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MULTICULTURAL UNIT FOR FOURTH GRADE

by  
Shannon M. Whalen

A Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of  
Rowan University  
April 10, 2000

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Gini Doolittle

Date Approved April 15, 2000

## Abstract

Shannon M. Whalen

Multicultural Unit for Fourth Grade  
2000  
Dr. Gini Doolittle  
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a multicultural, interdisciplinary unit on fourth grade students using an action research design. The unit included eight cultures that aligned with the Social Studies curriculum. Students learned to appreciate different cultures and experience the ideas and practices of those cultures.

This study took place at Mary Ethel Costello School with students in grade four. The population sample was limited due to the fact that the study was only conducted with fourth grade students. All students and each teacher received survey questionnaires. Categories were designed to organize the data. Observations of students were conducted. Teacher presentations and interactions with students were explored.

The data shows that teachers believe students were interested in the lessons and that students did gain an understanding of multiculturalism. The data also suggests that students enjoyed learning about the cultures and wanted to learn more.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of the Study

Awareness and appreciation of the various cultures in the world is essential to students becoming contributing members of society. It is necessary for students to learn why people think and act in different ways. A multicultural program can help students gain understandings about different beliefs and respect diversity. Many multicultural programs are started because of the diverse population of students in a district. It is just the opposite in Gloucester City. The town is a largely Caucasian community, with little representation from other races.

In a town that is unable to offer students the opportunity to see or experience people of different cultures, it becomes the responsibility of the school to provide it. Through a multicultural, interdisciplinary unit for students in grade four at the Mary Ethel Costello School (MEC), the intern intends to give students a chance to explore the world they will encounter. The unit will have an emphasis in social studies, with activities integrated into other subjects. Eight cultures will be explored throughout the year and the project will end with a World's Fair. The World's Fair is designed to allow students to demonstrate and share what they have learned. Teachers, administrators, students, and parents will be participating in this study. Surveys will be used to assess the



effectiveness of this unit. To work with others and learn tolerance and respect for different viewpoints is critical for lifelong success.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of a multicultural, interdisciplinary unit on fourth grade students using an action research design. The unit will include eight cultures that follow current curriculum standards in social studies.

The purpose of this study is for the intern to apply principles of effective curriculum development and promote a multicultural, non-sexist, adaptive, and developmentally appropriate curriculum. Communicating effectively and consistently reinforcing the teaching of skills and concepts identified in the curriculum will be important. State curriculum mandates and guidelines will be incorporated into curriculum development.

The purpose of this unit is for students to learn appreciation of different cultures and experience the many ideas and practices of those cultures. The students will discover more about the beliefs and values that people hold and the reasoning behind them. Through surveys of teachers, parents, students, and administrators, the organization will assess the effectiveness of this program and a feasibility report will be prepared for them to review.

The purpose of this study is for all members of the MEC community to understand and appreciate the differences of people in the world and through this appreciation better understand their own cultural beliefs and practices. This project will provide the students with experiences they may not otherwise have. It is intended to expose students to parts of the world they may never see and to allow them to get a sense

of how those people live. All students will indicate an understanding and appreciation of the eight cultures presented as a result of this multicultural, interdisciplinary unit.

### Definitions

The following terms will be used throughout this project. Combining information created the following definitions. These definitions best describe how the words will be used within the context of this study.

**Culture** – the way of life of a particular group of people, especially the general customs and beliefs, that are transmitted from one generation to the next.

**Cultural Pluralism** – the amount of cultural differences between ethnic groups living in the same society. It is the philosophical basis for multicultural education.

**Diversity** – a range of ethnic and cultural inclusion.

**Ethnic Groups** – a group that is defined by its religion, race, national origin, language, or a combination of these.

**Ethnicity** – the cultural practices, language and traditions used to distinguish groups of people.

**Interdisciplinary** – involving two or more different subjects.

**Multiculturalism** – the appreciation, tolerance, understanding, and celebration of differences in cultural practices.

**Multicultural Education** – a lifelong process of learning and development that provides students with information about different ethnic groups and helps students develop more positive attitudes toward these groups.

### Limitations of the Study

MEC School contains students in grades four, five, and six, however, this study will be conducted with only fourth grade students. The unit will be concentrated in social studies and only address this school's curriculum. The intern will develop the lessons and activities and it will be the responsibility of the classroom teachers to make the time to carry them out. Only eight cultures will be introduced to the students due to time considerations and the committee will be deciding which ones to present. Another limitation is that the study is assessing human understanding and appreciation of other cultures, which may be difficult to measure.

### Setting of the Study

This study will take place at Mary Ethel Costello School in Gloucester City, New Jersey. The study will be conducted with fourth grade students only.

### History of Gloucester City

Gloucester City began Formal education began in the late 1700's with the opening of a one-room log school. Gloucester City was incorporated in 1868 and there were three schools. Attendance became mandatory in 1874, but since there was still no high school, children left school to go to work. Gloucester City became one of the first cities in New Jersey to provide an evening school for adults. About 100 years after the beginning of education in town, Gloucester City had five schools, eleven teachers, and one principal. In 1907, twenty-eight students were enrolled in the first four-year high school. By the late 1950's there were six elementary schools and a junior-senior high school. The present High School was built in 1961. In 1995, Cold Springs Elementary School was opened for students in grades Pre-K through three. The four of the five other elementary

schools were closed, signifying the end of an era. Mary Ethel Costello School, which was built in 1907, remained open for students in grades four through six. In September of 1999, one of the elementary schools was re-opened for two pre-school classes. (MEC Parent Handbook, 1999).

### Statistics

The State Department of Education considers Gloucester City to be a poor urban district. This qualifies us as an Abbott District, which receives funding to provide programs for the students. According to the 1990 US Census, there were about 3500 families living in Gloucester City, almost half of them without income. 700 of the families were single parent households. I believe that number has significantly increased, especially since our rate of teen pregnancy has risen. Today, many of our students receive free breakfast and free lunch. The town is generally supportive of its schools and voted to approve the budget two of the last three times.

Gloucester City is not a very culturally diverse town. Information compiled from the 1990 US census shows that of the approximately 14,500 persons living in Gloucester City at the time, 14,334 were white. About 3,000 were school age children. At that time, thirty-eight people reported being black, with eight of them enrolled in school. Twenty-four people reported being American Indian, none enrolled in school. Fifty-eight people reported being Asian, with nineteen enrolled in school. Eighty-eight people reported being Hispanic, with none enrolled in school. Not much has changed since 1990. There are relatively few representatives from other races in the Gloucester City Public Schools. With so little contact with people from different ethnic backgrounds,

Gloucester City's students need a program to help them understand how and why others think and act the way they do.

Gloucester City School District consists of four schools. One High School, Mary Ethel Costello Elementary School for students in grades four through six, Cold Springs Elementary School for students in Pre-K through three, and Highland Park School for pre-school students. There are eighty-one teachers at the High School, forty teachers at MEC, fifty-three teachers at Cold Springs, and two teachers at Highland Park. The Administrative Organization of the district can be seen in Appendix A. There are approximately 600 students at MEC, with 200 of them in fourth grade. The Multicultural Unit is designed to be incorporated into the fourth grade curriculum. This will be done mainly in social studies, with some activities integrated into other subject areas. The six fourth grade teachers will present the lessons and activities to their classes. Assessments will be conducted by the classroom teacher and the intern .

### Significance

Spending time showing students about the different types of people and cultures in the world is important for their development. In a city that is mainly one culture, students do not have many chances to learn about other belief systems. Unfortunately, many students in Gloucester City rarely travel very far from home. Through this project, everyone in the MEC community will gain a better understanding of the eight cultures presented. Students will be encouraged not only to learn facts about these cultures, but also to appreciate how people can live and work together, despite these differences.

If this project meets its intended goal, it can be modified or adapted to fit the needs of all students at MEC, as well as the district's two other schools. Those schools

teach students in grades Pre-K to 3 and 7 to 12. The major impact of this project will be on the students, with the effects spreading to parents and the community. Learning that people with different ideas and value systems can compliment each other and that they can find ways to exist together in the world, is an important lesson for everyone.

#### Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study will be organized in the following fashion: Chapter 2 will be a Review of the Literature, Chapter 3 will be the Design of the Study, Chapter 4 will be a Presentation of the Research Findings, and Chapter 5 will be Conclusions, Implications and Further Study.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

#### History of Multicultural Education

Little information was available on Multicultural before the 1950's. People were still immigrating to America and trying to assimilate into American culture. Many immigrants refused to speak their native language and would only use English. They were trying to fit in and were not as likely to want to be pointing out differences. In 1954, the Supreme Court case *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* became very famous for its decision on desegregation. Banks (1995) points out that after that decision, "A substantial increase in research on race occurred" (p. 146). However, the author also stated that,

Multicultural education as an educational philosophy and ideology was born out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.... It was originally conceptualized as an effort to counter racism in schools. It soon expanded to become the umbrella term for a school reform movement that addresses issues of race, ethnicity, ... and language...(p.145).

Subsequently, research was conducted on multicultural education with the hope of "...correct (ing) the long-standing de facto policy of assimilating minority groups into the 'melting pot' of dominant American culture"(Burnett, 1994). Multicultural education research continues because Americans are still, "...grappling with the difficult issue of

race.... many are looking to education as a vehicle for improving relations among diverse groups” (Banks, 1995, p. 140). Educators must continue to find strategies to address these issues in the classroom and provide the tools their students need to relate to one another.

I believe that the classroom should reflect what is happening in society. In Gloucester City, it is especially difficult to attain that goal, given the unique makeup of the student population. It is important that these students be given a chance to “...experience the diversity outside their immediate environment. Otherwise, they can grow to adulthood unaware of, and insensitive to, the experiences of other cultural groups”(Gomez, 1991). One goal of this unit is that it be a starting point for introducing students to diversity in the world. The process is far from easy, however. According to Boutte (1999), “Multiculturalism does not develop in a vacuum; rather, it involves numerous social systems such as the family, the community, and society at large” (p. 39). It also requires a strong commitment on the part of the teachers to be responsible for what they bring to the classroom. Eldridge (1998) concluded that children have three needs: a need to feel valued and appreciated, a need for accurate information about themselves and others, and a need to determine what is or is not an authentic cultural representation (p. 181). This multicultural unit will provide background information about each culture and share viewpoints and beliefs that these cultures practice today.

#### Perspectives on Multicultural Education

There are many approaches a school district can follow when creating a multicultural program. A needs assessment should be conducted to see which approach would best fit the school district. Schools may choose to use one approach or a



combination of approaches. The trend toward multicultural education is not always seen as positive, however. Schlessenger (1992) does not agree with “proposals to divide the United States into distinct and immutable ethnic and racial communities, each taught to cherish its own apartness from the rest” (p. 18). While he agrees that it is necessary for students to learn to respect diversity, he wants to make sure “...this broadened multicultural perspective leads to unity and an enriched sense of what being an American is...” (p. 18). Some educators believe that multicultural education may divide students along racial and cultural lines, rather than unite them. They fear, as Schlessinger does, that it may promote the benefits of other cultures at the expense of pride in America. (Schwartz, 1994, ERIC No. 98).

Agreeing with Schlessinger, Smith (1999) is not convinced that schools should be focusing on race. While she agrees that “the school’s job is to educate everyone” she tells us that “a real understanding of differences means accepting that not everyone will know or even want to know everyone else”(p. 49). Another point Smith (1999) raises is that:

...life is full of inequalities that have nothing to do with the color of your skin. What really separates individuals is how much ambition, responsibility, and talent they have, or how little. Ambition crosses racial categories. So do talent and the drive to be successful in life. ...race is not the only way students show their differences? (P.49). These are all significant points to consider; yet I feel it is important for children to be aware of the different cultures and to be able to recognize the similarities and differences between them. If implemented carefully, a multicultural program can do this without fostering separation of the cultural groups.

Much of the research addresses the needs of the diverse classroom, where programs are geared to the backgrounds of the students. Schwartz (1994) explains three approaches to multicultural education dealing with the diversity of students in the classroom. The first program focuses on providing basic information about different cultural groups. Students would learn about cultural heroes and holidays in this type of program. Cultures presented would be representative of the student population. The second program focuses on trying to raise the school achievement of culturally different students. They teach about students' backgrounds to increase their interest in learning. A third program focuses on trying to improve the cultural and political climate of the school. The goal is to increase racial and cultural tolerance. This program emphasizes human relations. (Schwartz, 1994, ERIC No. 98). These programs would work well where there is a significant difference in the school population. MEC can take these approaches and combine them to provide an overall picture of multiculturalism. Since we are not dealing with many different cultures within the school, the programs can be more general at the elementary level.

In defining multicultural education as an "educational process that takes place in schools...and provides knowledge about the history, culture, and contributions of the diverse groups that have shaped history, politics, and culture of the United States", Banks (1995, p.145) supports the direction and purpose of MEC's multicultural unit. The approaches that he defines, however, are designed for different types of populations in the school. The *Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different* approach, the *Single-Group Studies* approach, and the *Human Relations* approach are three of five approaches to multicultural education, defined by Grant and Sleeter (1985), that Banks uses as

criteria in developing a multicultural education program (Banks, 1995). In contrast, Burnett (1999) uses three programs to define multicultural education, *Student-Oriented Programs*, *Content-Oriented Programs*, and *Socially-Oriented Programs*. The titles may be different, but the meanings are quite similar.

The Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different approach "...suggests relating the subject matter taught to K-12 students to their life experiences and concentrating their learning on basic skills" (Banks, 1995, p. 147). Supporting this idea, Eldridge (1998) tells us that, "These practices stem from the belief that the business of the classroom is to prepare the culturally different student for participation in the mainstream society" (p. 3). The similar approach, called Student-Oriented Programs by Burnett (1999) emphasizes how this design "...specifically address the academic needs of carefully defined groups of students, often minority students"(ERIC No. ED372346). These two approaches do not usually involve changes in the curriculum, but are used to "... help culturally...different students make the transition into the educational mainstream" (Burnett, 1999). A school that has many different ethnic groups represented in the student population may do well with this type of approach.

If a school district wishes to "foster positive effective relationships among members of racial and cultural groups...through ...lessons and activities that eliminate race, class, and gender stereotyping, and that promote individual differences and similarities", Banks (1995, p. 147) argues that they should try the Human Relations approach. This design, called Socially-Oriented Programs by Burnett (1999), is used to teach tolerance and reduce bias. Schools could use this approach as a way to start a

multicultural education program. Curriculum changes are necessary, but minor, and the information given about the different cultural groups is a broad overview.

At MEC, few of the fourth grade students have had much experience with various ethnic groups. I believe it would be beneficial for these students to be given general knowledge of the cultures at this time. As these students get older and their understanding of basic differences grows, more detail can be added to the curriculum. According to Banks (1995) this approach usually emphasizes, "...cultural holidays, heroes and heroines, and ...the works of some authors" from each cultural group (p. 147). Lessons involve pointing out similarities and differences between the cultures, students making crafts and foods representative of the cultures, and cooperative learning activities where students can share what they have discovered about the cultures (Eldridge, 1998, p. 3). This is the type of information that is familiar to fourth graders.

By combining the Human Relations approach with the Single-Group Studies approach, Gloucester City's children will be provided with "...a solid base of knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to meet global standards and challenges in the new millenium"(Boutte, 1999, p. 112). The Single-Group Studies approach is designed to "...promote social structural equality for ... an identified group. ...These programs assume that knowledge about particular oppressed groups should be taught separately from conventional classroom knowledge..."(Banks, 1995, p. 147). This approach is used if the school wishes to do an in-depth study of a group or culture. (Eldridge, 1998, p. 3). This is similar to Burnett's Content-Oriented programs and with this approach the curriculum is more actively transformed (1999). Much more detail about each cultural group is supplied with this approach and students become more involved in the

viewpoints and perspectives of the groups. This would be a good addition to the curriculum as it is implemented in higher grades.

Once a multicultural program has been established and students have developed an awareness of the diversity they will encounter, a content-oriented program may be beneficial for them. While it is important to present more than traditional, stereotypical views about the ethnic groups, trying to overload the students with details on every cultural group would not be wise either. The problem also arises when determining which cultural groups will be presented. "Many times cultures are linked to cultural conglomerates with an umbrella label, such as Asian American. Differences may be significant within each cultural conglomerate"(Eldridge, 1998, p. 182). By providing just a broad overview to the students, there is more time to discuss many different cultures, rather than giving details on a few.

### The Research

Saldana and Waxman (1995) conducted a study on incorporating multicultural education. The study was done in a large urban school district. Twelve elementary schools were randomly selected. There were students from at least two ethnic groups in every class. Six teachers from each school were randomly chosen for observation during a reading, math, or social studies class. Each teacher was observed twice during the year. The researchers were looking to see if teachers were supportive of the students in their classroom. They also wanted to see if teachers respected individual students and recognized individual differences. The results showed that the teachers were patient with students and they did not show any tendencies toward giving special treatment to any student based on their gender or ethnicity (pp. 41-43).

The problem the researchers found was that even though the materials used are culturally appropriate, teachers "...generally do not use examples of other cultures when explaining or demonstrating concepts or ideas, and they do not have many classroom books about American ethnic groups available in their classrooms"(Saldana & Waxman, 1997, p. 44). Gallavan (1998) identified 50 reasons why teachers are not using effective multicultural education practices. He organized these into five major categories:

1. Teachers do not know or understand what multicultural education is
2. Teachers do not know how to use effective multicultural education practices
3. Teachers are not motivated to learn effective multicultural education practices
4. Teachers are resistant to learn effective multicultural education practices
5. Teachers do not realize their full responsibilities as educators for using effective multicultural education practices (p. 21).

So, we discover that it is not only necessary to teach students about multicultural education, but the teachers as well. If a multicultural curriculum is going to be developed and incorporated into the curriculum, the teachers must learn what materials are appropriate and how to present the information. "Comprehensive inservice training, workshops, resource materials, and extensive instructional supervision and coaching should be readily available" (Saldana & Waxman, 1997, p. 44). To start, the school district should conduct a needs assessment to determine what type of multicultural approach or program would best suit their students. At MEC, we have decided on the Human-Relations approach, so now our job is to determine the curriculum.

There are many definitions of what multicultural education is. Saldana and Waxman (1997) say that schools should not "...just add a unit about cultural groups into

the curriculum” (p. 44). Likewise, Boutte (1999) states that “Multiculturalism is not a collection of activities or construct that exists outside the individual. Educators need to be willing to examine and change their attitudes” (p. 28). According to the Guidelines for Education that is Multicultural (GEM, 1993), multicultural education

...does not necessarily involve creating new curricula. It is an organizational approach which transforms the existing curricula through the integration of materials, ideas, strategies, and techniques that reflect the history, customs, interactions, and aspirations of various ethnic groups (p. ).

In a school that has a very diversified student population, it would make sense to develop a curriculum that addresses their cultural backgrounds and provides a lot of detail. At MEC, however, there is not a diversified student population. There are approximately 140 students in the fourth grade this year; within that group are two Chinese students, one African-American student, and one Hindu student. The rest are considered to be white. Those statistics alone show how different MEC’s needs are from most other districts implementing a multicultural education program.

#### Implications for Mary Ethel Costello School

The GEM Guidelines (1993) state that, “All public schools in New Jersey are required to prepare students to relate in mutually beneficial ways with people of diverse races, cultures, national origins, and both sexes so as to function effectively in a pluralistic society” (p. 1). It is necessary for our district to comply with this regulation. At the present time, there is no multicultural education program for students. After the implementation of the multicultural unit in the fourth grade, it will be expanded to fifth and sixth grade. Eventually, we would like to have a program in place in every grade.

Fourth grade was chosen because it is a time in a student's life that can involve significant changes. These children are expected to become more independent. Boutte (1999) tells us that "a decline in parent involvement is also seen. Children change classes and are exposed to more personalities and perspectives. Schools which emphasize multiculturalism can do a better job of effectively developing children who are competent and prepared for the future" (p.109). MEC looked at two GEM (1993) goals in addressing curriculum needs. The first one was, "To transform curricular content areas to include ideas, perspectives, and experiences of women and men of diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic groups"(p. 6). The second one was, "To increase students' knowledge of diverse cultural attitudes, traditions, and values"(p. 6). Multicultural literature and history will be incorporated approach and by into the current social studies curriculum. With that and the application of the Human-Relations approach (Banks, 1995, p.7), MEC will help students discover not only the "...uniqueness of various cultures, but basic values and experiences that all cultures have in common" (Eldridge, 1998, p.183).

It has been found by Boutte (1999), that, "Many teachers, administrators, and staff at predominately white school districts do not think that multicultural education is needed. They mistakenly believe that only children of color benefit from multicultural education"(p. 11). This is definitely a problem in Gloucester City. Things have been the same for so long that people may be afraid of change. With more people from other cultures entering Gloucester City, the students need to learn how to accept these changes and get along. The percentages are still low and students in primary grades do not seem to notice the differences. This changes as students become older and are able to



recognize these differences. Even with the addition of representation from various culture groups, Gloucester City remains a mainly white community. That can create a problem when explaining the need for multicultural education to the parents and teachers.

Boutte (1999) explains:

One misconception about multicultural education is that it focuses only on students of color. ...All students, including white mainstream students, benefit academically and socially as they develop the appropriate skills and attitudes for living in a pluralistic society. ...Not teaching white children about multiculturalism leads one to the erroneous assumption that whites are not part of the multicultural equation (p. 112).

Another problem that develops is that

When white children are exposed to a curriculum that constantly validates their culture and invalidates other cultures, superiority over other races is encouraged.

When confronted with issues of diversity may be less empathetic, respectful, and sensitive to the needs of other cultural groups (Boutte, 1999, 11).

I hope to begin to change some of that by introducing the multicultural unit to the fourth grade students. Change is slow and no one expects to see remarkable changes in attitudes occur overnight. Change can happen, however, and over time, if the program is continued and expanded to other grades, the students will grow up with the knowledge of other cultures. "The goal of multicultural education ... is to help children become accustomed to the idea that there are many lifestyles, languages, cultures, and points of view"(Gomez, 1991). Education is not just about facts and dates, it is about teaching children to be productive members of society. In order to do that, "Children must learn to

respect and live with one another in multiracial, multicultural communities...and the sooner they do so, the better (GEM, 1993, p. 1)

## Chapter 3

### Design of the Study

#### Overview

Students should be conscious of cultural diversity and they should be given the opportunity to learn that people can think and act in different ways and still get along. They should be provided with experiences that enable them to appreciate and respect others' cultural beliefs. Gloucester City's community is not offering students the chance to meet and interact with people from other cultures; therefore the schools should accept the challenge of providing multicultural experiences for these students. By implementing a multicultural, interdisciplinary unit, fourth grade students will be given a chance to explore the world around them. The lessons will involve not only students and teachers, but also parents and community members. Surveys will be given to students and teachers to assess the effectiveness of this unit. Through the lesson activities, students will gain skills, which will enable them to work with others, to learn tolerance, and to respect different viewpoints.

#### Context of the Study

Gloucester City is a unique community in respect to its cultural makeup. The school population consists of mainly Caucasian students, with little representation from other cultural groups. With my family being from Gloucester City, I know the area and the people well. It was always a close-knit community and many did not have experiences that went beyond the town. When I started teaching there, it became very

apparent to me that the students lacked knowledge about people around the world. The students grow up only experiencing one way of thinking and it can be difficult for them to learn to tolerate and respect any other way of thinking. I have become committed to making changes that will allow students to get to know people from different cultures. Students also need to learn how they are similar to these people and how they can live and work together. Incorporating a multicultural curriculum into the fourth grade is a first step in this process.

This study will take place in the MEC School with students in grade four. The committee will meet and develop lessons each month. The lessons will be evaluated and reflected upon after they are presented and the next lessons will be adapted accordingly. It is necessary for the committee to be aware of what cultures are already part of the current curriculum. National and State Standards in Multicultural Education will be reviewed to ensuring the unit is in accordance with them. Identifying the cultures of the student population is another critical step in designing unit lessons that are relevant to the students. Lessons can be designed around major events and persons within the culture and expanded.

Authentic assessments will be developed for each lesson in the unit. Criteria will be created to determine how the effects of the unit will be measured by these assessments. End of the year reports given by students will demonstrate their awareness and understanding of the cultures they have studied. The terms understanding and awareness will be defined to ensure the validity of the assessments. It is necessary to survey a large population of the students to accurately assess the effects of the unit.

### Data Gathering Procedures

The population sample is limited due to the fact that the study is only being conducted with fourth grade students. The generalizability of the study is low because the unit will only address this school's curriculum and will present only eight cultures to the students. Another limitation to the study is that it is assessing human understanding and appreciation of other cultures, which can be difficult to measure. Students will be selected to receive survey questionnaires using a stratified random sampling technique. All fourth grade teachers will receive a survey. The population will be surveyed in January.

Observations of students will be conducted throughout the year to see their behavior during and after lessons. Teacher presentations and interactions with students will be explored. Questions and comments from the students will be noted. During meetings with the fourth grade teachers, I will discuss the progress of the unit and ask for questions or comments. This will enable me to see how they perceive the unit's effects. The World's Fair will give the students the opportunity to present a detailed report on one culture. This will be a chance to see an application of the concepts presented in the unit.

### Data Analysis Procedures

All surveys will be analyzed as soon as they are returned. The student population will fill out the surveys in class and return them to their teacher. Questions will be designed to assess the students' understanding of the unit and their interest in the lessons. The six fourth grade teachers will be given their surveys at a committee meeting and be asked to return them within one week. Questions will be designed to evaluate teacher satisfaction with the lessons and their perception of the unit's effectiveness. Categories

will be designed to organize the data. A report will be developed and given to the MEC community.

### Action Research

Throughout the implementation of the unit, the committee will be using action research techniques to improve the quality of the lessons. According to Russell (1997), action research describes “professionals studying their own practice in order to improve it” (p. 1). The Multicultural Committee at MEC is doing just that. Each month we meet to discuss what occurred in the classroom when the lessons were carried out. The teachers reflect on their own experiences and everyone benefits from hearing what was happening in other classes. Students’ work and assessments are also evaluated to help determine areas of strength and weakness.

The nature of action research is collaborative and therefore the group needs to negotiate to draw conclusions and determine a plan of action (Hatten, Knapp, and Salonga, 1997, p. 18). The committee is following the process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. As Noffke (1998) pointed out, “action research may not always occur in neat cycles, but intermingle ‘where I went’ with ‘where I should go’” (p. 5). The committee is using action research to design better lessons for the students and increase the quality of instruction. It is a way for teachers to learn about themselves and take the time to figure out a course of action. Working together enables everyone to find alternative ways to resolve issues and concerns (Readington Township School District, 1999, p. 15).

Action research is a continuous process and the committee will meet each month to reflect and revise the curriculum. The ongoing feedback from others provides many

opportunities for improvement. Following the action research design helps to validate the study because the group is continuously analyzing and adapting the program to meet the needs of the students. We want to bring about change and as Wortley (1996) says, “action research conducted in its true spirit will change situations and organizations” (p. 6).

### Outcomes

At this point in the study, it is uncertain what impact the unit will have on learning. The unit’s design is very basic and as of yet, there are no plans to continue this project next year. I feel it would be necessary to develop a fifth grade program that would take the students further into the belief systems of the cultures. The fourth grade unit should also be expanded. It should be integrated into the curriculum, as opposed to separated lessons being done once a month. The intended outcome is to raise student awareness of other cultures and to help them learn tolerance and respect. For now, the committee and I will continue with the action research process to reach our goals.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of the Research Findings

#### Introduction

To determine if fourth grade student' awareness, appreciation, and attitude towards people of diverse cultures was affected by multicultural lessons, several sources of data were used. Observations of student and teacher interactions were conducted, a student survey, student interviews, a teacher survey, and conversations with teachers were also used to collect data.

While observing students, I recorded their reactions during lessons and their comments. All students completed a survey regarding their interest in the lessons, whether they believed they learned something new, and their feelings about friendship between people of different cultures. Students also spoke with me informally about their thoughts on multiculturalism.

Fourth grade teachers met each month to discuss the lessons effects in the classroom and find ways to improve the next lesson. Comments from those discussions were recorded. Teachers also completed a survey regarding their feelings on the unit's effectiveness and student reaction to it.

#### Analysis of Data from Teachers

The fourth grade teachers were very cooperative with the first stages of the multicultural unit. They all agreed to meet to discuss lesson plans and activities. I received comments such as, "Sounds great", "I'll be glad to help", and "The kids should



really enjoy that”. It was decided that we would follow an action research design and meet to discuss each lesson after it was taught and the assessment activities completed. The goal of these discussions was to find out what the teachers liked and disliked about the lesson in order to improve the next lesson. The cultures to be studied were determined and placed in sequence, with consideration given to national holidays and celebrations. At first, things went well and October’s lesson on France was developed and given to the teachers. The principal had decided that the lessons should be taught during an enrichment period. The teachers felt that they might want to incorporate the lessons at other times in the day, so we agreed they could complete them any period they had their homeroom. The lessons were designed to be completed in one to two class periods.

In October, when we met again, the teachers had all completed the lessons and activities, and were able to discuss the strengths and weaknesses. One teacher said, “This was very thorough and the students enjoyed seeing pictures from France”. Another teacher said, “I would like to see more short stories included. “ There was not enough time to write the next month’s lesson, so we scheduled another day to meet. Only four of the six teachers were able to attend the next meeting. I was beginning to notice a lack of commitment on the part of some teachers. November’s lesson on Native Americans was developed and given to the teachers.

At November’s meeting, two of the teachers admitted that they had not presented the lesson to their class and they would do it in the following week. Again, there was little time to develop the next lesson and it fell to me to create December’s lesson on three cultural holidays. There was a brief meeting in December and two of the teachers

said they could only complete part of the lesson. Another teacher said that she just gave out the assessments because the students already knew about the holidays. The other three had completed the lessons and activities. No one wanted to work on January's lesson on Japan, so again I created it and gave it to the teachers. I informed them, at that time, that they would be receiving a survey at the end of the month.

During the meetings, I spoke with the teachers about their feelings toward the unit. Most expressed that they were glad that the students were being exposed to the cultures, but that it should be more integrated into the existing curriculum, rather than just an extra lesson. This supports Saldana and Waxman's (1997) idea that school's should not "...just add a unit about cultural groups into the curriculum" (p. 44). Further, Boutte (1999) explained, "Multiculturalism is not a collection of activities..." (p. 28). Even though the teachers felt this way, they were not willing to put in the time necessary to carry out this idea. They wanted someone else to do it and distribute it.

The teachers had mixed feelings about receiving the surveys before the unit was complete. They thought they did not have enough information to answer the questions. Six fourth grade teachers were given surveys and five were returned. Table 1 shows that a majority of the teachers strongly agreed with the statements. Only twice did teachers disagree with a statement. The lessons were thought to be organized and appropriate for

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Insert Table 1

About here

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fourth grade students. Directions were considered clear and there was a sufficient amount of information available. Teachers perceived that students were interested in the lessons and that the students did gain an understanding of multiculturalism from this unit. This information leads to the conclusion that a multicultural unit is an effective tool in the classroom. More time should be taken in developing appropriate and more detailed lessons, but the teachers would like to see multiculturalism become part of the curriculum.

Considering that not all of the teachers carried out complete lessons, this data was interesting because the students still gained some appreciation and awareness of the cultures. There would most likely be even stronger evidence pointing to the positive outcomes of the unit if it had been completed properly. It is difficult to determine the generalizability of the data. The reliability and validity are in question.

Part of the problem was that teachers were not made aware of how to present the information. I was given limited time during grade level meetings to explain the lessons and overall purpose of the unit. As often as possible, I would meet with each teacher individually to provide support. The school should have provided “comprehensive in-service training, workshops, resource materials, and extensive instructional supervision”, according to Saldana and Waxman (1997, p. 44). Even with the problems they faced, the teachers seemed encouraged that a multicultural program had even been started in the district and all agreed that with time and effort the necessary improvements could be made to make multiculturalism part of the curriculum.

### Analysis of Student Data

A letter was sent home to parents in September to make them aware of the multicultural unit and request any information they might have on the cultures being presented. Teachers read the letter to the students first, so they would know what to expect. The teachers began by informally discussing cultures and asking students what they already knew about the cultures in the unit. Most students were aware there were other cultures, but not sure what it was that made them unique. Many students said that they had never met anyone from another culture before. When I asked some of the students if they wanted to learn about people from other cultures most said yes and a few said they did not care.

The teachers were to present the information on the cultures and then give students an authentic assessment activity at the end of the lesson. The assessments were to be turned in to me for evaluation. As stated previously, this did not happen in every classroom. Even when it did happen, teachers would forget to turn in the assessments and send them home. I got the feeling that some of the teachers did not take this unit very seriously. They would ask me question such as, “Will it matter if I only do some of the activities in the lesson?” or “This doesn’t have to be done each month, right?”. Since it was being completed for an internship project, they did not place as much importance on it. Students were not receiving all the information on the cultures and therefore their awareness and understanding of the cultures could not be complete. By only giving students parts of a lesson, some students became confused and the information seemed disorganized. Things did not progress smoothly from one lesson to the next. When I spoke with students in these classes, they did not seem very enthusiastic about the lessons

and they did not exhibit much understanding of the cultures. One student told me, “We learned something about France, I remember that rouge means red.” When I spoke with students in classes that had completed all the lessons, their attitudes were much more positive toward the lessons and they were eager to learn more. A student commented “I can’t believe that kids in France go to school on Saturday, I wouldn’t want to do that, but they do get to go home in the afternoon for two hours for lunch, that’s cool.” This is a significant finding of this study.

The teachers that completed the lessons and expanded on them provided a true multicultural education for their students. According to the GEM guidelines (1993), these teachers “transformed the existing curricula through the integration of materials, ideas, strategies, and techniques that reflect the history, customs, interactions, and aspirations of various ethnic groups” (p. 28). These teachers were much more likely to get the parents involved, as well as the art, music, and computer teachers. The lessons were not presented as a piece of information to be learned, instead the information was related to their lives, and so they could begin to appreciate the similarities and differences of the cultures.

Each fourth grade teacher administered the student surveys and had their class complete them. All students in fourth grade completed and returned their surveys. As Table 2 shows, the majority of students answered true to the statements. From the responses on the surveys, it can be concluded that students enjoyed learning about

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Insert Table 2

About here

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the cultures, they believed they did learn something new, and they wanted to learn more. They found the lessons fun and easy to understand. All but 7 students thought it was ok for people from different cultures to be friends, however 22 students said they would not like to meet people from different cultures and become friends with them. I found it very interesting that they do not oppose others being friends, but they themselves would not want to do it. That is an area that the unit should address in the future, to help students feel more comfortable relating to people of other cultures.

### Summary of the Data

This unit was designed to increase students' awareness and appreciation of the various cultures in the world. From the information provided, I believe the multicultural unit was a positive first step in reaching that goal. Students and teachers seemed pleased with the information and activities provided. Considering that many students had never been exposed to information on other cultures, these lessons gave them background information that can be expanded upon in upper grades. As a leader, I would be sure to include more training for teachers and time for them to develop the lessons and activities. To develop more commitment from the teachers, I would provide ongoing supervision, coaching and encouragement to help them reach their goals. While the data collected painted a positive picture for the unit, the questions of reliability, validity, and generalizability still remain. The data is very useful for providing information on how to improve and expand the unit to better meet the needs of teachers and students. Given that the district was in a unique position to begin with, the data is extremely helpful in assessing what needs to be done in this particular school. In time, the unit could be extended to other grades and eventually other districts.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

In planning the multicultural unit, the fourth grade teachers and I believed that they would have the opportunity to complete the lessons and the activities each month and then discuss them. The plan was to meet and develop the lessons each month, then meet to reflect on each completed lesson and adapt the next month's lesson accordingly. We decided to discuss how the students reacted and brainstorm ways to make the next lesson better. Unfortunately, time constraints and other obligations prevented things from progressing this way.

The first problem was scheduling meeting times that everyone could attend. The teachers were also not always very helpful in providing input into the lesson development and I ended up writing most of the lessons and activities. This made the task much more difficult. One person writing a curriculum is not as effective as a group. I did not have the chance to get different perspectives on ways to present the information. I felt like they wanted to just be handed each month's lessons and not have to give any time to creating them.

The goal of discussing the completed lessons and finding strengths and weaknesses that could be applied to the next lessons was also difficult to accomplish. It occurred on a more informal basis with a few of the teachers, but not all. A few of the teachers would always tell me they would meet with me, but then not be available at the meeting time. Another problem was that not all of the teachers completed each lesson.

This definitely showed a lack of commitment on the part of some of the teachers. This is typical of the way things occur in this building. People do their own thing, with out thinking about the consequences.

Sometimes a teacher would only do parts of the lesson, others would give the assessment activity without presenting all of the information, and others did not complete a lesson at all. The assessment activities were designed to provide an ongoing evaluation of students' understanding of the material, when these were left incomplete, it was difficult to know how much or if any awareness and appreciation of the culture occurred. There were two teachers who implemented the lessons completely and even expanded on them. We spoke at length on ways to improve the unit for next year. It was obvious from just talking with the students that they enjoyed their experiences with these lessons more than the other groups. They were receiving the entire picture, not just bits and pieces.

When the surveys were administered in January, the teachers felt somewhat unprepared to answer the questions. Since the unit has not been completed, they thought the results might not provide an accurate picture of what was happening. I did not understand why they felt that way. If they had been implementing and following through with the lessons and activities, they should have been well prepared to complete the surveys. The teacher survey was designed to evaluate teacher satisfaction with the lessons and their perception of the unit's effectiveness. The student survey was designed to assess students' understanding of the unit and their interest in the lessons.

The data showed that a multicultural unit can be effective in increasing student awareness of other cultures. It is my interpretation that the majority of the students did



gain an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures through the multicultural lessons that were introduced into the curriculum. It was only a basic understanding, but at least it was a first step. If the program is continued as planned, each year the students will build on what they already know. Eventually, students will be exploring the more complex aspects of culture and its impact on society.

In examining students' comments, it was found that the students had an increased appreciation and desire to learn more about other cultures. They wanted to know more about the different things they believed and where those beliefs came from. The benefits that emerged from this research suggest that the multicultural lessons did promote a positive change in attitude toward people of other cultures. If the program is not continued, these students have still been given a positive experience that may help them relate better to others.

As a result of this study, I would recommend that multicultural lessons be integrated throughout the curriculum in all grade levels. This would continue to develop students' appreciation and attitude toward people of diverse cultures, building upon what they already know. One suggestion I would make is to develop a curriculum that would be appropriate for each grade level. Beginning with stories at the lowest grade, activities would then be available for each grade level and expanded upon as students move to the next grade.

Another suggestion is for teachers to routinely collaborate in grade-level planning sessions. This would require extra planning time for teachers within the school day. Implementation of multicultural lessons may result from staff interest after exploring

developmentally appropriate ways of delivering instruction. Sharing ideas for lessons will encourage teachers to incorporate these lessons into their curriculum.

As a leader, I would work to ensure that all steps in the action research cycle were followed. I learned that teachers want to be involved if they are given the time, resources, and support necessary to ensure success. A multicultural program cannot just be thrown in to the middle of an existing curriculum. It is necessary to make the program part of the curriculum. In the future, I would be more involved in integrating the lessons into and activities into the subjects being taught, so that more time can be spent exploring the cultures' beliefs and student perceptions.

The students and teachers at MEC gained a general understanding of other cultures and realized the need we have for further study. With the addition of more students from various cultures, the schools need to prepare students to interact and relate to different people. More time should be spent on this part of the curriculum, with less emphasis on the stereotypical information. I believe that it will be necessary to further explore how to teach students to be successful in their everyday encounters with different people. It is not enough to just present information that shows some basic differences in thought, students need to learn how to live and work with others, despite these differences.

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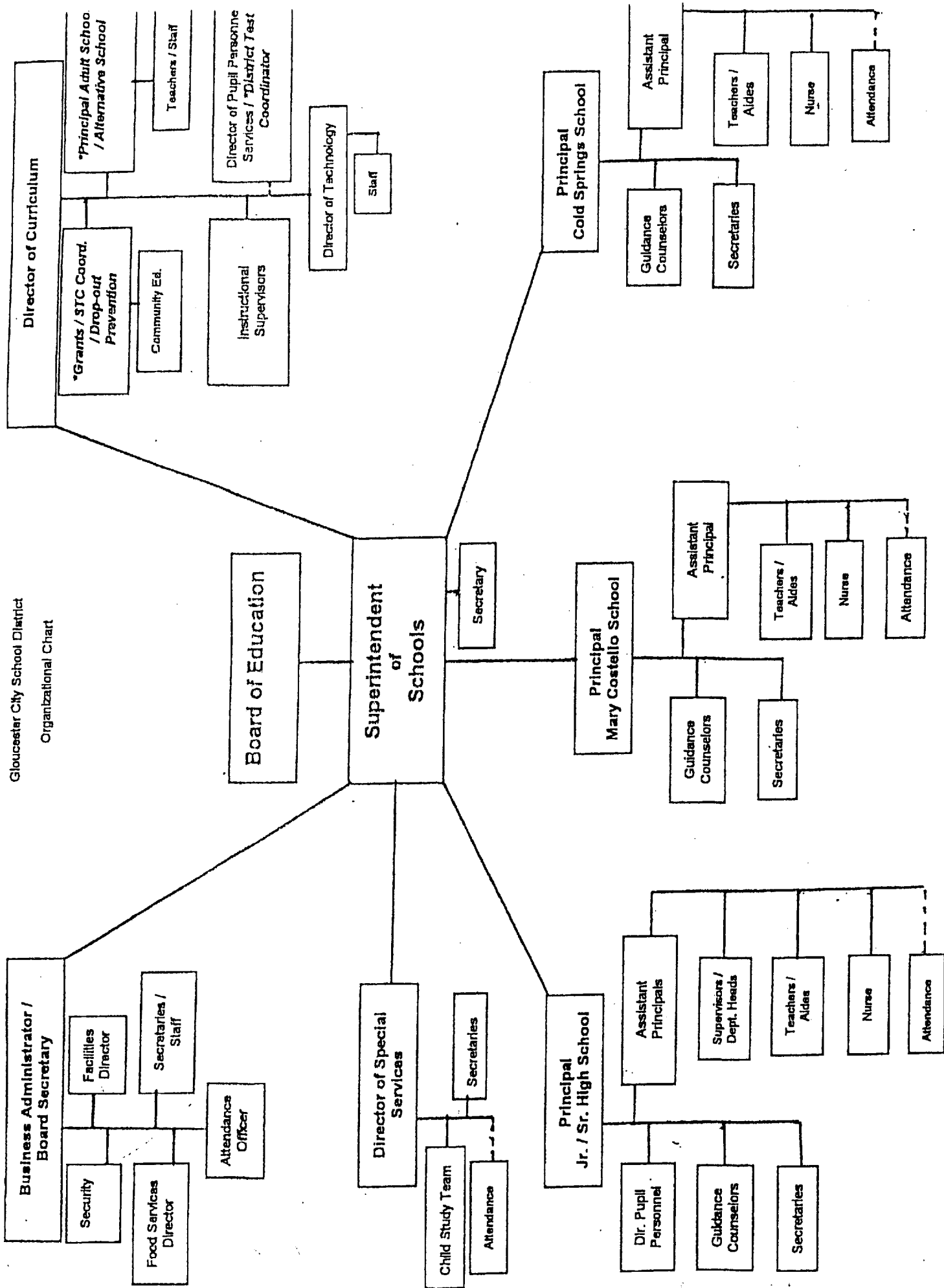
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## Appendix A

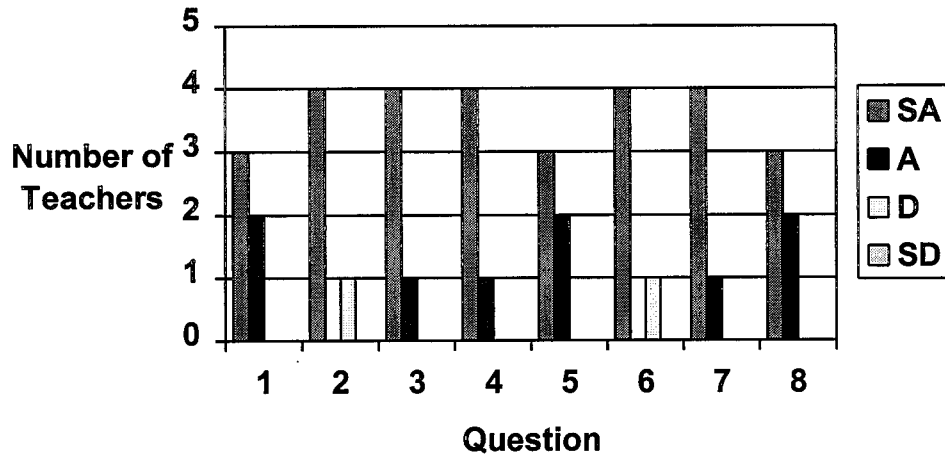
### Administrational Organization of Gloucester City

Gloucester City School District  
Organizational Chart



**Appendix B**  
**Teacher Survey Data**

## Teacher Survey -- Table 1



### MULTICULTURAL UNIT TEACHER SURVEY

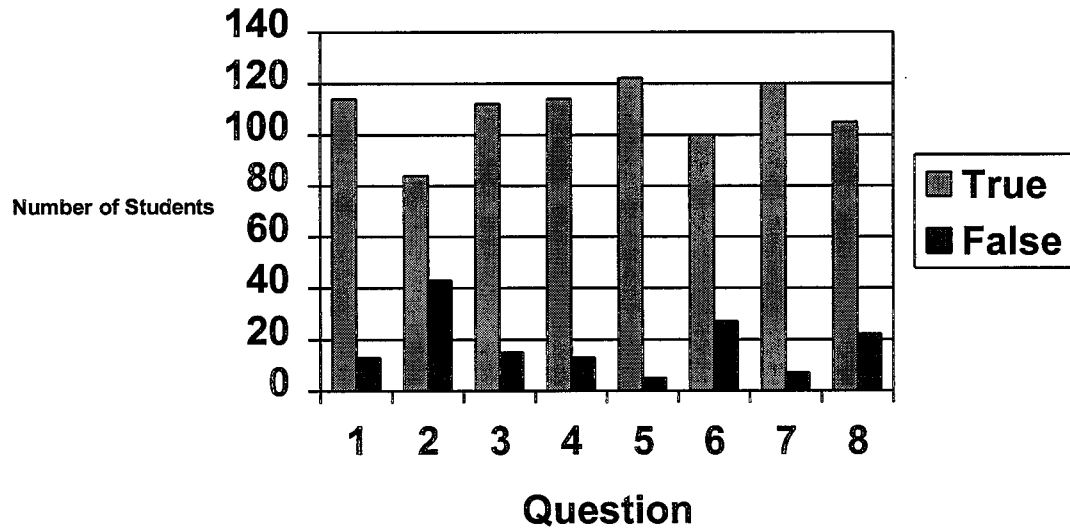
#### QUESTIONS

1. The lessons were presented in an organized fashion.
2. The lessons were appropriate for fourth grade.
3. The directions were clear and easy to follow.
4. The lessons were interesting to the students.
5. The activities provided were relevant to the lessons.
6. The lessons contained a sufficient amount of information.
7. The students gained an understanding of multiculturalism through this unit.
8. The students were interested in finding out more about the cultures.



**Appendix C**  
**Student Survey Data**

Student Survey -- Table 2



## MULTICULTURAL UNIT STUDENT SURVEY

### QUESTIONS

1. I enjoyed learning about the different cultures.
2. The lessons were easy to understand.
3. The directions were clear and easy to follow.
4. Most of the lessons were fun.
5. I think I learned something new about people and their cultures.
6. I want to learn more about the cultures.
7. I think its ok for people from different cultures to be friends.
8. I would like to meet people from different cultures and become friends with them.

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