

DIVERSITY CIRCLES

MAY 2007

MCKINLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL'S DIVERSITY CIRCLES CELEBRATION

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- SCRC Regional Conference held at Trefoil Oaks Girl Scout Facility in Kenosha, WI
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A wonderful celebration of diverse cultures culminated McKinley's 2006-2007 Diversity Circles Program. At 7:45 a.m. Friday, April 27th, the speakers began arriving to prepare for McKinley School's first Diversity Circles celebration, an event for students who participated in a Diversity Circle at McKinley. Many of the Diversity Circle participants invited a friend to join them on this special day.

As student participants gathered in the school cafeteria, they were handed a schedule of the day's activities. The Diversity Celebration began with the first class period of the day and ended with an ethnic lunch served in the school's foods classroom. Participants were given a list of six workshops

from which they chose the three they were most interested in attending.

In a very deliberate, quiet tone, David "Eight Eagles" Granados pulled the students into this story of Native American people. He talked about *Drumming to the Beat of Your Heart* and easily drew the students into the beat of their hearts as they moved to the beat of his drum. He held their attention as he explained and talked about how stories became the legend of the people.

Naison Nyamatutu, a local business owner, who grew up in Zimbabwe, talked to the students about what it was like to be a teenager in Africa. While he shared his stories with the students, he created a wire sculpture of a

bicycle that will be given to McKinley as a symbol of diversity.

Emily Ballew, a Carthage College student, shared a video presentation with students interested in someday studying in a foreign country. Emily spent a year studying in Senegal, and shared her experience as an American living in Senegal.

A highlight of McKinley's Diversity Circles was the presence of sixth grader, Carly Renguette. Carly suffered a stroke during the summer just prior to starting sixth grade at McKinley. The stroke incapacitated Carly, and she's been out of school all year undergoing therapy to regain movement with the hope of returning to school with her

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UPCOMING FACILITATOR TRAINING

When: Thursday, September 6th, 2007: 5:00-9:00 pm

Friday, September 7th, 2007: 5:00-9:00 pm

Saturday, September 8th, 2007: 8:00 am-5:00 pm

Where: UW-Parkside, Orchard Room in Tallent Hall

If Interested, please request application form from:

roseann.mason@uwp.edu or call 262-595-2606 or 262-595-2620

DIVERSITY CIRCLES JOINS CREATIVE WRITING CLASS

For five weeks in March and April, Carol Ruxton’s Creative Writing class at Park High School in Racine, participated in a specially adapted classroom version of a Dismantling Racism Diversity Circle. The group was facilitated by UW-Parkside juniors, Alesha Goss and Terrance Shaw.

The Diversity Circle met during class twice a week for five weeks. During the other days, the students read Paul Fleischman’s *Seedfolks*, a story about an urban garden in Cleveland tended by remarkably ethnically and racially diverse neighbors from a blighted neighborhood. Each gardener tells his/her own story. After completing the Diversity Circle and reading the novel, the students wrote their own *Seedfolks* type story.

The Diversity Circle portion of the five weeks was very popular with the class, itself an ethnically and racially diverse group, including an exchange

student from Central America. Student Darrius Thomas said he thought that the Diversity Circle made people come out of their shells and say what was on their minds. Despite the usual number (about 25), students listened carefully to what others had to say. Another student, Steve Rosin, said that it was a good experience that he got to see through different people’s perspectives and different backgrounds.

One of the liveliest discussions developed after the students viewed a clip from *Boston Public* where a controversy erupts over the use of the word “nigger”. The students spent the rest of the period discussing rap music and comedians who use language that angers some people while other see it as entertainment.

White privilege also engendered lively discussion. “It seemed hard for my white stu-

dents to see how their skin color gave them advantages”, said Ruxton. They wanted to argue that black students had access to scholarships and Affirmative Action advantages that were unavailable to white students. Even the video clip of Diane Sawyer’s investigation of racial bias in employment, housing, and car sales in St. Louis, didn’t convince everyone who wanted to see Racine as better than that.

The evaluations following the sessions ask if the respondent is uncomfortable talking about race. One of the students wrote, it’s uncomfortable, but we pretend that race is not a problem. As student Maria Sinnett said, “I looked at racism a whole new way which seems to be exactly the purpose of a Dismantling Racism Diversity Circle.”

By Alesha Goss

**WATERFORD HIGH SCHOOL DIVERSITY CIRCLE
IMPACT PAPER AND PROPOSAL**

After attending a Diversity Circle at Waterford Union High School, student Thomas Schneider, along with four other students, wrote a proposal to implement Diversity Circles as a class at Waterford. The impact letter that he submitted with the proposal is as follows:

All my life I have been aware that racism exists, although until high school, I didn’t know the extent of its reach. Being an ignorant white child living in the comforts of a white community, I accepted how comfortable life was for me, and I didn’t really care what it was like for the minority or ethnically diverse people with whom I came into contact.

I knew that racism was wrong, but since it wasn’t directly affecting me in my small community, I didn’t care that it was thriving in the outside world.

In my junior year of high school, the social worker of my school, Mrs. McLean-Peterson, asked me to take part in the “Diversity Circle” program because she thought that I could be influenced by the experience and positively contribute to the ongoing conversations among diverse groups of students. In this Diversity Circle, my friends, Joe, Brittany, Eric, a Middle Easterner, Native American,

African American, and Caucasian respectively, met with a similar group of diverse students from four surrounding schools and shared our thoughts and experiences on stereotypes, racism, and prejudice. I originally accepted the offer not because I wanted to hear about racial inequalities, but simply because I would be excused from class for doing so. As it turns out, the decision to miss class and attend was a choice that has changed my life.

The other three students from my school, Joe, Brittany, and Eric, were practically the extent of the ethnic diversity

**Fall 2007
Credit Classes
Tuesdays and
Wednesdays
Diversity Circles
on Dismantling
Racism**

**Sept. 5th– Dec.
22, 2007
4:00–6:00 pm
At
UW-Parkside**

**Diversity Circles
on Dismantling
Racism
Fridays, Oct. 12,
19, 26, Nov. 2,
9, & 16, 2007
11:00 -1:00 pm
Racine County
United Way
2000 Domanik
Drive, Racine**

**MCKINLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL...
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friends. Marybeth Zuhlke, an education consultant, Carly's homebound tutor, and one of the Diversity presenters, made arrangements to include Carly in the Diversity Celebration. As Ashlee Hartsfield, a Carthage student and one of the celebration organizers, led students in a team building activity, Carly's mom pushed her wheelchair so Carly could join a team. While Ashlee explained the activity to the student participants, Carly's team members contemplated how to include the wheelchair bound girl in the activity. Carly resolved the dilemma by offering to provide the talent required to gain back a stepping stone each time it was lost. By the end of the team building activity, Carly's mom was on a bench in the back of the room, and Carly was absorbed into the team.

When Carly couldn't navigate the McKinley stairs to get to the event that she was especially interested in

attending, Jerel Buckley, who came to McKinley from Carthage College to talk about student involvement in the NAACP, picked up the wheelchair and carried Carly up.

The Diversity Circles Celebration ended with a wonderful ethnic lunch for all the student participants and speakers. Chief Eight Eagles blessed the food, and everyone enjoyed sandwiches, salads, and desserts provided by event participants. There was fried chicken and English Tea, German chocolate cake and Danish gelatin, sub sandwiches and tortillas, kringles and brownies.

One happy participant offered his opinion on the day's activity by saying that he really liked the "African Dude," and he loved the fried chicken. Another participant enjoyed learning about traveling abroad and studying in another country. All the students who listened to Chief Eight Eagles were awed by his quiet presence.

Many students didn't know what the NAACP was until Jerel and Ed told them about the organization and its history and reason for existence. Ashlee got the kids engaged with her team building activities, and she helped a student in a wheelchair fit into the Diversity Circles group.

The Mix-It-Up Curriculum used in the Diversity Circles at McKinley Middle School focuses on breaking down some of the boundaries that separate middle schoolers into diverse social groups. We try to promote skills and confidence needed to become a boundary crosser. Ashlee Hartsfield, the Carthage student facilitator and McKinley graduate, served as a mentor for students, a person they could identify with as they participated in a Diversity Circle at McKinley.

By Nancy Piper,
Diversity Circles Facilitator at
McKinley Middle School

**WATERFORD HIGH SCHOOL DIVERSITY CIRCLE
CONTINUED....**

that existed in the overwhelmingly Caucasian student body at my school. I had known them all, but I wasn't particularly close with any of them, and being from the same school, I assumed that their lives and reasons for attending were similar to mine. I couldn't have been more wrong. During the first discussion, it became apparent to me that I would never forget this experience. We began the conversation with other schools about what things are like at their respective

schools, and their stories my peers told about our school appalled me. In the public school environment that I had felt so secure and safe in, these students were being discriminated against not only by students but even teachers. I kept my mouth shut the entire time I was there. Compared to the discrimination these people faced, I felt too shameful to say how great my life is as a white male.

It takes great courage to stand up for oneself but

an even greater amount to stand up for others, and now I have that extra courage. My eyes have been opened to the inequalities among the races, and even though I am only one person, I know that I can make a difference. I intend to make that difference through a proposal for a Diversity Class I have constructed with Joe from Diversity Circles, along with some other friends. With administrative cooperation and public support, I hope that this proposed Diversity Class can come into existence, and spur the

Into existence, and spur the changes needed at Waterford High. Maybe my intolerance for racism will affect someone else to feel the same way as I, and then by influencing another, I have already made a difference. This "Diversity Circle" has changed my life, and it is beginning, through me, to change the world. After all, change has to start with at least one person.

Evaluation

Quotes

"I enjoyed the experience. It really gave me some insights into diversity within my specific community."

**Marquette University
Student**

"This was a very good group. I have strongly encouraged a lot of people to take this class."

**Robert E. Ellsworth
Correctional Facility
Inmate**

"It was a positive experience. I learned things that would help me in the future."

**Park High School
Student**

Sincerely,

Thomas A Schneider

March 2007

SUCCESSFUL SCRC REGIONAL CONFERENCE SOWS SEEDS FOR STATEWIDE INITIATIVE

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Early in May, the Center for Community Partnerships at UW-Parkside hosted a two-day, statewide conference. The turnout was great. Many participants traveled a long way to learn how to help their communities develop their own ability to address local problems by bringing all kinds of people together in dialogue that leads to solutions.

The conference began with a day-long orientation for more than 50 extension service representatives, grass-roots organizers, and community leaders. The goal was to explore ways that public dialogue can lead to change on a range of issues.

Taking part in a sample of dialogue is the best way to learn how and why this process works, so participants spent much of the day gathered around tables, deep in conversation. Staff from the Study Circle Resource Center (SCRC) - a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Connecticut—gave people a choice: they could join a small-group discussion on racism and race relations, or they could choose to talk about poverty. Later in the day, small groups formed again to talk about the “big” issues in their own communities, how they were dealing with them, and whether Diversity Circles may be effective.

They left with a new set of tools and high expectations. Participant Richard Krupnow summed up the day this way: “I expected an introduction to Diversity Circles that would allow me to begin the process, and that is what I received, plus more.” Keynote speaker, SCRC Senior Associate Matt Leighninger, based his remarks on his recently published book, *The Next Form of Democracy*. He described a new relationship between elected officials and the people they govern—a more equal partnership where public input is both welcome and essential. Reflecting on lessons he has learned in communities across the U.S. and Canada, Leighninger offered reasons for hope and a belief that, working together, we can strengthen our democracy.

Following the orientation, the Center for Community Partnerships hosted a dinner meeting for Extension service personnel to discuss the potential for organizing Diversity Circles at an institutional level: How might this further the efforts of the Extension service and what would it take to make it happen? Energy in the room was high and, when the evening ended, the group vowed to push for a statewide initiative, focusing on poverty.

On the second day of the conference, teams from communities where Diversity Circles are already underway gathered for a ‘Learning Exchange’ to network along with and share success stories as well as explore ways to tackle orga-

nizing challenges. Special attention was devoted to thinking about ways to connect dialogue to action and change in communities—including asset mapping, providing support for action, and “telling the story” about the program.

At lunchtime, Wisconsin State Representative Cory Mason offered valuable insights about the political system and ways that citizens can work with elected officials to accomplish their goals.

Conferences like this generate energy. People gain insights, support, and inspiration from one another. In the words of a participant, they develop “connections and relationships that will continue to grow.” Wisconsin is fertile ground for Diversity Circles. We at SCRC salute you for what you have already accomplished and thank you for giving us the opportunity to help nurture existing programs and inspire new ones.

By Molly Barrett

SCRC Program Liaison and Editor

We are now on the web!!

www.uwp.edu/CCP/CommunityDialogues

University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Center for Community Partnerships
Community Dialogues
900 Wood Rd. P.O. Box 2000
Kenosha, WI 53141-2000

Phone: 262-595-2606 or 262-595-2620

Fax: 262-595-2513

E-mail: diversitycircles@uwp.edu



UW
Extension