

Chapter 1

Going Beyond Academics: Connecting With the Whole Child

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ABSTRACT

Teaching culturally diverse students and immigrant communities requires the purposeful implementation of instructional strategies that are able to meet diverse learning needs. The whole child approach to teaching and learning allows educators to look at students as individuals and view their diverse characteristics as assets to learning as opposed to limitations. The presence of the achievement gap between culturally diverse students and those from immigrant communities presents unique needs that interfere with the possibility of post-school success opportunities. Recognizing the whole child in learning has been proven as an effective strategy for successfully engaging students in the classroom and supporting them in their postsecondary development. The purpose of this chapter is to allow educators of culturally and linguistically diverse students to learn about how they can embrace the diversity of their students and their families by building meaningful relationships that take into consideration the whole child.

INTRODUCTION

On Sarai's first day of third grade in her American school, she said goodbye to her mom at the front entrance of the building. There was a rule throughout the school that parents could not walk their children to class in the morning unless they had a meeting with the teacher. The pounding of her heart was deafening as it boomed from her chest to her ears. The worry in her mom's eyes mirrored her own. Sarai

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blinked back tears as she hugged her mother goodbye before walking into the world of uncertainty and unfamiliarity that would now become her norm. She focused on remembering the way to her classroom that one of the Spanish-speaking secretaries had shown her the day before. During the few times that Sarai lifted her head to see those around her, she noticed that everyone looked so comfortable. Everyone looked like they belonged, except her. For reasons that she didn't quite understand, Sarai and her mother had left Honduras a few weeks back. As they were settling into their new life in the United States where they lived with some distant family members she didn't know very well, Sarai heard over and over again about how much she would love her new school. Yet as she made her way to the brand new classroom in the brand new school to meet her brand new teacher and classmates, Sarai only felt a sense of shame at all of the ways in which her differences stuck out. On that very first day of school, Sarai understood that not only had she entered a world that she knew nothing about, but it also knew nothing about her.

Students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds are entering classrooms and being taught by teachers who are culturally and linguistically unlike them. The rise in immigration throughout the country is increasing the likelihood that culturally and linguistically diverse students are entering mainstream classrooms. The teaching and learning of these students are unique to their specific needs based on their educational experiences. Culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and those from immigrant communities are equally as deserving of a quality education that promotes academic achievement beyond the classroom as their native English-speaking peers. Although schools throughout the United States are experiencing an increase in the enrollment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers are receiving little to no preparation for addressing their needs at the pre-service stage (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Lucas et al. (2008) point out the fact that English language learners (ELLs) are held to the same level of academic standards as their native English-speaking peers despite their limited language proficiency. Therefore, not providing educators with the necessary tools and strategies for meeting the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse learners, as well as those from immigrant communities, ends up doing a disservice to a rapidly growing student population throughout the country.

Being responsive to the needs of diverse students requires an awareness and understanding for who they are as all-around learners. Teaching to the whole child allows teachers to move beyond the realms of academic learning and target the socio-emotional well-being of the child as well. Slade and Griffith (2013) present the notion that an education which targets the whole child is purposeful in allowing all students to meet their potential as future contributing members of society. In a framework presented by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the whole child approach to teaching and learning promotes meeting the

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