents. When it comes to the issue of there being a lack of multiculturalism in schools, the main people that need to be reached are parents and teachers. These two groups have a direct line to the students and in many cases need their perceptions changed as well (American Association of Teaching & Curriculum, 1999; Powell, 2005; Nieto, 2000).

### **The Common Places**

The celebration of diversity and the word multiculturalism have multiple definitions based on who is being asked. In most school setting, the use of food is one way of bringing multiculturalism onto the campus. Although this is one way of creating a positive experience tied with other cultures, it is not the only way (Frumkin & Baver & Mustakas, 2009; Powell, 2005). While speaking with Christine Sleeter (2013), a CSUMB alumnus, she said that having one aspect of a culture present is not breaking stereotypes, but replacing them with new ones. The idea of food being a way to celebrate diversity was the biggest common misconception I found both through my research as well as being at Bay View Academy.

### **Solutions and Suggestions**

Multicultural education is a major component to the liberal studies program here at California State Monterey Bay. The faculty is preparing a new generation of teachers who are trained to combat the inequalities of society and to fight for social change. But, how prepared

were the teachers who are currently overseeing our children's education? The need for multiculturalism in schools is growing and the suggestions for how to approach it are growing too (Powell, 2005; Parekh)

### **Multicultural literature.**

Changing the curriculum was one suggestion that came up during research; however, standardized testing and the public school system make it very difficult for these curriculums to be adopted. The use of multicultural literature is a way to bring different cultures into a school that the children are able to connect with (Miller 1997; Nieto, 2000; Banks & McGee-Banks, 2010). Books allow children to connect with someone from another culture on a more personal level as they read about their trials and victories through story and wrestle with the concepts (Miller, 1997). Not only does literature provide students a one-on-one interaction with this culture, but it allows them to reflect on how these groups are similar to the individual.

### **The use of the arts.**

The use of food as a way of introducing children to new cultures is acceptable, but it is commonly used as the only way of doing this. This causes a problem of replacing old stereotypes with new ones. It was suggested to use a multitude of approaches in order to present children with different aspects of a specific culture (Sleeter, 2013; Miller, 1997). The arts are a beneficial way of teaching both children and adults when teaching them about different cultures. Music, art, and dance are some of the ways of getting the children physically involved in a culture (Powell, 2005; Frumkin & Baver & Mustakas, 2009). With the use of arts as a medium for teaching about cultures, children are able to experience first-hand aspects of that culture. The theory of



experiential education states that learning is a process; a person has an experience and then is able to critically analyze (Kolb, 1943). Piaget's model of learning and cognitive development, as exemplified in Kolb's piece, shows that a sensory experience turns into an internalized reflection then to an abstract view of what has happened and finally a concrete understanding of the experience as well as the deeper meanings (Kolb, 1943). The arts full fill this model when exposing children to different cultures.

### **Celebrating diversity as a community.**

Literature and the arts are both easily accomplished ways of bringing multiculturalism into schools; however, the final suggestion that was found in the literature was a cultural celebration that not only unified the school, but also members of the community (Powell, 2005; Miller, 1997). Celebrations are a fun way to immerse students into an aspect of a culture. Events like these require many people to be involved; parents, teachers, and different groups from the community are necessary for events like this. In order for a cultural celebration to be a success, cultures must decide a way they would like to be represented and the presence of the parents will help the children to understand that we all must take part in making a change (Nieto, 2000; Frumkin & Baver & Mustakas, 2009). An organized day set up to celebrate cultures ties in food, music, dance, art and literature to reach all types of learner a and create a well-rounded experience that will become a concrete concept to those involved.

### **Methodology**

Multiculturalism is something that should be celebrated. America is known as a "melting pot" for cultures and it is exactly that; cultures melt into on another trying to confirm to the American way. Traditions tend to get pushed aside to make room for new, socially acceptable ones. Generation after generation does this and eventually the families start to become "just American". How are educators going to celebrate and preserve the rich cultures that make-up America?

### **Context**

Bay View Academy is a charter school in Monterey. After the public school closed down, the community surrounding the area came together and drew up a charter to reopen their beloved school. In the fall of 2011, Bay View Academy opened its doors for the first time as a charter school. As word got out about the amazing ideals of this school, the waitlist began to grow. In 2012, it was decided that three more classes were to be added to the school to make room for the immense amount of students that were attempting to make their way into the heart of the Bay View Community. The influx in students reciprocated the influx in diversity. Monterey itself is a very diverse town on the central coast. With the university in town, the heavy military personnel, and the tourist and historical attractions that it has to offer, Monterey brings in many different people from all different walks of life. This amazing community has such a rich variety of cultures that it is no wonder Bay View's mission statement includes the following: "Community involvement, including partnerships with local educational, cultural and research organizations

enriches the academic program. At BVA, all children are artists, authors, scientists, musicians, and mathematicians.”

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

I started out by having several meetings with the principal in order to create something that was beneficial for both my project as well as the school. After these meetings, she suggested I reach out to parents and staff for further suggestions. I sent out emails and surveys to all of the teachers. Bay View has a total of nine full-time, master teachers as well as the principal, physical education teacher, secretary, and front office clerk. The teachers were a targeted group because they are responsible for a large portion of a child's education. The next group that I targeted was the parents, not just any parents but the parents involved in the CVO which is the parent teacher organization. I contacted the president and then proceeded to speak at their monthly meeting. Here is where I heard the parents' perspectives, concerns, as well as suggestions. This is an important participant because not only does this specific group of parents control where fundraiser money is allocated, but they also have a huge say in the on campus events. With the suggestions, opinions, and help from these two groups, my action was able to become a reality.

### **Researcher**

I spent the entire 2011-2012 school year service learning at Bay View Academy. It was their first year being opened as a charter school. When I first stepped into the classrooms, the diversity of the students present reminded me of where I grew up and I felt right at home in the Bay View Community. It was not hard for me to develop a love for the school. They were so new and had so many wonderful things written in their mission statement about community and

culture. I was able to grow and learn along with the school, but I felt that because of my education, there was something that I could establish to aid the school in reaching throt full potential of a school that promotes community and celebrates diversity. I was educated at a university that strives to prepare their students for teaching in multicultural classrooms. This training along with my bringing up aided me in my mission to bring the celebration of diversity and multiculturalism to Bay View Academy. My goal was to inspire the staff, students, and parents to maintain such a celebration in order to combat negative perceptions of other cultures.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

The surveys and interviews were targeted toward parents and teachers. Both of these groups have a heavy influence on the education and morals of the children. In order to get a good understanding of what this cultural celebration should consist of, I sent out an online survey to teachers and had a group interview with both parents and teachers.

The following questions were set up for a mixed group of parents and teachers:

What did you think or hear about with the last Cultural Day?

What suggestions do you have for the Cultural Day here at Bay View?

Would you be interested in starting a committee to help with the organization of this event?

The following questions were set up for the staff and faculty because they were directly involved in the school and education of the students:

What is your definition of a multicultural curriculum?

In your opinion, does this school meet your definition of what a multicultural education should encompass?

Do you feel that you are connected to your students in a way where you would be able to teach them about their cultures, your culture, and other cultures in a non-biased educational manner? Please explain

What cultures would you like to see represented in next year's Cultural Day?

### **Procedure**

I started this project with several ideas in mind, but these ideas had no input from those who were directly involved with the school--the stakeholders. I had to back track a little bit and hear them out to see how to keep my cultural day running. First, I wanted to show the need to educate the students about different cultures present in the community. To do this I went and surveyed the older children in grades three through five to see what they knew about ethnicity, their own culture as well as other cultures. The answers were interesting to say the least. When I asked the students what their ethnicity was, one of the answers I received was from a third grade boy; he wrote "San Diego". This mistake was made due to a confusing definition of ethnicity being given by the teacher. The teacher had informed the little boy that ethnicity is where you were born. This incident only provided more evidence to bring to my stakeholders.

I then targeted the principal. The initial discussion was simple and straight forward. What I needed to find out from her was what she wanted to do to make this happen without my involvement. She had a few suggestions and the discussion went well. Her suggestions then led me to the next stakeholders--the parents.

I knew the parents were going to be a tough crowd, so I went in with an open mind. The action, Cultural Day, was my baby so I knew it would be hard for me to take in new ideas and critiques. I contacted the president of the CVO and from there I was placed on the agenda for their next monthly meeting. I needed to prepare the questions that I was going to ask. This specific group was a mix of parents and teachers so i had to make the questions answerable by all. I prepared my evidence and practiced the introduction and questions over and over again. I was nervous because I've never really had any experience dealing with parents before. When I presented at the CVO meeting, some of the parents were put off by the questions, but finally we had a break through. The teachers made suggestions about what their involvement should be. Everyone's input helped with creating the action--a how to guide for the school to use between administration, teachers, staff and parents to create their very own Cultural Day that will be celebrated for years to come.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews will be coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

### **Results**

There were a number of approaches for researching this subject. Becoming an expert of the literature was the first step. After reviewing the literature, the next step was going directly to those involved with Bay View Academy to see what they had to say on the issue at hand. Through a group interview with parents and teachers as well as an online survey for just the staff, three themes emerged from this information: parents are a part of the community and are a direct line to the community, teachers should be incorporating lessons that are directly related to the

cultures in the, and finally a step-by-step guide as well as committees should be used to delegate work and responsibility.

### **Parent and Community Involvement.**

Parents are a huge part in creating a successful and sustainable event. It was pointed out during the group interview with the CVO that parents are a part of the community and have a number of contacts that the school may not be aware of. This connection not only gets the parents involved in bringing multiculturalism to their children, but it also creates networks into the community. These networks build relationships between the community and the school. Community relationships with cultural groups help to fulfill a large part of Bay View Academy's mission statement. It also helps to weave the Bay View community into the community of Monterey. The positive experiences created during this event is beneficial for all who are involved.

### **Cultural lessons start in the classroom.**

Multicultural literature was one of the major solutions for bringing multiculturalism into the schools. The teachers at Bay View Academy were curious about how they could contribute to the goal of the Cultural Day. Teacher involvement can come in many different forms. The creation of lesson plans dedicated to one culture or even class projects having to do with the cultures of the students are a good starting point. After analyzing the surveys and the group interview, literature seemed to be a favorite amongst the majority and also coincided with the literature that has been written of this topic. The use of picture books in the classrooms helped to





### **Decision Making**

Monterey is a diverse community both in the environment of the area as well as the people who reside here. The vast amount of cultures present allows for many teaching opportunities that are brushed under the rug. Educators need to take advantage of this cultural richness in order to not only expose children to the ways of a variety of groups, but to also unite the community.

There are many different ways that this can be done. The top three that had come up through my research were: educate through the use of multicultural literature in the classrooms, engage by involving the students in aspects of art from different cultures, and unite by creating an event that has parents and multiple cultures from the community coming together in the celebration of diversity.

The main things to think about when deciding an action is the sustainability of it, the access to materials, and the cost. Sustainability is important. If this action only is for one school year then the following classes will not only lose this opportunity to celebrate diversity, but those who have already experienced it could potentially develop new stereotypes from the single interaction with these cultures. Access to materials is also another factor to look at when it comes time to deciding on an action. While something like books may be readily available in a local library, different curriculums (if deciding on the educational path) take a little more time and effort to find and finalize. Finding volunteers, locations, and materials are all something that need to be predetermined before even attempting to access them. Once these factors have been decided, the accessibility of them will depend on those decisions. This brings us to the next factor; what will the cost be of the action decided. With this specific location, funding is minimal. The school thrives on personal donations and fundraising. When choosing an action,

cost needs to play a major role in the decision making. If the action costs are out of budget then the action will be unattainable.

After hearing the voices of the stakeholders, several points became apparent. One, the teachers should be informed about what cultures are going to be focused on so they are able to incorporate stories, literature and lessons pertaining to those cultures to give the children a solid foundation prior to any event or speaker that will be held for the school. Two, the parents should be involved in the action, whether they are part of a planning committee or volunteer with an event on campus. This falls under both accessibility as well as cost. Parents should be and, for the most part, are involved in their children's education. They are easily available and volunteers are free. This helps the ease of the action and saves the school money. Finally, the more ways the cultures are represented the better. It was said that there should be in class work, visual representations, as well as hands on activities that the children can engage in. When I spoke with Christine Sleeter, she had mentioned that there is a fine line between educating students about other cultures and creating new stereotypes. She suggested using many different aspects of the cultures to give a well-rounded view. This was taken into consideration when it came time to make a decision.

Last spring I had established the first annual Cultural Day at Bay View Academy, so I already had in mind a celebratory event that brought in members of the community. With this project, I had to do research and listen to the stakeholders in order to insure that this Cultural Day would continue without my involvement. I knew that the teachers wanted more of a role in this and the administration wanted the parents to be involved as well. We all wanted this event to be a community effort; between parents, teachers, staff, students, and members from the community all coming together, the event should have no problem running smoothly after I have

left the area. To make sure the event maintains its sustainability, I decided to create a how-to-guide for the school. This guide will show what works well and what doesn't. It will have book lists and in-class activities that were used while I was in charge. It will also have a contact list of performers from past events and those who are interested in future events. Finally, it will have a breakdown section of how the parents can do their part. What helped me make my decision was the discussion I had with the CVO. The biggest suggestion was the use of the resources and people that are already at the school. The school's diversity is a rich resource that isn't being tapped into.

Out of all of the suggestions I had come across, this seemed to be the strongest. The school is new and because I was the founder of the Cultural Day, it only seemed suiting that I make the survival guide. The teachers told me what they saw that worked and what didn't and the principal was a solid backboard for me to bounce ideas off of. The only negative outcome that I see occurring with this, is if no one decides to step up and be the "go-to" person. However, I have already heard talk of the Cultural Day being put onto the calendar for next school year.

This Cultural Day is my baby and I would love nothing more than to be the person that continues planning it. But, it is more rewarding to watch it thrive without my assistance. That shows that I not only did my job but I did it well. I have already watched it grow from a three hour event in the afternoon to a whole week where the children were introduced to the cultures in their classrooms then celebrated those cultures for an entire day. As time goes on, I hope to see the Cultural Day grow more and become a part of the Bay View Academy family much like I have.

	<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Cost to School</b>
<b>Educate:</b> Incorporate multiculturalism into the school	Medium	High	High
<b>Engage:</b> Involve students and staff in presentations	Medium	High	High
<b>Unite:</b> Use community, parents, teachers, and staff to come together to celebrate different cultures	High	High	Low

**Action Reflection**

My goal for this project was to inspire the Bay View Academy parents and staff to continue cultural celebrations. I knew that with the time allotted for my action project, it was going to be difficult to set up a committee and get them directly involved in the planning. At this point, I knew that what I could do was create such a celebration myself to provide them with a solid example of what the Cultural Day should consist of.

I felt that I was running around like a chicken with its head cut off on the day of the event, but the teachers felt otherwise; they all told me that the Cultural Day was one of the best

things that has happened at Bay View Academy. Although there was plenty of positive feedback, there is always going to be room for improvement. I ran into some issues with one of the performers. She had on an outfit that was a bit revealing for an elementary school event. Some of the students had voiced their concerns about this specific woman and so I felt that because I was the one who brought her to the school, that I should be the one to deal with any complaints. The fifth graders had the most concerns about this woman so I stood in front of their class and explained something to them; I told them that what is inappropriate in one culture is completely acceptable in another. There are certain things in this world that are taboo to us as Americans, but the use of television and Facebook are taboo to others. The children then started to understand a little bit better. They even started coming up with references of their own. This showed me that I had some sort of influence on changing the perspectives of these young minds.

Although I have a place in the Bay View community, I will be moving after I graduate. I will no longer be the one in charge of the Cultural Day; it is time that I push my baby out of the nest. After talking with the principal and finding out her suggestions and ideas for future Cultural Days, I have created a how-to-guide for the school. This somewhat of a survival guide, along with the examples that I have set into motion over the past two springs, will serve as a starting point for the next person who takes on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Cultural Day at Bay View Academy.

### **Critical Reflection**

When I came into this project, I knew what I wanted to do for the school, but I was unclear of what I was to actually accomplish. I went in wanting to expose the children to other cultures to help with the fight against negative stereotypes, but I achieved much more than that. The project that I created inspired the school to continue the Cultural Day that I had started; my baby

is going to thrive. With the actual Cultural Day, I saw that not only did I help educate the children and inspire the staff, but I also learned valuable lessons myself.

As a future teacher, I will be confronted with many different obstacles that will get difficult at times and this project has given me a taste test of what is to come. I had to deal with uncomfortable questions from students. I had to deal with a room full of parents who were not very welcoming to begin with. I had to deal with teacher concerns and handle them on the spot. I had to deal with last minute issues and be able to come up with an alternative that would still benefit the event. Lesson plans that I set out for my classroom will not always go the way that I envision them. The students may have difficult questions and, from what I've heard, parents will be my biggest obstacle in the teaching world. For these cases, I will have to be able to think on my toes, think logically, and view the situation from all viewpoints in order to come up with the best solution on the spot.

There are other difficult situations that helped me grow as a person and as an educator. Some of the staff was not helpful or willing to aid me in my project plans. They did not respond to emails or fill out surveys. Thankfully it was only a couple of people so my goals were still attainable; however, their lack of responses and openness to my being there taught me that not every person I come in contact with will be on the same page as I am, some will not even be willing to turn the pages to try and catch up. It may be because I am young, it may be because they do not agree with what I am trying to do, or it may be that they just did not have extra time to give; whatever the case, it helped me learn that children are not the only ones who I need to inspire.

My education here at California State University Monterey Bay has been very valuable to me during this project as well as preparing me for my professional career. When I was twelve

years old, I knew I wanted to be a teacher, but as I got into my senior year of high school, I realized that I needed to do more than just teach—I needed to change the education system. I knew that it was going to be something difficult to do and I knew that I wanted to change it, but I did not know where or how to start. Lucky for me, the Liberal Studies program here has a focus on not only the multicultural classroom settings and multicultural education, but also how to approach social change. The major learning outcomes set out for a Liberal Studies Major has showed me that I cannot do this on my own. I must pay attention to the diversity and society of the area to show that there is an issue. I need to research and hear out the voices of the stakeholders to see if the issue can be resolved. This project was a starting point for what I wish to achieve as an educator. It was a way for me to take everything that I have learned at my stay here and put it to use in one action. There were kinks that needed to be worked out and this project definitely helped me figure things out. It was a learning experience on multiple levels.

As I start my journey into the teaching world as an educator for social justice, I will deal with negativity from some and support from others. This Cultural Day was me taking one step out of the nest preparing for my flight in the real world; my flight into dangerous territory in society. Education is the start to breaking negative perceptions and the foundation to social justice.

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## **Appendix**

Podium Presentation can be viewed through the following link:

<http://prezi.com/zsb96rwbbqpc/inspire-create-unite-celebrating-diversity/>