Invitations can be a powerful force in elementary education. In a world of standards, accountability, and data collection, there isn’t often time to practice invitational competence, that is, the skill set of graciously responding to an invitation as well as effectively affording invitations in order to achieve identifiable goals. The invitation can be and ought to be a component of community building, dispositional development, pro-social learning, and professional enhancement. How can inviting further the purposes of elementary education? More specifically, how can an invite have anything to do with the overarching goal of teacher diversity and equity? This article tells the story of an invitation to the career of teaching.

Making Meaning
Before launching into the details of that story, it’s is helpful to share a couple of other examples of educational inviting that demonstrate the appeal of this form of social discourse. The first derives directly from a book appropriately named... Invitations. This is an iconic text, the kind of book that rests on the shelves of many primary and intermediate teachers who are jazzed by the potential and spirit of child-centered literacy education. Invitations, written by Regie Routman, is a book about teaching young children to read and write, and it is chock full of tried and true activities and lessons. Routman based her approach on a secret that sometimes gets lost in the frenzy to raise reading scores and produce power writers. Literacy is a self-fulfilling enterprise that is actualized when children make it their own and find their inner voice. Students can be taught all kinds of methods and strategies, but at root, what teachers do is invite their charges into the magical world of meaning making. The teaching of reading is an invitation.

What About Preschool
The second example comes from the world of early childhood education and is borrowed from one of the new icons of ECE lore. Her name is Lisa Murphy and she has become well known as the “Ooey Gooey Lady” – the consultant who encourages preschool teachers to return to their roots of process activities such as water play and finger painting. As a sought after keynote speaker, Murphy has become well known for her essential presentation which is entitled “What if Today Was Their Only Day?” In this talk, she chronicles her very own first day as a child going to preschool, and walks the audience through the trepidations, anxiety, novelty, excitement, and wonder of those first hours in a genuine educational “program.” After all of the art and puzzles, songs, and coloring, her four year old group went outside to play, which they did with complete abandon, until her wise and sanguine teacher/director said to her the most amazing thing: “Would you like to come in for snack?” Just think of it; in an era of authority, expectation, and time on task, Lisa’s teacher, rather than announce the common clarion call “Snack Time!!!,” finds this new little girl, gets on her level, respectfully, sincerely, and entreatingly, extends an offering. We could call it an invitation. Would you like to come in for snack?

Come and See CWU’s Program
The invitation can be a force for ethnic diversity in teaching. It delivers the message “we want you to consider the prospect of being a teacher.” It was this very notion of invitation that led to a visit by a group of 17 high school seniors from Tukwila School District, each a minority student, all with immigrant and even refugee status, where they spent a full morning immersed in the ECE and Elementary Education Program at the Des Moines Center of Central Washington University. To a person, these students were adept, inquisitive, confident, and cordial; there is no question teacher gems were among them if and when
INVITING CONTINUED

Not only does such a format provide the depth of information students need, it also gives genuineness to the phrase “if not you then who.”

With these thoughts in mind, the art workshop wound down, and our Tukwila High School guests were greeted by Dr. Tina Georgeson, Program Director, who welcomed them to the conference room for a discussion about advancing from high school to college, and all that CWU’s Des Moines Center has to offer. By that time, lunch was ready in the student union building, and each participant received an incentive gift package that included CWU notebooks, binders and a Webster paperback College Dictionary.

This on-campus experience is the kind of program that needs to be woven into a teacher recruitment protocol. It is based on a transactional proceeding that perhaps loses enfranchisement in this age of standards and expectations – namely, the sincere and personal invitation. Some may argue that there are so many teacher education candidates, why invite more? Yet such a point of view only serves to maintain the dominant culture paradigm which has a stranglehold on the teaching profession. Whether it be into snack, into the community of readers, or into the field of teaching, the act of invitation will always be a powerful approach and ought to be a constituent in the arsenal of recruitment which someday will normalize equity as the narrative of American schools.

Fortuitously, on this day in the Des Moines program was an art workshop dedicated to the topic of doing art with preschoolers. The classroom was bedecked with art stations throughout the environment: tempera paint, collage, a three-dimensional construction project, melting crayons, sand sprinkle white glue picture creating, and several others. The conversation had to do with goals, strategies, and issues connected to all of the creative work that preschoolers do in programs and child care centers. This class is taught from a confluent perspective, that is, an underlying philosophy which says: in order to teach art, teachers need to do art. The workshop had begun with the university teacher education students immersed in the activities. In short order, Tukwila’s Foster High School’s students arrived with their teacher, introductions ensued, and then art became the ice breaking catalyst as college and high school students mixed together and explored the plenitude of materials.

College and teacher education can be a mystifying prospect for secondary students. Most high school youth in all probability have only a hazy impression of how somebody becomes a teacher. While college fair events and outreach programs serve essential purposes of making connections and providing contacts, these occasional gatherings are large, mostly impersonal, and gimmicky rather than personalized and meaningful. As the Power of Diversity initiative has moved through its two year cycle, one of the key insights has been about how important it is to bring potential teachers on site to observe and partake in the program, if only for a morning.

There is no age limit when creativity is the goal.
Melissa’s Spotlight: I interviewed Sharon Hirata who just graduated the M.Ed Program here at the Des Moines Center. Here is Sharon’s story:

**A CWU Graduate Alumni Tells How She Became a Teacher**

Sharon Hirata is known as a Sansei-Yonsei Japanese American, which means that she is a third and fourth generation immigrant of Japan. Sharon’s paternal grandparents were second generation immigrants (Nisei) from California and her maternal grandparents are known as Issei because they emigrated directly from Japan in the 1920’s. Both of Sharon Hirata’s parents were born in California but were later separated when they were sent to live in different internment camps in Arizona and California. After the war and the closing of the internment camps, Sharon’s parents were given the opportunity to work in Illinois.

When Sharon was in the 7th grade she worked in a tutoring program for students struggling with reading. Later as a high school student, Sharon had the opportunity to work with Cambodian refugee students through her church. These experiences are what “got me hooked and wanting to teach special education”, said Sharon.

Before becoming a teacher she spent many years as a full time mother to her two daughters Courtney and Lisa, while her husband Ron worked. She received her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education with an emphasis in Special Education before beginning six years of substituting and then her 16 year career of teaching within our community. Sharon previously taught the 5th, 7th and 8th grades for the Highline School District and currently works for the Seattle Christian School teaching 5th and 6th grade. Sharon Hirata is a recent graduate student of CWU-Des Moines’ MEd Masters In Teacher Program. Sharon’s favorite part about being an educator is working and laughing with her students each day. She loves their spontaneity and their inquisitive and curious minds. She really loves working with children and bringing hope to future generations.

Working with a predominately European American population, Sharon has tried to incorporate cultural responsiveness and multicultural education into her classroom by sharing her story and the stories of her students. Sharon likes to teach her class about her Japanese American heritage and then have her students complete a project and presentation that teaches the class about their own unique heritage. Students share books, family stories, food, their language and arts: sharing something fun and personal to make the learning meaningful. For example, Sharon teaches her students about the purpose and use of origami, songs and dances of her Japanese heritage. Sharon explained how she likes to have students incorporate their culture into all content areas.

Sharon offers this advice to new teachers about incorporating cultural responsiveness into their classroom, “Don’t forget to recognize that each student comes from a rich and valuable culture”. By giving students the opportunity to share their own heritage you are recognizing the significance of their culture. When teaching a predominately European American population it is important to emphasize the cultural differences between your European American students and to also teach students about other, equally important, ethnicities. Also, just because there are differences among students, try not to set them apart. It is important to find a balance between teaching about our differences and similarities across ethnicities and cultures.

Though the occupation of teaching does not offer a large salary, Sharon encourages people of non-dominant cultures to join the field of education because of the other opportunities and rewards afforded to teachers. Some of these rewards include reaching out and acting as a role model to students of a similar background as yourself and dispelling the media onslaught of cultural misunderstandings. As the Teaching Equity logo says, “If not you, then who”?

Sharon is on the left with her daughters and husband
Here’s the Calendar Page! Lots Going On!

Latino Education and Achievement Project
Register for the LEAP Conference!
2011 LEAP Conference
February 24 – 26, 2011
Hotel Murano Tacoma

The Praxis Institute for Early Childhood Education
The Praxis Institute for Early Childhood Education is hosting a Black History month event on February 28th, 6-9pm at the 2100 Building. The theme is Cultivating the Genius in Black Children: Education in Our Community with guest speaker Dr. Joye Hardiman and followed by a lively panel discussion. A light dinner will be served. STARS credit and clock hours. For more information call 726-9538.

Early REACH
A n early childhood approach to multicultural education
Join REACH trainers, Kristen French (WWU) and Barbara Yasui (Shoreline CC), diversity perspective presenters, and parent panel for 2 interactive days.
March 4 and 5, 2011
8 A.M.-4 P.M. each day
The REACH Center
Highline Community College
Des Moines, WA
Phone: 800.205.4932
Email: reach@nwlink.com

21st Annual Students of Color Conference
We’re announcing the theme - Stand UP, Speak OUT: Education IS Liberation!
For our 21st Annual Students of Color Conference. Thursday through Saturday, April 14-16, 2011
Yakima, WA.

Teaching Equity Conference
April 30, 2011 8:30—4:00 pm.

TEACHING EQUITY CONFERENCE 2011
This education conference is for future teachers: pre-service teachers looking to increase their understanding of how effectively work in today’s diverse classrooms AND people of color interested in finding out if careers in education are for them. Both groups will participate in informative workshop sessions that highlight major issues impacting today’s schools. Workshops on cultural competence, state requirements, job placements, funding, and many more will be available to conference participants.

Highline Community College and Central Washington University
Des Moines Center