

**NAME 2011**  
**“Reworking Intersections - Reframing Debates - Restoring Hope**  
**Nov. 2-5, 2011 – Chicago IL**

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In November of this year, we attended the national NAME conference in Chicago, IL. This was the 21<sup>st</sup> annual conference, and just as in previous years, this one was a great success. Many of the board members were able to attend, including this year’s president, Dr. Jackie Thompson. Dr. Thompson has asked us to write this short essay in order to highlight some of the events that occurred and topics that were addressed at this year’s conference.

There were many wonderful speakers and breakout sessions throughout the week. We were able to walk away with a number of useful ideas for how we will change our own teaching. We are both professors of Multicultural Education and ESL Methods at UVU and were able to take away from the conference multiple ideas for how to make our Multicultural Education classes better and more current.

Our hope with this essay is to share just a few of the wonderful ideas shared at the conference. We will do this in three parts. The first will be some ideas from William Ayers who was the keynote speaker on Thursday. We will then discuss some of the breakout sessions we attended. Finally, we will end this essay with a discussion of the Regional Meeting, in which Utah participates.

**Keynote speaker William Ayers**

On Thursday afternoon, we were privileged to hear from William Ayers. He spoke about wanting our students to interrogate the world, and have them begin by asking fundamental questions such as: who in the world am I? How did I get here and where am I going? What in the world are my choices? How in the world shall I proceed?—and then to pursue the answers wherever they might take them.

He also talked about the responsibilities of educators as citizens. As citizens, we have obligations to see the world as it is, in all its complexity. When we specialize in one academic area and ignore other issues society is dealing with is to be morally blind. We need to teach our content areas within the willingness to participate in public debate.

One interesting concept Ayers talked about was something we had previously talked about being our theme for this year's Utah NAME conference. He discussed the concept that extraordinary change happens when ordinary people step up and *do* something. This concept connects nicely with the theme of our conference this year which is: *Narratives of Bravery and Hope: Ordinary People United for Extraordinary Change*.

### **Breakout Sessions**

Of course there were far too many breakout session to review here. However, we would like to mention just a few, and share some of the information discussed in those sessions. The first one we would like to mention was called “Directions and Misdirections in School Diversity and Multicultural Education Initiatives” by Paul Gorski. It was a pleasure to attend Dr. Gorski's session on Thursday morning. He talked about what

he has seen happening in various schools he has been doing research in as far as providing equity for students and what seems to be working and what does not.

Dr. Gorski discussed some different approaches to Multicultural Education that he sees in the schools he visits. These different approaches include: *Celebrating Diversity, Cultural Competence, Support Programming, Human Relations, and Equity and Justice*. We will not discuss all of these, but we want to touch on couple of them. The first is the far too common celebratory approach which consists of celebrating diverse foods, dances, clothing, etc. Dr. Gorski defined it as “Surface-level cultural activities and programming (fashion shows, food fairs)” and “Stereotypical minimizations of “cultures” (Taco Night).” He claims, however, that this does not do anything for equity in the school. Dr. Gorski said that it is not bad to do this celebratory type of Multicultural Education, but we need to not kid ourselves that it has anything to do with equity.

The other approach we will discuss here is that of “cultural competence”. Gorski says this is categorized by:

- “focuses on learning about cultures, often in ways that minimize or essentialize them (“Latino culture”; “African American culture”);
- Focuses exclusively on those in the “minority” while ignoring systemic power and privilege;
- An expectation that those in disenfranchised groups will “teach” those in privileged groups about their “culture”

Dr. Gorski then shared what he sees does not work and what does work as far as providing equity in schools. Below is what he claims does not work to bring equity to

schools. Gorski made it clear that it is not bad to do the following activities; they just do not do anything as far as providing equity in the school. Gorski says,

- **The “Culture of Poverty” and Other Stereotyped Paradigms**: Avoid models which suggest we can know anything about a student based on one dimension of her or his identity.
- **Professional Learning Communities**: Research demonstrates modest amounts of increased teacher morale and connectedness when done certain ways.
- **Student Diversity Clubs**: Can be great educational experiences for students if “diversity” isn’t completely depoliticized, but there is no evidence that diversity clubs make any school more equitable or just because these clubs don’t have the power to change policy or larger school culture.
- **Mix It Up at Lunch Day**: Fun, perhaps, and especially for white students, but does little for students of color.
- **Learning Styles**: Research indicates that teaching directly to “learning styles” does not help students learn or decrease achievement gaps. Mostly because it has been shown to encourage simplification and stereotyping (especially when culture-specific).

In addition to these, Gorski says the following do not work either: *Intergroup dialogue programs*: *Peer mediation programs*, *Conflict mediation programs*, *Respect policies*, and *Cultural festivals*.

On the other hand, those activities that Gorski has observed which do work in providing equity to students in schools include the following:

- **Acknowledgement**: Acknowledge the work diversity advocates are doing and, in some cases, have been doing for years with little recognition and often in the face of strong resistance.
- **Set Expectations**: Leadership (both school and district) must set expectations that people are to do their part to make schools and classrooms equitable, just environments, but equally important, schools need some measure of *accountability* for those who choose not to “participate” in this commitment.
- **Make Family Involvement Accessible to All Families**
- **Reject Deficit Ideology**: Must focus on cultural change at the classroom, building, and district level rather than trying to “fix” the cultures of disenfranchised communities.

- **Engage in Policy Review**: Inequities often are buried in policy in very implicit ways; Pay-to-play extracurriculars; Inaccessible family involvement opportunities.
- **Provide Safe Feedback Outlets**: People who are feeling alienated will not tend to step forward and share their feelings of alienation; they need opportunities to share issues safely and anonymously.
- **Perform Full Assessment**: Full diversity assessment should include various data collection methods (surveys, focus groups, and so on), all constituencies (students, staff, faculty, admin, community, and so on), complete demographics (for cross-comparisons), and detailed disaggregation.
- **Place Equity First**: Effort on addressing educational inequities must be prioritized - Starting with policy and clear indications (through accountability measures) that racism, sexism, and so on, even when it's unintentional, is not acceptable and carries repercussions.

In conclusion, this session was very beneficial for educators committed to multicultural education. Often times we participate in activities we believe are helping to bring equity to our schools, without consulting what the research actually says. This insight by Dr. Paul Gorski can provide teachers and school administrators invaluable information as to how to make their schools accommodating to diverse populations.

Another breakout session we would like to discuss was one led by Lee Mun Wah. Lee Mun Wah is an internationally renowned Chinese American documentary filmmaker, author, poet, Asian folk teller, educator, community therapist and master diversity trainer. He is currently creating a new film, which deals with issues of racism in our society. The first half of the film is completed and was shown at the conference. It is a film about a group of college students who meet for a retreat in order to talk about race and racism on their individual campus and in their lives. Lee Mun Wah said in the breakout session that this will be his last film and that he really wants to see this used throughout the country to talk about the ongoing problem with racism.

In the breakout session, Lee Mun Wah had the students there who were in the documentary. He allowed audience members to ask the students questions about the documentary, but used those questions to model how he believes we should talk with people in general about race and other issues. He taught that when someone asks a question, you should ask back: ‘Why did you ask that?’, ‘What is underneath that question?’, and ‘Do you really want to hear the answer?’ He discussed with the audience, when someone was asked a question, if we were taking note of what was said AND what was not said in asking the question. Lee Mun Wah said that 60% of communication is non-verbal.

Finally, Lee Mun Wah discussed how educators need to take the time to ask their students what they like, what they are interested in and what they want; and then, to really listen to what they say. If educators are going to be able to more effectively teach students who are different from them, they have to get to know those students and their interests. If educators will ask, and then really listen to what their students say, they will be able to become advocates for diversity and change.

The last breakout session we will discuss here is one that was presented by two of our own Utah professors. Erika Feinauer and Erin Whiting, both professors at BYU, presented on “*Evidence of Ethnic Identity Formation Among Early Adolescent Latino/a Students*”. Their presentation was on a study they conducted which looked at the following research questions:

- How do pre-adolescent (5<sup>th</sup> grade) Latino/a youth articulate their ethnic identity?
- How do pre-adolescent (5<sup>th</sup> grade) Latino/a youth describe the importance of ethnic things in their lives?

This study was designed to better understand how pre-adolescent students experience and articulate ethnicity in order for teachers to know how to support them with their identity development during this crucial transition period.

The findings from their study include the following about what those who participated in the study shared:

- They have a lot to say about themselves, about the ethnic things in their lives, and about the Spanish language.
- BUT, they have to be promoted to talk about their ethnicity.
- AND, when they do talk about their ethnicity they do in a ‘celebratory’ way (as discussed above in Gorski discussion).

The presenters concluded with the following things to think about:

- How do we support a critical reflection on ethnic identity for minority students in developmentally appropriate ways? (w/in a celebratory frame).
- Do we need to challenge the discourse that places at odds the celebratory and critical approaches to multicultural education?

As mentioned before, there were so many wonderful breakout sessions and so much to learn. Our goal here is to give a quick overview of a few of the sessions. Our hope is that this will provide you with a general idea of the happenings at this year’s NAME conference.

### **Regional Meeting**

The final event we will discuss here is the regional meeting on Friday evening. Our Regional Director Charlene Lui, who is from Granite School District, ran this meeting. For those not familiar, Utah is in region 8 along with Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

In this meeting we discussed Utah’s NAME conference, which will be held at Westminster campus in Salt Lake City on March 9-10. Dr. Jackie Thompson also

announced that Dr. Kristin French has agreed to be the keynote speaker at the conference. We discussed themes for the conference as well. One of the themes that was brought up was immigration. Someone shared the following website: [www.immigrationpolicy.org](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org) as a good place to find resources on immigration.

We also went around the room and individuals from the different states represented (Utah, Colorado, North Dakota) shared what each state has been doing with regards to NAME, as well as some future goals. One of the things that was shared for Utah was that a few of the board members presented at the secondary administrators conference last spring in St. George. The presentation was about Utah NAME, what we stand for, and what we can offer school districts to help their teachers learn how to do multicultural education. Furthermore, one of the goals for Utah NAME, it was discussed, was to continue to do presentations like this in order to recruit more membership.

### **Conclusion**

In all, this year's national NAME conference was a tremendous success. We were able to learn a great deal about how equity and multicultural education are being pursued throughout the country. It was refreshing to listening to and talk with people from all over the country that share the same commitment as Utah NAME to help all students succeed. We look forward to continuing these conversations and learning more at the upcoming Utah NAME conference this spring.