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Best Practices in Increasing Cross-Cultural Competency

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OVERVIEW

At the Olympia Conference in 1982, the profession of school psychology recognized that there would be a significant increase in minority students in public schools in the future that would most likely have an effect on practice and services provided. Education, also recognizing this, began to push for multicultural education as efforts were made to prepare educators to work with a population of children that many teachers previously had little to no experience teaching. This movement was in large part due to an acknowledgement that many culturally different children and their families had values, beliefs, and norms that differed from the majority culture and in some instances had a negative impact on academic achievement.

This increasing diversity in the United States has outpaced what had been previously projected. According to the 2010 census, minorities account for 36.6% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is projected that non-Hispanic Whites will become a minority by 2042. Previously, it was projected that this would not occur until 2050. In 1980, non-Hispanic Whites were 74.6% of the children in the age range of 5 and 17. In contrast, they accounted for only 54.7% of that population in 2010, a 20% decrease. Whites were almost half of the school age population in the 21st century. In 1980, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans accounted for 14.5%, 8.5%, 1.7%, 0.8%, respectively. In 2010, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans were 14.2%, 22.4%, 4.4%, and 0.9% of the school age population (5–17 years of age). Children with two or more races were 3.3% of that population as well. For the first time, in 2011, racial and ethnic minorities made up

more than half of all children born in the United States, 50.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Unfortunately, this diversity is not reflected in the school psychology profession, which continues to be predominately Caucasian. The latest demographics of the profession indicate that approximately 10% of the profession is racially/ethnically diverse. Given that there has been very little increase in diversity in the profession since the 1980s (Castillo, Curtis, Chappel, & Cunningham, 2011), it is expected that there will continue to be underrepresented groups in the field of school psychology. Thus, it is imperative that future practitioners as well as current practitioners have the skills to work effectively with diverse populations.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and American Psychological Association (APA) have both addressed this increasing diversity through guidelines, position papers, standards, and competencies. These tools provide guidance to the profession in terms of best practice when working with populations that are culturally, ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically diverse. APA (2003) has articulated six guidelines that are founded on six principles. These guidelines reflect the knowledge and skills needed for psychologists to effectively practice in an increasingly diverse U.S. society.

NASP has also provided a number of resources related to multicultural issues. As described by Harrison (2010), “virtually every NASP activity reflects our emphasis on diversity and multicultural competence” (para. 2). In 2009–2010, NASP had a priority initiative to increase cultural competence and cultural and linguistic diversity of school psychology. In 2009, NASP published *The Psychology of Multiculturalism in the Schools: A Primer for Practice, Training, and Research* (Jones,

2009). It was only the second diversity book published by NASP, with the first one published in 1990. NASP's website has a link (<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/culturalcompetence/cultcomppractice.aspx>) devoted to multicultural resources and publications, with many of the resources and publications describing culturally competent practices (e.g., culturally competent assessment and consultation). Position statements have been developed that demonstrate the commitment of the organization to multicultural competence across a variety of areas. The NASP (2010b) Standards emphasize the development of multicultural competence as part of the practice of school psychology. NASP has also successfully provided scholarships for minority students for the past decade. Thus, the organizations that represent school psychology have made valiant efforts to promote and validate the importance of the profession to develop cultural competencies that inform practice.

More recently, the term *social justice* has become part of the vernacular in school psychology. In 2008, *School Psychology Review* had a special issue entitled "Promoting Social Justice." In the introduction to the issue, Power (2008) suggests that school psychology's advocacy on behalf of disabled children and more recently to marginalized youth demonstrates the profession's commitment to a social justice agenda. Often, multiculturalism and social justice are used as interchangeable terms. While they do indeed overlap, social justice is generally more narrowly defined than multiculturalism (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009). Increasingly, psychology and counseling disciplines view multiculturalism and social justice as fundamental elements of the curriculum and training of future professionals. Thus, issues of justice and fairness are the backdrop and foundation to much of the work in multiculturalism, equity, and diversity (Hage 2005). While much of school psychologists' work in advocacy has been at the individual level, there is an increasing recognition that school psychologists need to intervene at a systems level.

Research in school psychology addressing issues of diversity has not increased much since the 1990s. Rogers Wiese (1992) was the first to examine diversity literature in major school psychology journals, in which she found that only 9% of the total articles in the three major journals (*Psychology in the Schools*, *Journal of School Psychology*, and *School Psychology Review*) reflected multicultural content. A second study by Miranda and Gutter (2002) found that multicultural content in four major school psychology journals had increased slightly from 9 to 10.8%. Brown, Shriberg, and Wang (2007) reviewed

five major school psychology journals and found that 16.9% of the total articles were diversity related. Grunewald et al. (in press) found that 15.5% of the total articles in seven major school psychology journals were diversity related. It should be noted that in every study conducted after the Rogers Wiese study, additional categories of diversity were added as well as more journals that were considered focused on school psychology. Thus, there has been a modest increase of about 7% since the 1990s of diversity-related articles.

As the field continues to examine best practice in working with culturally and linguistically diverse children, research with these populations is critical. Culture should be studied as a process that is ever changing rather than as an index or variable. Cultural considerations should be a part of school psychology research to determine the validity of theories, measures, and interventions beyond just being studied with one population. Research that looks at school psychology practices through multiple lenses will improve school psychologists' practice with diverse populations. This is an area that the field of school psychology needs to continue to improve upon.

Diversity training continues to be an area of focus as it is perceived to be an essential element in preparing future professionals to work with populations that are culturally and linguistically diverse. It would seem that infusing such training in graduate programs would be ideal as it provides students with the tools before they enter the field. There are a number of training models on how best to incorporate diversity into the curriculum. Unfortunately, what most training programs do is require one single diversity course. Ideally, there would also be infusion of diversity content throughout the program and where possible field-based experiences in culturally diverse settings. NASP (2010b) as well as APA (2003) attempt to provide guidance on incorporating diversity into graduate programs and set standards for the importance of diversity.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide school psychologists with knowledge, guidance, and practical suggestions on how to effectively work with populations that are culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse. An overview of some of the most salient issues school psychologists will encounter with diverse populations will be highlighted as they may potentially have an impact on practice. Strategies and suggestions will be provided that will enhance school psychologists' cultural competencies in working effectively with diverse populations. The chapter addresses the NASP domain of Diversity in Development and Learning in the *Model for*