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 Center for Early Adolescent  
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The Center for Early Adolescent Educators is committed to helping middle level educators build challenging, integrative and responsive schools that meet the unique social and educational needs of students in the middle grades. CEAE's mission is to advance the efforts of middle level educators in the areas of educational practices and professional development.

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*Dear Readers:*

*It is with a sense of excitement that I assume the role of editor of Impact. I am energized by the opportunity to promote the work of Connecticut's wonderful middle school educators. It is no accident that Connecticut students consistently perform at the highest level in the nation. Their performance is testimony to the dedication and creativity of teachers and administrators at all levels. By sharing ideas, strategies concerns and successes, we raise the level of instruction to an even higher plain. I encourage you to send me accounts of your special programs, innovative units, instructional strategies and position papers on "hot topics." It is my privilege to publicize the work and the wisdom of those who work in the middle.*

*Yours,  
Earle G. Bidwell*

**I**n this issue.....

One of the "buzz words" in education in the 90s, and I dare say the new millennium, is "Diversity." Ever since *Horton v MesKell* determined that students from the urban areas were not getting an educational opportunity equal to their peers in the suburbs, we have been urged to create plans in our schools to celebrate diversity. After all, an increasing number of students in Connecticut are African-American, Hispanic or Asian and this country was built on the ideal of a "melting pot," where people of all nationalities, races and faiths could come and be assimilated into the "great American society." Remember, "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." The words engraved on the Statue of Liberty are an inspiration to those not born American; they are a promise of a second chance, a new beginning, and an invitation to incorporate "diversity" into America. Well, to celebrate diversity in Connecticut, we have state plans, regional plans, local plans and individual school plans.

As good as some of these plans are, and some are very good, they remind me a little bit of Little League. Before Little League Baseball, kids played ball in sandlots, hayfields, parks city streets and back yards. They chose up sides, adapted the rules to fit the number of players and the available space, and played until dinner or dark. Then, adults became involved and baseball became a game that required try-outs groomed and lined baseball diamonds, uniforms, sponsors, formal practice sessions, coaches and well-meaning parents who wanted their children to succeed. What was lost was spontaneity, the natural pecking order of the neighborhood, learning from the older kids, imaginative use of available resources and creativity.

Like organized baseball, many of our diversity plans are dominated by adults, have structured objectives and formal determiners for success (evaluation). What many are lacking is time and space for the natural curiosity of youth, spontaneity and natural interactions between young people. Perhaps we are celebrating the wrong thing. Perhaps we should be celebrating "commonality" rather than diversity; those programs that give young people an opportunity to learn about each other, to interact in a natural peer relationship and to grow and expand their horizons without undue structures from the adult world.

While advertised with a focus on "diversity," this issue of *Impact* is really a celebration of the "commonality" of young people from different races and cultures; a celebration of a natural curiosity to learn about others, and about the inherent goodness of children of the world.

The articles featured in this journal are about programs that allow students to discover things about themselves, to experience different cultures first hand, and to work together with others of different backgrounds. Under the guidance of enlightened educators, middle school students are encouraged to be themselves and do what comes naturally.

# THE TOWN-TO-TOWN C.A.R.E.—A—VAN:© A VEHICLE OF EXPRESSION

By: Michele Sorenson-Bagwell

*Today's adolescents are faced with a variety of societal challenges that are being reflected in our schools. Acts of prejudice, hatred, and violence have become headlines for defining teenagers and their behaviors.*

Topics and issues that once lay beyond the domain of teaching have become integral parts of the curriculum. Unfortunately, lessons on human relationships are not conveyed easily, if at all, by dictum, through the pages of textbooks, or by rote instruction. They must be modeled and embedded in actual, authentic experiences that have meaning and application to the adolescent world. Nearly all of the programs that have arisen to address this issue have done so from a reactive rather than a proactive stance and from an adult perspective colored by politics, school administration, and the media. Many teenagers today have preconceived ideas and negative opinions about people who are different, especially when these differences are associated with culture, race, ethnicity, religion, economics and gender to name but a few. More than ever, it is imperative that young adolescents acquire the ability to respect and value the differences and similarities of the people in the world around them.

In the spring of 1999 students, educators, and administrators from a suburban middle school (Catherine M. McGee) in Berlin, Connecticut, and two urban middle schools (Roosevelt and Slade Middle Schools) in New Britain, Connecticut, joined efforts to address the topic of diversity through a series of planned academic and enrichment activities that culminated in the Town-to-Town C.A.R.E\*-a-Van© bus project.

(\* Caring Adolescents Reaching Everyone)

The focus of this project was to address diversity from an adolescent perspective through the use of a school bus serving as a multi-media "vehicle of expression." Primary objectives included:

- fostering respect, appreciation, and positive relationships between adolescents as they reflected upon a broad range of diversity issues;
- allowing participants opportunities to apply teamwork and leadership skills in their schools; and,
- providing a novel medium for integrating skills of creative problem solving, critical thinking, metaphorical writing and visual design.

Thirty artistically talented students (ten from each of the three participating schools) joined three art educators, Marianne Metcalfe from McGee Middle School, Kristen Ramsey from Middle School, to repaint a traditional yellow school bus as a



## C.A.R.E.-A-VAN

Roosevelt Middle School and Joseph Geisler from Slade visual metaphor for issues of diversity. DATTCO Incorporated, the school transportation company for the New Britain Public schools, donated the bus.

Prior to painting the bus students were provided with a review of historical busing events including Rosa Parks' confrontation with a bus driver when she refused to relinquish her seat on a public bus. The idea of Rosa Parks' historical significance as an allegory and the utilization of the bus as a means of conveying ideas became the central focus of launching students' ideas on diversity. Mr. Geisler engaged students in the lesson by asking students to create a visual metaphor representative of diversity. Although students designed individual metaphors on blank bus templates, the final design was a student-generated, collaborative effort among the students involved. As a group of artists, students worked together to select a puzzle design to paint on the bus. "We are all important 'pieces' of the same puzzle" was the written metaphor selected to accompany the visual expression of connecting puzzle pieces on the bus. Students noted that unless puzzle pieces connected, the entire puzzle picture couldn't be seen or appreciated. The students related their own thoughts about diversity to the puzzle pieces. Students were actively involved in a group dialogue sharing their feelings about appreciating each other's differences and similarities. They emphasized the importance of connecting as human beings.

After the bus was painted other students participating in the project were asked to express their feelings about diversity through additional metaphorical writings. Students learned

about metaphor writing in their language arts classes. Each student composed an original metaphor related to the topic of diversity and then transferred the writing to the bus with a permanent marker. Four hundred students from all three middle schools created the written expressions on the bus.

The artwork and writings on the bus do not represent any one specific race, gender, religion, academic or physical ability, economic condition or sexual preference. The visual and written expressions are gems of commonality capable of being exceptionally poignant when applied to all areas of diversity. Adolescents in two local suburban and urban school communities have indeed transformed the bus into a “vehicle of expression.”

The initial phase of the project has been extremely formative and successful for several reasons:

- The project seeks a proactive response to understanding and celebrating diversity.
- The responses from student participants are voluntary (self-motivated), creative (providing a sense of ownership), and genuine (believed in as viable).
- The input has a large audience and moves laterally (to peers) as well as upwardly (to an adult culture).

This project utilizes a school bus as a medium whereby those most affected by issues through top-down decision-making can have direct input “with a face on it” in the solution process.

The irony is that buses have historically been the solution of choice in solving issues such as integration or addressing economic disparity within a community. Buses in their traditional forms move only bodies, not minds or hearts. The Town-to-Town C.A.R.E.-a-Van carries the latter too.

A mere five miles separate the Berlin and New Britain school communities geographically. They are so close in distance and yet so far apart in an understanding and appreciation of each other. This project has allowed students to travel beyond the familiarity and comfort of their own backyards into each other’s lives. We recognize that local action by today’s adolescents has the potential to affect the world at large. To



“Adolescents in two...communities have indeed transformed the bus into a ‘vehicle of expression.’”

this end, DATTCO Incorporated has made a commitment for the continuation and extension of this project by giving our school districts permission to move the bus across the country. The movement of the bus allows for an extremely large number of people to observe and continually respond to the messages of contemporary adolescence/adolescents related to issues of diversity. Without movement the amount of input would be limited as would be the audience who would respond, propose, and share personal perspectives about diversity. The bus is moving beyond local boundaries to address this issue nationally.

Educators from urban, suburban and rural middle schools in twenty-one states have volunteered to be a “bus stop” as the bus travels across America. Hosting states to date include:

Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, California,

Washington, Wyoming, North Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas and Rhode Island.

Hosting schools will each have two weeks to complete their own “vehicle of expression”. Participating schools will read and examine the existing artwork and writings on the bus when it arrives. They will then preserve one written metaphor on the bus before repainting and rewriting their own themes of diversity on the bus. Before the bus departs from each school a variety of artifacts will be placed in a C.A.R.E.\*Carton on a seat inside the bus. The following artifacts will be included in the carton:

- a student made video highlighting the school and the town/city where the school is located;
- a description of the school’s demographics;
- a copy of the school’s yearbook and handbook;
- a group photograph of students and staff who worked on the bus project;
- a print copy and a disk copy of students’ written metaphors;
- an original lesson plan written by teachers and/or students celebrating a theme of diversity.

Lessons will be published in a booklet for classroom use at the end of the project. The drivers will send the cartons back to Berlin to be shared with students at McGee Middle School and sister schools, Roosevelt and Slade. The cartons’ artifacts will allow students to have a better understanding of the similarities shared by middle school students and teachers from a wide variety of geographical locations. Satellite sites will also be arranged whenever possible to have telecommunication assemblies between the hosting schools and McGee, Roosevelt and Slade Middle Schools. This live





communication medium will allow our students to interact with students across the country as they address concerns related to diversity. Harris McCabe and Jay Kubeck are driving the bus. Both are taking a one-year sabbatical leave from their college studies in order to drive this project across the country. Mr. McCabe and Mr. Kubeck will be filming a documentary of the bus project as it travels to schools over the next thirteen months. They will assist in facilitating each school's approach to the bus project during the two-week hosting period. The most notable difference between the pilot program and the current project is the presence of bus drivers who are, in actuality, the activity facilitators, filmmakers, mechanics, goodwill ambassadors, publicists, journalists and more. As the bus travels across the country it is a goal to add the signature artwork of the notable bus rider, Ms. Rosa Parks, when the bus makes a stop in Detroit, Michigan.

What began as a local project to break down barriers of prejudice and bias is destined to have global effects. Upon completing its North American tour the bus has been invited to visit middle schools in Switzerland, Korea, Singapore and England. However, before considering any international travel plans the bus is first scheduled to return to its home state of Connecticut in February of 2001. It will then function as a moving museum, visiting middle schools throughout Connecticut in an effort to share collected thoughts about diversity as expressed by adolescents across America.

This project values today's adolescents as learners, leaders and peacemakers. Our students have been creatively successful in breaking down boundaries of prejudice through the use of paintbrushes and metaphors. Some lessons leave an eternal impact on a student's mind; consider the Town-to-Town C.A.R.E.-a-Van bus project to be one of them.

You can follow the cross country journey of the Town-to-Town C.A.R.E.-a-Van© by visiting our Web site at <http://McGee.berlinschools.org/careavan.htm>.

For further information about the bus project or to schedule a "bus stop" at your middle school next spring please contact:

Michele Sorensen-Bagwell  
Assistant Principal  
Catherine M. McGee Middle School  
899 Norton Road  
Berlin, Connecticut 06037



## **“SAFE SCHOOLS”**

**will be the focus area for the Fall Issue of IMPACT**

The staff welcomes articles from practitioners of middle level education regarding exemplary programs, innovative strategies or position papers on the focus area, or on any other middle level topic.

Contact: Earle G. Bidwell at (203) 250-1111 or [ebidwell@casciac.org](mailto:ebidwell@casciac.org) for more information

# “If We Are Americans We Are Like One Song.”

By: Judy Bivona and Jim Seldner

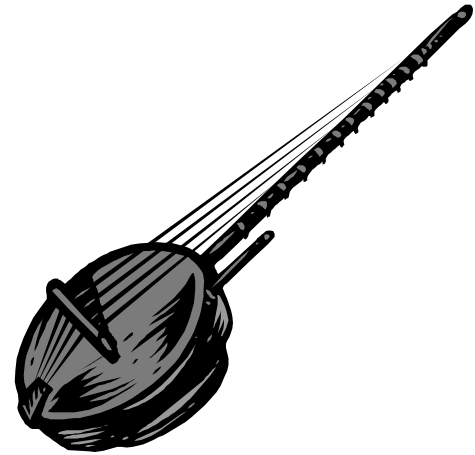
*“ If we are Americans,  
We are like brothers and sisters.  
We have the same hands and the same flowers.*

*And if we are Americans,  
We will be good neighbors to each other.  
We will share the wheat.*

*If we are Americans,  
We won’t look at the borders.  
We’ll put away the flags and take care of the seas.*

*Because if we are Americans  
We are all the same-  
The Black, the White, the Mestizo, the Indian.*

*If we are Americans we are like one song.”*



## Chilean Folk Song

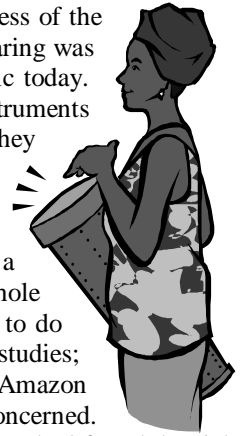
The musical group Sirius Coyote immediately struck the theme of diversity at a school assembly at Lincoln Middle School on December 22, 1999. The lyrics above were from the first song played by the ensemble of Dr. Dennis Waring, Kathleen Sartor, and Giovanni Ciarlo. The group arrived on stage with 120 sixth graders from Lincoln’s Team 6-2 as part of the culminating activity of a Higher Order Thinking Skills (H.O.T. School) project. Lincoln Middle School is the first middle school in Connecticut to be selected as a H.O. T. School by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. The purpose of the H.O.T. School project is to infuse and affirm the role of the arts within the traditional curriculum and to coordinate interdisciplinary studies that enhance learning connections among the academic disciplines.

The students, their teachers, and Dr. Dennis Waring participated in a two month interdisciplinary journey study called “Key in on The Cay.” The Cay, by Theodore Taylor, is a Newberry prizewinning work for young adults that includes the themes of race, war, survival, self-reliance, and friendship. Using this reading, students made connections with other parts of their studies including math, geography, science, social studies, practical and applied arts, physical education, and music. Students are able to understand how learning in one area is connected with learning in another because they experience the link of one concept from classroom to classroom.

A centerpiece for the students in a H.O.T. project is the Artist-in-Residence. The artist may work in the area of dance, drama, photography, puppetry, or writing. The shared element among all the Artists-in-Residence is that they are first and foremost Master Teachers. The Artists-in-Residence teach the students another path to learning. The goal of the Resident Artists is to share their craft, skill, and art with the students and infuse it within the objectives of the students’ learning. Three other elements are significant in the H.O.T. School model. One key factor is that all students are included. In other words, the method is founded upon the belief that all students can learn and can be successful. All of our students – of all-academic levels and classifications, including bilingual and special education students – participated. Secondly, the H.O.T. School model believes in and teaches with Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences in mind. Students, teachers, and the Resident Artist were fully aware of the diversity of learning styles and preferences. Activities were designed with a bias toward each person’s strengths, while also offering opportunities to learn about other styles and preferences. The third element of the H.O.T. School model is creativity. It is in this area that the role of the Artist-in-Residence is crucial.



Dr. Waring worked with 120 sixth graders of every shape, shade, and ability to bring them to a higher awareness of the diversity and importance of music in their world. Another important aspect of the students' studies with Dr. Waring was learning about diverse musical customs and cultures, and how they contributed to and influenced world music today. Dr. Waring's goal was to have each student study, make, and perform on four different types of musical instruments constructed from common objects found around the home. The students succeeded. With their own hands they fashioned "bleach bottle" banjos, "washing machine hose" flutes, "twine and lattice" xylophones, and "coffee can" drums.



Important musical learning included being able to keep a beat, create a rhythm, and play music with others in a group. Finally, the finale was the students' participation with Dr. Waring in performing music before the whole school. Each student had a role. Some sang; some danced; some drummed; and some were able and willing to do more. A few students contributed by reading their writing about the importance of music and interdisciplinary studies; some presented folk instruments made in art classes; and another group in textile arts made tapestries using the Amazon as thematic inspiration for stage decorations. All in all, the H.O.T. School experience was exciting for all concerned. For all the diverse elements that came into play during our two-month H.O.T. School journey, most of us felt we had found the right key.

*Judy Bivona and Jim Seldner are 6<sup>th</sup> grade Language Art teachers at Lincoln Middle School in Meriden, CT. Joining Judy and Jim on the interdisciplinary team are Dan Girard (Science), Gus Roncaioli (Social Studies), Rick Pizzonia (Math), Andrea Buccilli (Textile Arts), Janet Boyer (Special Education), Santina Scalia (Media Specialist), Kevin Cook, Kathi Gorman, and Chris Webster (Art)*

*Dr. Dennis Waring, Giovanni Ciarlo, and Kathleen Sartor are "Sirius Coyote." Dr. Waring may be reached at (860) 344-5354.*

***The State Board of Education has recognized the Strategic School Profile Narrative from the Albert D. Griswold Middle School in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, as a model narrative for addressing diversity. Here is a reprint of that narrative.***

### **EFFORTS TO REDUCE RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND ECONOMIC ISOLATION**

By: Laura Boutilier, Principal

Connecticut law requires that school districts provide educational opportunities for their students to interact with students and teachers from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. This may occur through programs with other schools, distance learning, or other experiences. Here is the description, submitted by this school, of how it provides such experiences.

Griswold Middle School has worked very hard to provide opportunities for students to interact with others, thereby reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation. This past year four new activities with the express purpose of meeting this need were added to the myriad of extra-curricular opportunities made available to students.

Participation in the Greater Hartford Academy for the Performing Arts with area urban and suburban schools is just one of these activities. Through this vehicle 36 GMS students and 10 staff members had an opportunity to travel to one of the middle schools in Hartford and participate in a middle school version of the Greater Hartford Academy for the Performing Arts. Attending classes, preparing skits, and literally "making music together" created lifelong friendships. Because of the tremendously positive responses from staff and students, our plan is to continue our involvement in this program for this school year.

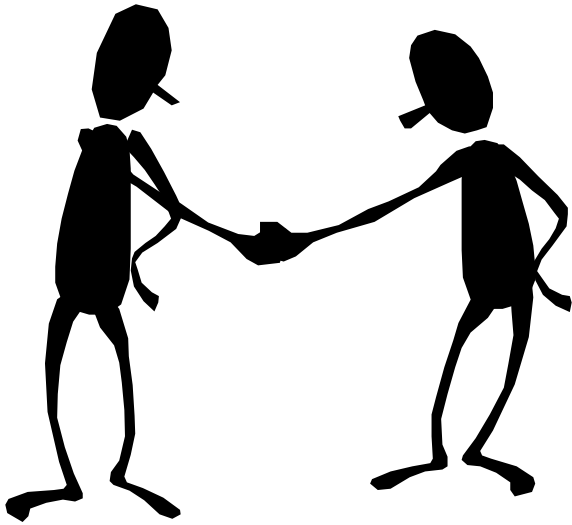
Two years ago an Academic Bowl Program was initiated at our school. After a year hiatus we reconnected with the suburbs of Windsor, New Britain, and Berlin for the purpose of providing an academic venue for interaction among diverse populations. Through this activity Griswold students competed in cooperative teams made up of students from these towns. At times these competitions took the format of a question and answer, jeopardy-type game and at other times it included problem-solving activities where team members were dependent upon each other to complete a task. Again this was the start of life long friendships.

Our involvement in the Y.E.S. (Young Educators Society) Club continued this year with 12 of our students involved in twice monthly activities either by school or with students from surrounding towns. Not only does this activity serve to encourage students who have an interest in teaching as a career, but it also affords them opportunities to interact with their peers from surrounding towns.

# Kids To Kids International

## A Picture-Book Program for Children

By: Monita Leavitt, Project Explore Enrichment Teacher  
Rochambeau Middle School, Southbury, CT



### "So We'll All Be Friends"

are the words of children's author, Pat Kibbe, that serve as the motto of the non-profit organization, Kids To Kids International. Kids To Kids International is a student-created picture book program that gives children an opportunity to learn to love and understand each other. Founded in 1991, KTKI has inspired thousands of children across America to create and send picture books to less fortunate children in poverty areas, such as refugee camps and third world countries. During the past nine years, classes at Rochambeau Middle School in Southbury, Connecticut, have created hundreds of picture books, which were sent to Russia, Africa, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, and Lithuania. Their enthusiasm and commitment evolve and grow each year as more teachers in Region #15 schools join the program.

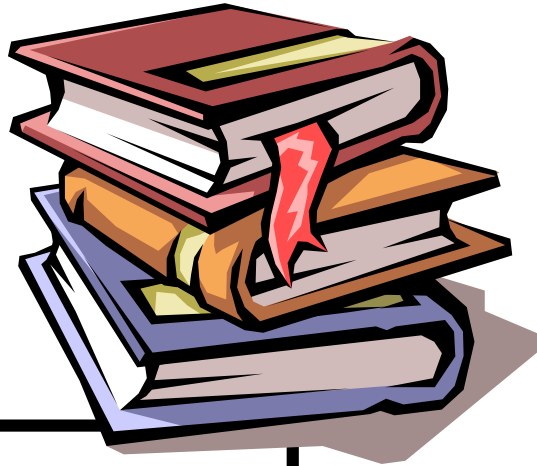
Kids To Kids International all began when Pat Kibbe was talking to a group of fourth graders in Vermont about what it was like to be an author. She suggested to the children that they write about what they know best. She spoke of how the characters in her own books were written with her children, their hobbies and adventures in mind. Pat held up a photo of a Cambodian boy from a newspaper clipping and explained she was writing a book about a little refugee boy coming to America. She said a refugee was someone who leaves his or her homeland for reasons of political or religious freedom or war. She went on to say that refugees often did not have enough food, clothing or medicine, and that they certainly didn't have all the things students in America have. Pat explained to the students that in the book she was writing the little refugee boy came to an American classroom much like their own. She then asked how the children would communicate with him and make him feel at home. The children talked about how they would like to draw pictures for him to show their family, pets, sports and hobbies. Then one boy raised his hand, "Pat Kibbe, if we make pictures, can you send them to that little boy in the Cambodian Refugee Camp? Will you see to it that he gets them?"

Pat replied that she didn't know if she could send the pictures to that particular refugee boy in Cambodia, but she would try. Soon boxes and boxes of children-created pictures began arriving at Pat's house in Yorktown Heights, New York. She knew she had to do something about them! Pat called up Refugees International in Washington, DC and arranged for a meeting. She explained about all the hundreds of boxes arriving at her home containing pictures created by American children and was told, "Pat Kibbe, not only will we see to it that these books will be sent to the refugee boy in the newspaper photo, we'll do even better. We'll send you to Cambodia, too!" Two weeks later, Pat Kibbe arrived at the refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. She brought 500 student-created pictures and supplies to the camp and got an airline to ship the remaining 2,000 pictures and materials.

When Pat arrived at the Cambodian refugee camp, she was not prepared for what she saw. Children stood behind barbed-wire fences in large groups. These were not like the white picket fences she remembered her five children standing behind in their yard. Cambodian children lived in houses, but they were made of wood and straw. Cambodian children ate food like Americans do, but usually it was a bowl of rice cooked over an open fire. Cambodian children took baths, but the entire village had to wait for the water truck to come once a week. Cambodian children slept at night, but in woven hammocks. Their clothes were different, but not as nice as American's. Their travel was mainly on foot. Cambodian children went to school, but the classes met in outdoor classrooms and the children had to line up for a long time each morning before they began. Teachers only had a blackboard and chalk. Imagine how precious the drawings were when Pat delivered the boxes!

Pat Kibbe's idea of children communicating through drawings when they didn't speak the same language had worked! But soon she realized something was not quite right. As the little fingers of the refugee children began touching the drawings over and over again, Pat saw they were becoming destroyed. She vowed to ask the American children to laminate the drawings to protect them. Pat saw the refugee children were intensely interested in finding out all they could about American children. She thought that, maybe, American children could make picture books so that their new friends would learn more about them.

Today, Kids To Kids books all over the world to wonderful thing is that now the children who receive them! have been received. KTKI asks their shipment of books to give as well as creator of books first Lithuanian school to computers and Internet access. establish global link projects, more books for KTKI.



International has shipped thousands of more than fifty countries. And, the picture books are being created by some of Boxes from Africa, China and Lithuania teachers to send a packet of supplies with enable children who receive them to be a for others. Anima School in Kaunas, the participate, recently received two The principal and teachers, eager to are excited to have their students create

*Today, as our curriculum becomes more global, the need to connect with children in other countries becomes even greater.*

I have had the opportunity to present the KTKI program in Lithuania and at conferences throughout the United States, including those sponsored by NELMS (New England League of Middle Schools), the National Gifted Association, and National Middle Schools. Administrators, librarians, home-schooling parents as well as teachers are excited to offer this global program to their students. And, the neat thing is there are no deadlines! The books can arrive at the KTKI headquarters any time throughout the year. For example, one classroom teacher sent a box of

books to KTKI in May, but because not all of her students had finished creating their picture books in time for her shipping date, she simply sent the others in July.

At Rochambeau Middle School, we have implemented the Kids To Kids International Program in various ways. One year, our reading consultant worked with the fifth and seventh grade classrooms to have the older children create books with the younger ones. Rochambeau's Spanish Teacher created ABC books in Spanish that were sent to Ecuador. The inclusion teacher worked with her students to create one large book where each page was a different student's work. The program was also offered through Project Explore, our enrichment program, where it was run during lunch waves and, later, as a Writers' Club at the end of the school day. And the great thing is that it keeps growing and evolving! For the past three years, eighth-grade gifted students have taught the program to third and fifth graders at nearby Pomperaug Elementary School. Two students who have taught KTKI used their hours to earn the silver wings honor in Girl Scouts. Others are writing it on applications when applying to various schools or programs. They see what a wonderful opportunity it presents for service leadership.

Today, as our curriculum becomes more global, the need to connect with children in other countries becomes even greater. The more contact we have with people of different cultures, the more understanding and tolerance there will be. Kids To Kids International is becoming even more important than ever. The benefits our students receive from participating in this program are both local and global. Children are encouraged to think beyond their own world and become more interested in learning about others. Their perspective changes and their sensitivity deepens. Their ability to give enhances self-esteem. As writers, children know their books will have an authentic audience and will be treasured by those who receive them. KTKI challenges children with the opportunity to establish global links and help make a difference!

*It is easy for classrooms and schools to become involved with Kids To Kids International. To join for the year, a teacher can send \$35, which entitles the classroom to a manual and a newsletter. The manual contains the guidelines for writing the books, including special information on writing the author's page and how to ship to KTKI. Schools can take advantage of a group rate. Teachers may contact KTKI at 1691 Commerce St., Yorktown Heights, N.Y., 10598.*

# To Russia With Love

By Tom Dzicek and Earle Bidwell

*Moscow in February! Sound delightful? To the average person, probably not; but to a group of sixth and seventh graders from Nathan Hale School in Coventry, the time was ripe, for this was the final leg of an exchange program which was proving to be the experience of a lifetime.*

Few would have guessed ten years earlier that a pen pal program between students from Coventry, Connecticut, and Moscow, Russia, would turn into a unique cultural exchange program spanning ten years and involving over 300 American and Russian students and chaperones.

Having hosted a group of Russian students in Connecticut (with trips to Washington, D.C. and Space Camp in Florida), sixteen middle school students and their chaperones were preparing to embark on a trip of a lifetime. For the next 16 days, they would live in Russian homes, go to Russian schools, eat Russian food and become immersed in the culture of that ancient country. For many it would be a life-changing experience and the beginning of lasting friendships among people from the two countries.

The first night in Moscow the group of Americans were "formally" welcomed to School #7 in Kraznagorsk through a traditional Russian Tea. It was quite an experience. Russian students in traditional garb greeted the group with bread and salt, followed by a variety of "sweets," tea and then series of performances. Russian students displayed a wide variety of talents as they sang and danced their way into the hearts of the American group.

**“For many it would be a life changing experience...”**

also served to keep the Americans in Russia informed of the weather back home (at one point it was warmer in Moscow than in Connecticut!) and to keep the Americans apprised of the standings of the University of Connecticut's men's and women's basketball teams.

For this group of Americans, there were several "firsts." They were the first Americans to be allowed to visit the Nakhabino Military Base. Nestled away in the forest, it is the site of the first successful Russian rocket launch. A Russian colonel was the escort, and he took the group through snow-covered fields to the site where a monument had been erected to Sergei Korolev, the Father of Russian rocketry. Russian and American students then launched their own model rockets from this historic site. After the launch the group had lunch...an outdoor barbecue on a Russian military base...in February... in the snow...and it was EXCELLENT! The menu consisted of chicken, bread, vegetables, and piping hot tea. The American students said they had never tasted such great chicken before.



Saskaya Tower at the Kremlin

As this was the first group of American students to visit School #7, there were many questions about America. Several classroom visitations provided forums

where Russian students quizzed the Americans on every conceivable topic about American life.

E-mail was used to keep the students back at Nathan Hale School in Coventry informed of the group's activities. E-mail



*Coventry and Moscow students launch model rockets  
at Nakhabino Military Base*

At least two students have come to America to further their education and one has become an integral part of an American family. Some participants have gone back to Russia and others have hosted their Russian brother or sister during summer vacations.

“We have the same problems...  
the same worries and  
the same ideals...”

The Americans have fond memories of visiting the Kremlin, St. Basil’s Cathedral, St. Petersburg (via an overnight train) and other historic sites but the lasting memories are about the people they met and the lifetime relationships they have developed. Who would have thought that a group of Russian and American middle school students would one day come together and go to Space Camp, meet Alan Shepard, see one space shuttle return to Cape Kennedy, and another shuttle blast off into space; or that they would journey half way around the world and visit the site of the first Russian rocket launch, launch model rockets at that very site and then visit the Cosmonaut training center at Star City? Yes, indeed the times are changing. It makes one wonder what the future holds!

More than just a heartwarming story of American students abroad, the Coventry-Moscow exchanges have produced some interesting and far-reaching outcomes.

First, Russian language classes are now part of the world language offerings at Capt. Nathan Hale School. Students in grades seven and eight can enroll in a rigorous language program, which brings students to a 2<sup>nd</sup> year language level. In addition to learning the language, students experience Russian culture through writing and performing plays, preparing Russian cuisine and interacting with people who have either visited Russia or are Russian by birth. The C.N.H.S. program is one of only a handful of middle school Russian programs in Connecticut.

Many American families have kept in touch with their Russian counterparts. Furthermore, favorable telephone rates and e-mail have allowed Russians and Americans to communicate regularly.

Through the work of Mary-Ann Hansen and the State Department of Education, grants were obtained and many other schools in Connecticut have established exchange programs with Russian schools. This type of “people to people” program has created a level of understanding of another culture that would not be possible through ordinary classroom experiences. Some of the best indicators of success of the program are quotes from journals of the students.

### **From the Russians**

“The project gave us a wonderful opportunity to know each other better. It has even forced many people at school to re-examine their values. We know now that we have the same problems... the same worries and the same ideals. We all want peace and we want to be friends, not enemies.”

“The most important achievements: 1) We met nice people, who are our best friends now. And this fact helps to unite people from different countries. 2) We saw the wonderful country - the USA, about which we had read and heard a lot.” 3) We've learned a lot of about the American culture, customs and about the system of education in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

4). We've visited many lessons in these schools and discussed many questions about the education and upbringing of teenagers in America and Russia. Our joint work has helped us to find out some common problems and has helped us in our work at school (now our teachers use, as their lessons, a lot of things which we've seen in your schools)."

“...they have been  
changed profoundly by

“...they have been  
changed profoundly by

### From the Americans

“We were amazed by the talents of Russian students, by the emphasis the school places on the arts and their importance in students' everyday lives. The experience of going to Perm was tremendously rewarding for all participants. The trip has subtly changed one senior's goals for the future: he has decided to major

in Russian at college. For me personally it was a most unforgettable and special trip...”

“In talking with students I have seen many changes in attitude. Most of them are self-acknowledged. They want to participate in public forums where they can discuss what they have learned. They feel that they have been changed profoundly by their experience and they have made some wonderful suggestions about how we can improve topics in our Russian Language Program. Students (also) spoke before the local Board of Education. The reaction from the Board was that these students had matured, developed a keener sense of tolerance of others, and had learned to appreciate what they had.”

### Evidence of changes in attitude or knowledge acquired by the participants

One Connecticut school as part of its "Diversity Day" had the students who visited Russia do a special presentation. “Listening to the students you could see the change of attitudes. The before and after was astounding! The change was due to the cultural approach of this project,” remarked one observer.

Students from another school are discussing a fund-raising activity in order to purchase new books for their Russian school partner.

From still another school: "One of the teacher participants fell in love with Russia and the people he met. He is now studying Russian and is planning to travel there (again) in the near future. [His] students comment frequently on the fact that the trip contributed in a major way to their understanding of everything they have been learning about Russia in history classes. The experience deepened their understanding and made all the data real and immediate."



*Winter bar-be-cue, Russian Style*

Site visits to the participating schools in the Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly the countries of the Soviet Union, including Russia) also illustrate the value of the program for both language and technology. A noticeable and increased proficiency in the English level of both students and teachers wishing to participate in the exchange is evident. Similar to our "Internet" evolution, schools in the CIS are also undergoing a transformation. From the rudiments of e-mail, schools are now moving onto the World Wide Web. Schools in Puschnio and Artek now have their own pages on the Internet.

### Other programs to Promote Tolerance

While not every school can develop an international exchange program, they can perhaps look to neighboring communities for a more local exchange. There is a rich mix of cultures and nationalities in Connecticut. Even short term, modest exchanges can benefit students. Any program that promotes real-life experiences for middle schoolers will help to promote tolerance of others and help to celebrate the diversity that is part of the American way.

*Tom Dzicek is the Challenge & Enrichment Program Teacher at Capt. Nathan Hale School.*



# As Viewed from the Center ... *prejudice and intolerance are universal problems and are not confined just to inner cities.*

At a recent meeting of the CAS Middle Level Professional Studies Committee, members were asked to list the greatest challenges facing Connecticut principals in the new millennium. The one that elicited the greatest response was the challenge of dealing with prejudice and intolerance. What was surprising about this response was not the topic as much as from whence it came. With but one exception, the principals were from small rural communities and the prejudice and rejection of differences they were speaking about were, by and large, not racial or ethnic. Rather, they were primarily about alienation, bullying and scapegoating.

While there have always been interest groups and cliques, in-crowds and outcasts, there seems to be a greater polarization in the last decade and a corresponding decline in tolerance and acceptance of differences. With increasing frequency, young people are subjected to harassment, bullying and abuse just because they are “punks” instead of “jocks,” “skaters” instead of “preps,” and “geeks” instead of “trendies.” Nowhere is the problem more apparent and troublesome than at the middle school level. To those who work in the middle, this comes as no surprise, for it is the 10 to 14 year olds, the early adolescents, who are becoming aware of their differences for the first time and are perhaps the least well equipped to deal with them. With the onset of puberty comes a heightened (and often misplaced) sense of fairness and justice, and the uncertainty that goes with physical, social and emotional growth spurts. With all of these changes occurring, it is understandable that many young people behave outside the acceptable norms and the rules. Without the restraint that comes with maturity, real and imagined slights become cause for lashing out, both physically and verbally. Furthermore, those who are different become the targets for those who cover their own immaturity and uncertainty by directing abuse at others. Even adults are not immune from occasionally being the object of a middle schooler’s wrath.

Acknowledging that there have always been differences, one might ask why those differences have translated into more violence and intolerance in the last decade. While much has been written about school climate, expectations for success and academic standards, this writer postulates that there are two often overlooked factors contributing to increased intolerance and aggressive behavior. They are as follows:

- an insufficient number of good adult role models;
- a decline in the influence of religious institutions and scouting; and,
- under-developed social skills.

Arguably, the tremendous increase in the number of single parent families has had some effect on modeling desired adult behavior. While there are certainly many wonderful, functional families led by single parents, it is certainly more difficult for one parent to find quality time for his or her children. Also, it is important for children to have daily contact with role models of the same sex. I suspect that there are more boys without significant men in their lives than girls without significant women. This exacerbates the problem of aggression in young people, as males are more prone to aggression than females. So with more parents working, and fewer two-parent families, where do impressionable early adolescents turn for role models? To compound the problem, there has been a steady decline over the past decade in the influence of religious institutions and scouting, which traditionally aided families in the ethical and moral development of children and the development of appropriate social skills. With less time devoted to supervised interactions with others and more time spent alone or with television or computers, it is not surprising that there is less “person to person” tolerance among young people.

Educators in affluent suburbs and rural areas should not be complacent and assume that intolerance is a city phenomenon. Intolerance takes many forms and is not confined to places where race or ethnic origins are major factors. It is just as prevalent and just as problematic in areas where people appear to be more alike than different. The need for aggressive programs to foster positive inter-personal relations and tolerance is universal. Remember, the middle school philosophy encompasses responsibility for educating the whole child. Consider interpersonal skills and tolerance to be as important to your curriculum as math and reading. The quality of American life in the future may hang in the balance.

By: Earle G. Bidwell



# CAN NAMES REALLY HURT US?

(Teaching acceptance to Middle School Students)

By: Ann M. Richardson, Principal Strong Middle School

*Support for our students to understand and accept difference is a struggle in today's world.*

With so many acts of hatred visibly displayed, how do we help young people learn to be more tolerant of others? This is a question that many people struggle with on a daily basis. The nurturing of tolerance is often over shadowed by media coverage of actions of prejudice. Consequently, our youth play out these acts in the hallways and on the front steps of our schools. Intolerant behavior portrays itself in a variety of disguises. It is not just the struggle of accepting one another because of the differences in skin tone or religious beliefs; the lack of acceptance is reflected in clothing, music, and hairstyles. This results in rejection that becomes intolerance for others and manifests into prejudice that lasts for a lifetime of hatred toward anything that is different.

Today, schools around the country are focusing on changing student's perception of differences through exposing them to a wide variety of programs. Many of these programs call for mere increases in the frequency of exposure to different students from other school districts and socio-economic backgrounds. Others allow students to talk and process the reasons why being different is distasteful.

The students at Strong Middle School have made strides toward changing the process which results in prejudicial behavior. They have taken part in several programs that support student understanding of differences. One such program called "Names Can Hurt Us," a seminar for middle school students, has proven to be a tremendous help in teaching acceptance of differences. Facilitation teams of four people were made up of two middle school teachers and two high school students. The teams spent time training with leaders from the Anti-defamation league. Activities and supportive techniques were discussed to aid students to talk about issues that hurt them. The teams shared and built a plan to empower all of the students during the seminar day.

In preparation for the day, the teachers talked about how the day should unfold. All seventh and eighth grade students gathered in early February to talk about the hurt that name calling causes and how they could appreciate the differences found in others. During that day, activities were implemented in each classroom to foster student communication. Everyone was given the opportunity to speak and to offer constructive points about how they accept differences in others. A discussion by a panel of high school students was broadcast to each classroom through close-circuit TV. In their discussions, students shared their hurts and disclosed how they had hurt others when they were in middle school. This panel session was followed by interaction between a randomly selected group of middle school students and the panelists. They talked openly about the comments they heard and asked the high school students questions. All of the discussion was aired on the broadcasting system. A video was viewed depicting middle school students talking about the pain they felt when people mistreated them by calling them names, using racial slurs or making degrading personal comments.

## ***THE NO-TAUNTING PLEDGE***

*I will pledge to be part of the solution.*

*I will eliminate taunting from my own behavior.*

*I will encourage others to do the same.*

*I will do my part to make my community a safe place by  
being more sensitive to others.*

*I will set the example of a caring individual.*

*I will eliminate profanity towards others from my language.*

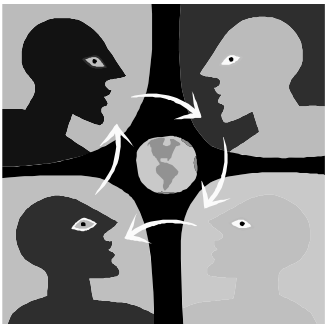
*I will not let my words or actions hurt others.*

*And if others won't become part of the solution,  
I will.*

*Anonymous*

The seminar closed with each student taking a no taunting pledge and building an action plan to stop harassment. Representatives were selected from each room and sent to the broadcasting station where they shared their plan live with the whole school.

On that day, students made commitments to change the way they interact with one another. They pledged to stop treating each other with disrespect. The staff has planned another follow-up day, which will focus on supporting the experiences of the February seminar. During the second day, students will be asked to reflect on their pledge and to process how they are doing with their commitment to decrease harassment toward others. Again, each student will be asked to work on making the school a better place for everyone. This year, Strong Middle School has embarked on a new road to help everyone appreciate differences.



## A Student's Perspective

By: Brett Eagleson, 8<sup>th</sup> grade student, Strong Middle School

As I reflect upon my experiences in the inter-district *Glimmerglass* program, cultural understanding through storytelling, I am thankful for Strong School's emphasis on the program "Names Can Really Hurt Us." "Names Can Really Hurt Us" is an excellent program that helps students recognize the differences between their peers. It sets aside differences and helps share the positive attributes between each other. The student population is composed of students with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. What may appear to be innocent name-calling or slang statements can be very hurtful and disrespectful to the recipient. "Names Can Really Hurt Us" taught us to break down the barrier of differences and gain an understanding of each other. With the understanding of each other we all learn to be cooperative and respectful of each other's differences. Working with the positive opens the lines of communication, for a cooperative and harmonious relationship.

"Names Can Really Hurt Us" provided me with an open mind and attitude in the *Glimmerglass* program. The *Glimmerglass* program is a program where students from several different towns integrate with each other and learn the background of many different cultures through the art of storytelling. I was at ease meeting and working with students from several different school districts. The students in the program were from many different backgrounds and ethnic origins. Having experienced the fundamentals of the "Names Can Really Hurt Us" program, I was not tense or nervous about meeting new people. Having this advantage, I was able to immediately make new friends from other towns. In fact, the experiences and strategies I learned from "Names Can Really Hurt Us" helped me to ease tensions between students from other districts. *Glimmerglass* proved to be an enriching and rewarding program allowing students to gain insight into the many diverse and cultural backgrounds that make up our population.

"Names Can Really Hurt Us" is an excellent stepping-stone in developing an understanding of the diversity within our society. It gave me the strength and guidance I needed to successfully complete the *Glimmerglass* program.

## "What is a Good Middle School?" is coming soon!

A video production by the CAS Middle Level Professional Studies Committee

*Suitable for:*

- Student Orientation
- Open House
- Board of Education Presentations
- Parent/Teacher Meetings

Watch for details in the CAS Bulletin

# Multicultural Education: The Windham-Coventry Experience

*Multicultural studies have attracted a wide audience in educational circles in the last two decades and, in some areas, they have even gained a permanent footing in school curricula.*

Departing from the Eurocentric bias of an earlier time, courses at all academic levels have begun to examine and recognize the Hispanic, African, and Asian contributions to American culture. Through the generosity of a Connecticut State Multicultural Grant, the middle schools in Windham (predominantly Hispanic) and Coventry (predominantly Caucasian) have been engaged in a multicultural exchange for the past five years. These yearly exchanges have provided students with an opportunity to: (1) explore each other's culture; (2) examine their own background; (3) establish enduring friendships; (4) dispel misconceptions on issues concerning race, culture, and ethnicity; and, (5) promote tolerance. In all, the exchange has been a tremendous learning experience.



In preparation for the actual exchange, students at both schools are immersed in the study of United States immigration history

In preparation for the actual exchange, students at both schools are immersed in the study of United States immigration history. The reasons for immigration, the groups involved, the legislative impact, the difficulties undertaken in a dangerous voyage, the discomfort and alienation experienced by immigrants in a foreign land, and the contributions made by newcomers are all explored in detail. An extensive vocabulary is introduced as are the many influences concerning celebrations, clothing, and food on American cultural life today. Emphasized are the enormous powers of cultural absorption that this nation has demonstrated in the past as well as the

accompanying experiences generated by prejudice and fear. One of the most revealing surprises to emerge among students is the fact that since earliest times, the entity that became the United States has always played host to a diverse population.

In the Windham-Coventry exchange, students met five times per year and participate in activities designed to bring together two diverse populations and foster trust, understanding, and friendship. The first meeting is intended to acquaint students with one another in a series of icebreaker activities. Problem solving, sharing and fun are promoted. The next two sessions are geared toward specific activities that explore the multicultural experience itself. Here students engage in an immigrant simulation, sew quilts, create masks, participate in folk dancing, write creative essays, perform in plays, and take part in a number of other activities designed to promote a better understanding of cultural heritage. Following the completion of activities, the students share and display their work for parents during an evening presentation. The culminating activity is a field trip to Ellis Island. The end result in the exchange of five years has been rewarding. New friendships have been created and continue to endure, and a greater understanding of America's diversity has been promoted. The multicultural exchange now has become one of the most eagerly anticipated events during a student's eighth grade year.



*Icebreaker*



*Getting to Know You*

Dr. A.J. Scopino, Jr.  
Bethia Newmarker  
Multicultural Coordinators  
Captain Nathan Hale Middle School  
Coventry, CT

In spite of its success, multicultural education is not without its detractors. Multicultural education, according to the naysayers, only promotes division and separateness. On the contrary, multicultural education helps to identify common interests, values, and experiences among diverse peoples. "Multicultural education," according to educator James A. Banks, writing in *The School Administrator* in May of 1999, "is trying to help unify a deeply divided nation, not to divide one that is united." The resurgence of hate crimes, the rise of armed militias that preach separatism, and the high incidence of intolerance practiced in many parts of this country call out for greater understanding of, and appreciation for, cultural diversity. Multicultural education is one way to satisfy this need.

**"Multicultural education...is trying to help unify a deeply divided nation, not to divide one that is united."**

# Diversity in a Not-so-Diverse School

By: Lynn Sloan

What do you do when you need to educate your students about diversity, and the vast majority of your school is Caucasian? It's not easy, but it's do-able, according to fifth grade teachers at Tolland Middle School in rural Tolland, Connecticut.

With only a four percent minority representation in the school population, firsthand experiences with diversity in this school are few and far between. It's a predicament faced by many Connecticut schools where teachers have an increasing need to ensure their students are not only aware of other cultures, but are also tolerant of others "different" from themselves. That can be a challenge with middle school-aged children, when fitting in is often one of their most important concerns.

However, part of the challenge is rethinking the concept of diversity. Diversity doesn't have to just be about race or culture. Diversity can include any difference such as age, background, hair color, size or family makeup. The children we are teaching today have already found out that there are others who do not share their same opinions or interests, who have a different heritage, or who have different family units. Soon, these same students will enter high schools where there are even more students with perhaps even greater differences. When they attend college or enter the workforce, they will again find that the world is not composed of people exactly like themselves. They need to learn to be interested in and appreciate differences.

So how then do we teach diversity? the heart of your teaching, it is best what you feel is right. Here are helpful for one fifth grade.

**Diversity in Literature.** While the include representations of many fifth grade teachers at Tolland Middle newspaper supplements, and other *The Story of Harriet Tubman* – Sterling, not only offers insight into the issue of slavery and the life of a black heroine, but other educational opportunities as well. Parallels can be drawn to other ethnic groups that have been enslaved or persecuted. Incorporating other biographies in the curriculum is an effective way of developing understanding and appreciation of others. Sometimes, it's best to go back to basics. *The Sneetches and Other Stories*, as well as many other Dr. Seuss books, offer messages of tolerance that can be used for class discussions and as springboards for battling stereotypes. Teachers ensure their classroom libraries contain literature that is representative of culturally diverse backgrounds. However, great care should be taken to ensure that the literature we present to our students is both accurate and acknowledged as truly representative of a group or culture.

**Diversity in Field Trips.** As part of Black History Month, the entire fifth grade attended a children's theater production based on *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Students learning about segregation now have a more vivid impression of this important time in history. Students have also had the opportunity to visit a "sister school" in Hartford, and meet students they had been corresponding with in a pen pal activity. The fifth grade teachers have also taken students to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Ledyard, where students learned the history of Native Americans in Connecticut and met tribal members.



“...fitting in is often one of their most important concerns.”

There are no magic formulas, but in to be sensitive and thoughtful, and do some of the strategies that have been

majority of school reading books cultural backgrounds, many fifth School seek out trade books, text that address minority groups. *Freedom Train*, written by Dorothy



# Diversity...Just Around the Corner

By: Juliana Wyland

At Tolland Middle School, we are committed to connecting our middle school programs to community needs, interests, and resources and have developed extensive intergenerational programs that have provided diversity and enabled local senior citizens to leave our emerging adolescents a legacy of unforgettable memories.

"Remember when . . . . . " involved our students in an interdisciplinary, intergenerational project that focused on the Hurricane of 38. Students interviewed local senior citizens who had survived experiences of the hurricane, recorded their oral histories and studied the rich language of the period. The older adults came into my classroom laden with albums of pictures, yellow newspaper clippings and boxes of memorabilia.

Students also interviewed local seniors about World War II and wrote books about their memories. They made a quilt to hang in the new senior center and each patch represents a senior's experiences in the war or on the home front. The students even interviewed them for a cable access TV show!

"Out of this World," our integrated interdisciplinary unit about outer space, involved older adults, too. Students listened to Orson Wells' "War of the Worlds" broadcast and then interviewed senior citizens who had heard it in 1938. Additional diversity was provided when the 7th grade class and 6th grade students from a rural school became our Expo guests.

To celebrate Women's' History month, I invited a panel of 12 women, ages 68-88, to discuss events in their lives that made a difference; such things as the spread of disease, World War II, the Depression, education and family life, and roles of women in society. The students were spellbound by their recollections about the changes of the role of women, especially during WWII, Rosie the Riveter, alive and well!

These intergenerational programs have helped to integrate social studies and language arts classes and have provided diversity. They have had a powerful impact on student learning.

The legacy of shared memories became material for TV shows, stories and Expo projects. Student work was celebrated and the students formed relationships with adult role models. They learned to interview, take notes and share what they have learned.

Parents often tell me that their children will not forget the legacy that the older adults left them; nor will I. "Diversity .... just around the corner!"

*Juliana Wyland is a social studies teacher in a "looped" 7th/8th" grade team at Tolland Middle School.*



[Continued from 17](#)

**Diversity in the Classroom.** Students have had the opportunity to explore and share their own genealogy through a computer project that has been implemented in the curriculum, and some have created a "family shield" that communicates to others the special qualities their families share.

**Diversity in School Programs.** Through ESTEEM, an outreach program run by Canton High School, Tolland fifth graders have a fantastic opportunity to learn about differences, self-esteem, respect, and other issues. Every year a group of high school students present skits and teach dances that foster respect for oneself and others. Also, a successful Native American Day program had students involved in hands-on activities that included games, crafts, food sampling, and learning from a Native American while sitting inside a teepee currently used by a local tribe.

**Diversity in You.** As teachers, we are among the most important role models in our students' lives. By sharing our own backgrounds and differences and modeling proper attitudes towards differences, we can give to our students this same appreciation of diversity.

Not all of us have the opportunity to work in a

# A Look At Diversity Programs at Parish Hill

By: Andy Seles, English Teacher

Parish Hill Middle/Senior High School houses grades seven through twelve. As such, it is not a typical middle school, and programs open to middle school students often also include older students. Capitalizing on this unique feature, the students and faculty at Parish Hill have been quite active in developing a robust program addressing issues of diversity both inside and outside of the regular school curriculum. The key components relating to diversity issues involve the English and Reading curricula in grades seven through nine, a very active Diversity Club, a Peer Mediation program, and a newly founded Gay-Straight Alliance.

Parish Hill became involved with the issue of diversity in the fall of 1985 when Eve Soumerai, then a teacher at Conard High School, brought a curriculum which dealt with the Holocaust to our school. Parish Hill was one of a few schools that were part of an assessment conducted by Dr. Vincent Rogers at the University of Connecticut which sought to prove that student bias could be impacted by curriculum. The curriculum was ultimately formalized in The Struggle for Freedom, Dignity and Equality, a state of Connecticut teacher resource guide published in 1987 and revised in 1997.

Many of the original components of the curriculum have been divided among grades seven through twelve, and have gone through various mutations. In grade nine, for example, there is a focus on learning and intelligence, and how to interact with people who have learning disabilities or who are physically challenged. A glance at the reading list provided below gives some idea of the depth and breadth of this unit. Students also go through simulations of various disabilities to better understand the conditions. An excellent resource for interactive work is Diversity in Action (Chappelle & Bigman).

## Unit: Being Different

**Materials:** Short Stories: “Flowers for Algernon” (Understanding Literature anthology)

“You need to Go Upstairs” (Understanding Literature)

“Marigolds” (Understanding Literature)

“My Left Foot”

“Mirrorings”

Poems: “I’m Nobody, Who Are You” (Understanding Literature)

“Mirror” (Understanding Literature)

“The Road Not Taken” (Understanding Literature)

“Fable” (Understanding Literature)

“Locked In” (Understanding Literature)

“Plain” (Understanding Literature)

“Ambivalence” (Understanding Literature)

“Pigeon Woman” (Understanding Literature)

“Please Hear Me”

“Like Me”

Novels: Of Mice and Men

The Wave

\*See also book list for individual book reports

Plays: The Miracle Worker

Antigone

Non-fiction: “It’s O.K. to be Different”

“Our Deepest Fear”

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”

“Myths and Facts About People with Disabilities”

\*Editorial Library Research Packet

Film: My Left Foot

The Elephant Man

What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?

Children of a Lesser God



Of Mice and Men  
The Wave  
Antigone  
The Miracle Worker  
Mask  
Charly  
Flowers for Algernon  
Numb  
A Class Divided  
How Difficult Can This Be?

\*See also film list for individual movie



Hands-on Activities/Projects: Algernon Maze

Getting Acquainted Activity

How Difficult Can This Be? (disability simulations)

Diversity in Action (Chappelle & Bigman) activities

Being Different Book Jacket

Being Different Library Research Project

Journal Writing

Rubrics: Movie Review Evaluation

Book (Book Jacket) Report Evaluation

Antigone Response to Literature (RTL) Evaluation

Discussion Question Evaluation

Editorial Opinion Evaluation

**A general goal of the seventh grade reading curriculum is “to develop an awareness of the uniqueness of all human beings.” To this end, students are required to write essays which explain why “labeling” people is good or bad and to defend the position taken. Readings include Walkabout, Morning Girl, Slake’s Limbo and The Acorn People. In conjunction with these readings, students investigate Australian Aboriginal culture, native American culture and homelessness, participate in simulations of various handicaps, and complete research on various challenging mental and physical conditions**

Some general goals of the eighth grade reading curriculum are “to develop an understanding of different cultures, and “ to develop an understanding of the issues surrounding slavery and their impact past and present.” Units of instruction are designed around the Colonial Era, Slavery and the Westward Expansion Era. Students are required to keep a first person journal of books assigned including The Witch of Blackbird Pond, Sign of the Beaver, A Journey to the New World and The Courage of Sarah Noble, When the Legends Die, Shane, A Light in the Forest, Weasel, The Captive, and My Name is Not Angelica. In social studies classes, students participate in a “slave quilt” project and complete a research report and oral presentation for Black History Month. The final reading of the year is Elie Wiesel’s Night. The goal here is “to develop an understanding of the Holocaust, its beginning and its impact on all world citizens.” In the past students have corresponded with Wiesel about the writing of his novel.

**While core curriculum is an important ingredient in diversity education at Parish Hill, it certainly is not the only way we encourage students to be more tolerant of others. The *Diversity Club* at Parish Hill was started nearly six years ago in response to homophobic comments being made by students in the school at that time. Rather than starting a gay-straight alliance (which we now have), we decided to address the more global issue of intolerance and founded a Diversity Club. The Diversity Club is open to all students and meets every Wednesday after school. A number of middle school students attend regularly and are actively involved in club activities. Over the years these activities have included annual “Diversity Day” celebrations, school exchange programs, community service work and support for multi-cultural and community events at our school. Volunteer outside speakers are invited to provide workshops on topics ranging from racism and sexism to homophobia. The students in the club are very involved in the planning for this day and take an active part in its presentation. On our last Diversity Day the Diversity kids (along with some help from our peer mediators) facilitated the whole day with their advisors and faculty taking a “backseat” and participating in group activities on a peer level with their students. Diversity Days are usually quite interactive and hands-on in nature and are not for the faint of heart as they take a great deal of planning.**

Students and faculty advisors who facilitate our Diversity Days and other diversity events receive group facilitation training through a MOSAIC grant provided to EASTCONN. Typically the training will occur twice a year, with veteran students from a group of “sister” schools running the sessions with guidance from faculty advisors from the sister schools as well as the EASTCONN project coordinator. The training, which occurs on a three-day retreat at a nearby 4-H camp, is another opportunity for our mostly white, Christian population to be exposed to students of different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

# Making the Most of the Mastery Test

By: Dennis M. Curran, Principal, Clark Lane Middle School

*Much has been written in various newspapers and periodicals about problems associated with the Connecticut Mastery Test.*

Since the Connecticut State Department of Education published the much-ballyhooed list of ten schools needing improvement, the test has been viewed with even more disfavor than it had previously been in some quarters. While the merits of publishing such a list can be debated, one fact remains abundantly clear: the CMT's are not going away anytime soon.

Faced with that reality, schools need to continue to work toward improving their test scores if for no other reason than to stay off "the list." But there are many more positive reasons to improve the scores for schools. Certainly we must recognize that the scores are not important in and of themselves, but are important because of what they represent: increased student knowledge. Beginning with this premise, we must seek ways to involve staff, students and the community in the effort to increase student knowledge and, concomitantly, raise scores.

The first step in that direction is to identify clear goals and objectives that are related to student performance as measured by the CMT. To do this, a school must begin with a mission statement developed by a democratic committee of stakeholders. Moving out from that base, a few simple, understandable goals can be developed such as: **"Within 5 years, X percent of our students will perform at the goal level on the CMT."** The variable "X" needs to be well thought out and set at a level that is lofty, yet achievable in the timeframe. A school may want to be more specific: **"Within 5 years X percent of our students will perform at the goal level on the math portion of the CMT."**

A school community may want to add a reference point to the goal statement: **"Within 5 years our grade 8 students will perform at the top of the Educational Reference Group."** The language of the goal statement is dependent on the recent history of student performance on the CMT and the mission of the school. It is important, in any case, that the language be simple and understood by all stakeholders, especially the students.

Once the goals have been developed, we must move to specific objectives and action plans to support the goal statements. In other words, we know what we want to happen, how do we make it happen? This becomes the bulk of the plan because it is where staff can determine what happens in the classroom to meet the goals of the school. It is extremely important that the staff be invested in this effort. They must be committed to the objectives and action plans, as they are the ones to carry them out. The only way to insure this is to have them participate in the planning every step of the way. Once

the classroom door is shut, the success of the plan is wholly dependent on what happens behind it. Some examples of objectives are:

- **"All staff will become involved in the importance and improvement of CMT results"**
- **"Create parent and community involvement in improving CMT results and communicating the importance of these test results."**
- **"Involve the student body in the importance and improvement of CMT test results."**

It is important to note here that action plans are the essence of the success or failure of this effort. If these plans are not accepted and understood by the staff, they have a slim chance of working!

Specific action plans will include statements like:

- **"Teach students the different levels of scoring used for open-ended questions and the writing sample."**
- **"Educate parents as to how the test results are used for student placement decisions."**
- **"Each grade level team will organize after-school help sessions based on areas of weakness as identified on the CMT."**
- **"Teachers will have math students explain their strategy in solving problems and justifying their answers in writing."**

Now that the staff has collaborated on the plan, there is a definite direction that they, the students and parents, can see and invest in. This is the start of a school and community effort to improve student learning. The plan must be a living document that is referred to often by the administration. ***It falls on the administration to keep the plans at the forefront in the daily operation of the school. It is paramount that the administration begins to look at staffing and budgeting in terms of the mission, goals, objectives and action plans of the school. In essence, follow the blueprint.***

***We have learned to make the most of the mastery test.***

At Clark Lane Middle School, we began this process in 1995 when our scores hit an all-time low. Through planning as described above, we have been able to elevate our CMT scores to a point where they have doubled in some instances. Overall, our student performance has improved greatly since the first year of the plan. The commitment from the staff, students, and parents has been incredible. Importantly, the students are the big winners here, as we know they have increased in the skill areas tested by the Connecticut Mastery Test!

*As times change, Prentice Hall has changed to meet the new and challenging demands of teachers, parents, and students. A generation of students is now growing up with television, movies, the Internet, and computer games, in a stimuli-rich world and a more diverse learning environment. In addition, today's teachers are dealing with new academic demands as the result of curriculum reforms, new national standards, and recently revised Connecticut assessments. What kind of help can you expect from your partner in education? Quite simply, Prentice Hall is striving to help students, teachers, administrators and parents in every way possible.*

**DIVERSITY - Today's mainstream classrooms must address:**

*the student,  
higher standards,  
customized instruction,  
expanding curriculum needs,  
new ways to access information.*

**Prentice Hall reaches today's student with materials** that are visually appealing and exciting. Our programs address learning styles and diverse student needs. Text and graphics work together. Captions teach the content in pictures and illustrations. We have moved beyond "readability" to create "reader friendly" texts like *Science Explorer* and *World Explorer* in the middle grades, and we've incorporated these design elements into our high school programs as well.

**Prentice Hall reaches today's student by setting higher standards** in education. Significant research has indicated that when we expect more from our students, we get more. Throughout our programs transition statements help students make connections from individual facts to broad concepts. In addition, Prentice Hall materials connect previously learned material to current content, bridging the information gap. Drawing conclusions, as well as analyzing and synthesizing information move students from just learning facts to dealing with higher order thinking skills and the more powerful cognitive levels of reasoning.

**Prentice Hall helps teachers customize instruction** with instructional materials that fit every teaching and learning style. Our mathematics books include "explore" and "investigate" lessons with rich, hands-on experiences that connect to the real world. This is evident in the top rated *Connected Mathematics Project* and in *SFAW Middle School Mathematics*. A "reading skills strand" in *Literature, Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes* helps today's students more effectively access the world of literature. Plus, a new 2001 Writing and Grammar program for grades 6-12 has just been developed, and the latest learning strategies like "TPR or total physical response" are now included in *Paso a Paso* for learning Spanish. In addition, customized instruction is evident in the *primary source materials* included in our social studies programs.

**Prentice Hall has expanded your curriculum options** with the Connected Mathematics Project, new Grammar and Writing, new Civics, Economics, UCSMP (University of Chicago School Mathematics Project), new Chemistry, Health, Driver Education and expansive selections in AP, honors, and elective courses.

**Prentice Hall gives you new ways to access information** with the leading Internet web sites available. Beyond our Interactive Student Tutorials, audiotapes, videotapes, CD-ROM's and laser disks, our subject specific web sites support program content and link to exciting sources in every subject. Visit us at [www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com) and see how today's student can learn science, math, language arts, social studies and modern languages.

**In short, Prentice Hall is committed - on a variety of levels - to help you reach and motivate all of your students.**

# Improving CMT Performance

By: *Ralph White*

*Every fall eighth-grade students spend several days taking Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs) and the test results are an important indication of students' educational progress as specified by the state.*

At Parish Hill, teachers and administrators have been looking for ways to help students improve their test performance. Two initiatives appear to show promise for achieving gains. The first is a change in emphasis for summer school and the second is a packet of summer work for students to complete at home.

During the 1998-1999 academic year, the results that the students in the eighth grade achieved on the Connecticut Mastery Test were compared with the scores that the same students achieved while they were in the seventh grade (off-level testing administered and scored at the school). This comparison produced the following correlation coefficients:

Mathematics (by objectives mastered)	0.88192
Mathematics (by matched objectives)	0.612504
DRP	0.745119
Writing sample	0.407006

In interpreting these coefficients it is necessary to understand that coefficients can vary from +1.0 to -1.0. The closer the coefficient is to +1.0, the more the two sets of data will change together; that is, if one set of scores increases, the other set also increases. The closer the coefficient is to -1.0, the more the two sets of data will change in opposite directions; that is, if one set of data increases, then the other set decreases by roughly the same amount. The closer the coefficient is to zero, the greater the probability that the two sets of data are independent; that is, knowing how one set of data changes gives little information about the other set of data.

Applying this information to the above correlation coefficients, mathematics scores on the seventh grade version of the CMT are good predictors for how the students will score on the eighth grade version. The seventh grade DRP (Degree of Reading Power) correlations are not as strong but are still good indicators of how students will score on the eighth grade DRP. Given the data, seventh grade writing sample scores are not particularly good for predicting how well the students will score on eighth grade writing samples.

Using the information gathered from the interpretation of test scores, Parish Hill educators reviewed scores of students in the seventh grade. Based on this review, letters were sent to parents of students whose seventh grade CMT scores were low. These students were encouraged to attend summer school. In previous years the focus of summer school had been enrichment. This year the decision was made to change to an academic emphasis that would address areas of weak skills as indicated by the CMT results. The summer curriculum was planned around materials newly purchased from Educational Design, Inc. that were written specifically to focus on those skills tested on the CMTs. For those students going from seventh grade to eighth grade, the summer school used 8<sup>th</sup> Grade CMT Reading Comprehensive Coach, Grade 8 Connecticut Mastery Test DRP CLOZ, CMT Math Grade 8 and Strategies for Math Problems 7 & Up.

Ten of the students with low scores on their seventh grade CMTs chose to attend summer school, and six of those same students were still enrolled at Parish Hill this fall when the CMTs were administered to the eighth grade. The mean change in score from the seventh grade to the eighth grade for students who attended summer school can be compared to the mean change in score for students who did not attend summer school. This comparison appears in Table 1.





**TABLE 1**

	<b>Attended Summer School</b>	<b>Did Not Attend Summer School</b>
Means		
7 <sup>th</sup> DRP	53.8	65.1
8 <sup>th</sup> DRP	61.6	68.9
Increase	7.8	3.8
7 <sup>th</sup> Reading	12	18.1
8 <sup>th</sup> Reading	14.5	19.6
Increase	2.5	1.5
7 <sup>th</sup> Math	37.8	72.9
8 <sup>th</sup> Math	44.8	74.1
Increase	7	1.2
7 <sup>th</sup> Writing	4.2	7.1
8 <sup>th</sup> Writing	6.6	6.9
Increase	2.4	-0.2
7 <sup>th</sup> Written Comprehension	23.2	34.5
8 <sup>th</sup> Written Comprehension	23	32.4
Increase	-0.2	-2.1

Although these results should be interpreted cautiously because the sample of students who attended summer school is small, there is a greater degree of improvement for students who attended summer school in every category than for students who did not. These results clearly support the conclusion that these students benefited from summer school by improving their performance on the Connecticut Mastery Test significantly more than students who did not attend summer school.

Current plans for summer school in 2000 include improving the bus transportation in hopes that more students will take advantage of the opportunity for test score improvement so clearly indicated by last year's results.

In the second initiative, all seventh grade students were given a packet in June 1999 to complete over the summer. These packets contained materials for mathematics, writing and reading. Seventh and eighth grade teachers in each of these subjects selected materials that either addressed the specific area of weakness identified for students by their CMT math performance, or addressed areas of weakness that teachers identified by observing and evaluating those students who earned low scores in reading and on the writing sample. The students were asked to complete the material in the packets over the summer and return them to their teachers on the first day of school. Those students who returned the completed packets were rewarded with a pizza party. Sixteen students out of 90 (18%) returned the completed packets. As with the summer school, a comparison can be made between the

mean score of those who completed the packets and those who didn't. That comparison appears in Table 2.

The findings for improvement attributable to work on these packets were not as straightforward or as easy to interpret as the findings from summer school. First, the group of students completing the packets was larger and had a greater range of abilities. In this kind of sampling, students who demonstrated fairly strong performance on the seventh grade CMT could be expected to have a smaller marginal gain since they started closer to the peak of their abilities.

Second, there was the possibility that those students who completed the packets were more motivated and the differential achievement reflected their motivation as well as the possible benefits of completing the packets. With these factors in mind, the implications of the comparison of the improvement showed by each of these groups conservatively seems to be that the mathematics packet was the most effective, the reading packet the least effective and the writing packet somewhere between these two. The positive results of the mathematics and the writing packets as shown on the writing sample scores indicate that continuing to give packets for summer work is worth pursuing for the next summer. Teachers will be examining all three packets in an effort to fine-tune them.

While the groups of students in both initiatives were small, the preliminary results are encouraging and plans are underway to repeat and expand these opportunities in the future.

**TABLE 2**

	<b>Completed Packet</b>	<b>Did Not Complete Packet</b>
Means		
7 <sup>th</sup> DRP	66.6	63.8
8 <sup>th</sup> DRP	67.9	68.5
Increase	1.3	4.7
7 <sup>th</sup> Reading	17.4	17.6
8 <sup>th</sup> Reading	18.4	19.4
Increase	0.9	1.8
7 <sup>th</sup> Math	72.5	70.5
8 <sup>th</sup> Math	75.4	71.7
Increase	2.8	1.2
7 <sup>th</sup> Writing	7.3	6.8
8 <sup>th</sup> Writing	7.8	6.7
Increase	0.5	-0.1
7 <sup>th</sup> Written	34.6	33.3
8 <sup>th</sup> Written	32.7	31.4
Increase	-1.9	-1.9