

# MULTICULTURAL RESOURCE CENTER

A collaborative project of Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Educational Equity and the East Metro Integration District

"The Problem Solver"  
Nail Fetish from Congo



Spring 2006, Volume 2, Number 2

## Language and Power

This issue of the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) newsletter focuses on language and power. At our December staff development event, Dr. Chance spoke of valuing Ebonics, or BVE (Black Vernacular English). Participants expressed interest in learning more about the topic. That's where the idea for the topic for this issue came from.

Expanding on these ideas, this issue also addresses language in a broader context. The resources in this issue address not only ebonics, but bilingual education and bias and racism inherent in everyday language as well.

Language is an integral part of any culture. Language develops in relation to the shared history of cultural groups and is a reflection of the culture's members attitudes and thinking. Language not only expresses ideas, but also plays an important role in shaping them.

Language, what ones are honored and how, and the choice of the words we use has a powerful impact on the norming of one way of being, in the case of the United States, most often norming whiteness. Whiteness tries to be

invisible and is often the universal norm against which other racial identities are measured. We hear the terms "in our country" or "we Americans" and don't think of the underlying meaning. Who are the implied group members we are choosing to include in this label. Who feels left out? The ethnocentrism of white culture often seeks to see every one and every thing through our own experiences. Learning about "other" cultures continues to keep the white experience as the norm.

Often in classrooms we hear of teachers "correcting" a student's speech or requiring students to only speak English while in school. Teachers need to value and support the languages students bring from home, while at the same time assisting students in becoming bi-lingual or bi-dialectal. Teaching students when to code switch and the expectations of "standard English" is as important as encouraging students to value their home language or dialect. Once you loose your home language, you loose the strongest connection to your culture.

It is our hope that you will use these resources to educate yourself and in turn educate your students on the importance of these topics.

### MRC Steering Committee

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## Learn More Online...

[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/12\\_01/12\\_01.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/12_01/12_01.shtml) Edition of the publication, *Rethinking Schools*, that focuses on Ebonics.

[http://www.tolerance.org/teach/web/power\\_of\\_words/index.jsp](http://www.tolerance.org/teach/web/power_of_words/index.jsp) Collection of lesson plans examining the language of ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation bias.

<http://www.angelfire.com/or3/tss/raclang.html> Contains an article by Robert B. Moore entitled "Racism in the English Language", dated but still relevant.

[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special\\_reports/bilingual/resources.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bilingual/resources.shtml) Collection of articles from *Rethinking Schools* that address bilingual education.

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*"I found them thought provoking...in that they made me think about some issues in a different way."*

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*"I saw some interesting films that I would not have seen without the program."*

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*"I enjoy the programs because they pull up my awareness of the differences we share. The things in life taken for granted by some are greatly esteemed by others. It is good for me to put that out in front of myself."*

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*"I was able to get cultural perspectives that I otherwise wouldn't have. Seeds of understanding were planted and I became interested in gaining more knowledge of various cultural issues."*

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*"They gave me a first person experience with a person of a different culture and I gained understanding of their point of view."*

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*"I learned truths which have been hidden from me."*

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## Exciting Events Coming Up @ the MRC

This school year the MRC introduced a new series of staff development opportunities. The pairing of monthly staff development workshops with Film Nights has been a great success. These events have been a great way to draw new patrons to the MRC while providing much needed professional development to staff in EMID member districts.

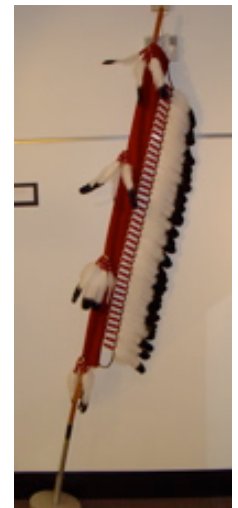
Additional information and registration forms for these events can be found on our website. We hope to see you at one of these exciting upcoming events!

Planning for next year's offerings will begin soon. If you have suggestions for workshop topics that would be of use to you or colleagues, contact Jenny Eisele at [Jennifer.eisele@spps.org](mailto:Jennifer.eisele@spps.org).

## New Addition—Eagle Staff

The MRC's newest acquisition is a new eagle staff. An eagle staff, from a eurocentric point of view, is the equivalent of a national flag for American Indian groups. There is much more significance to a staff than that. The eagle staff is a spiritual object with many layers of meaning. Learn more about the significance of eagle staffs at <http://www.wright.net/content/view/18/38/>

Traditionally the feathers on the staff are eagle feathers, but due to federal regulations and cultural respect for the sacredness of the eagle feather, the feathers on the staff we have on display are turkey feathers. Eagle feathers traditionally are thought to hold the spirit of the eagle, a creature that can communicate with the creator. Our old eagle staff is now available for check out.



## Class Set of *Passages* Available

The MRC recently received a generous donation of 40 copies of the novella, ***Passages***. Written by local author Lucy V. Hulme, this book conveys the tale of a young boy who rises to the occasion when he finds himself an unwitting accomplice to the Underground Railroad. The story is based on actual events in antebellum Zanesville, OH. The story is a great example of youth empowerment. Thank you Ms. Hulme.

***Passages*** is recommended for readers 5<sup>th</sup> grade and above. It is especially designed to, appeal to reluctant readers. Individual copies and a class set are available for check out from the MRC.

The author is interested in sharing her book and experiences writing it with classrooms in the area. You can contact Lucy Hulme at 651.631.2173 if you are interested in having her visit your class.

## Check It Out...Just a Sampling of MRC Resources on Language and Power

***Teaching Language Minority Students in the Multicultural Classroom* by Robin Scarcella.**

Combining insights from the fields of second language development, teaching and testing as well as education and cross-cultural communication, this book suggests ways teachers can provide students with tools to further their language development, learn in the content areas, and develop a stronger sense of identity.

***Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* by Geneva Smitherman.**

Black talk from all segments of the community, crossing the boundaries of sex, age, religion, and social class is explained from the perspective of African Americans using the language.

***Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States* by J.L. Dillard.** Black English is not a sloppy imitation of white English, Dillard insists, but a precise language with a history and grammar of its own. Although printed in 1972, much is still applicable to working with students today.

***Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development* by Enid Lee, et. al.** An interdisciplinary guide for teachers, administrators, students, and parents. It offers lessons and readings that investigate racism. One chapter specifically focuses on language in the classroom.

***The Skin the We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom* by Lisa Delpit.**

Exploration of language in the classroom and the power it has.

***Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* by Lisa Delpit.**

Discusses the conflicts between an educational system that has mostly white teachers and an increasing number of students of color. Contains a chapter on language diversity in learning.

***Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* by Linda Christensen.**

Provides a collection of essays, lesson plans, and student writing rooted in empowering students through language. Also see *Rethinking Our Classrooms, vol. 1 and 2* for similar articles and lessons.

***Affirming Diversity: the Socio-political Context of Multicultural Education* by Sonia Nieto.**

Looks at how personal, social, political, cultural, and educational factors affect the success or failure of students in today's classroom. Has a chapter on linguistic diversity in multicultural classrooms.

***Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?* by Sandy Lynne Holman.** This picture book openly confronts the way we often associate darkness and blackness with what is bad; it then answers the negatives with a vibrant celebration of African roots.

***The Language You Cry In (VHS).***

Traces the history of a Mende burial song brought by slaves to rice plantations of Southeastern U.S. over two hundred years ago and preserved. In the 1990's the song was discovered preserved in Sierra Leone. The film documents the song and the visit the Gullah family which preserved the song made to the Mende village. The film is an excellent example of the power of language in maintaining cultural identity.

***Navajo Code Talkers, A film by Tom McCarthy (VHS).***

Describes the story of the Navajo code talkers, who during World War II, transmitted secret messages for the Americans in the Pacific using the Navajo Language as code. Relates to the importance of retaining home one's language.

***Multicultural Literacies: Dialect, Discourse, and Diversity* by Patrick L. Courts.**

This study describes and analyzes non-dominant dialects/discourse systems associated with certain cultural groups in the U.S. and examines their school experiences.

***Racetalk: Racism Hiding in Plain Sight* by Kristen Myers.**

Using a dialectical analysis, this book examines the ways that everyday people help to reproduce racism through their common interactions.

***The Story of English, Program 5: Black on White (VHS)***

Black English has made a vital contribution to the english language. This program examines its beginnings in the American slave trade, its migration to the South to the northern states, the Creole influence, Harlem's jive talk, and today's black "rap."

***Bilingual Education: Teacher Narratives* by Nancy Lemberger.**

Through teacher narratives, the complex realities that are shaped by the racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and class based identities and experiences of teachers, their students, and by the orientation of the state, school district and community towards bilingual

***The MRC also houses an extensive collection of dictionaries in various languages and bilingual materials.***

**Browse our on-line catalog to discover more great resources for your classroom!**

<http://mrc.spps.org/Catalog.html>

## Multicultural Resource Center

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We're on the Web!

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[www.mrc.spps.org](http://www.mrc.spps.org)



Saint Paul  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## About the Multicultural Resource Center...

Multicultural education is a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally. Multicultural education acknowledges that schools are essential to laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of oppression and injustice. ~Paul Gorski (<http://www.edchange.org>)

The Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) facilitates access, for teachers, to the necessary tools to infuse learning

experiences with Multicultural Education. The MRC is part library, part museum, mostly a place where educators can come to build their capacity in working with diverse students and find resources to support this new capacity.

The end goal of the MRC is to promote the creation of equitable learning environments infused with multiple, authentic viewpoints that confront the norming of whiteness. Through curricular support, lending out materials to support such an environment, and providing modeling through class visits and staff development opportunities, social change will occur. Please explore our website to gain a better understanding of the MRC's various roles.

### Browsing Hours...Stop On By!

While the MRC is available for class visits and meetings during the day, we have set aside the specific times below for patron browsing and check-out. It is best to call before you come to ensure that someone will be available to assist you.

***Mondays and Thursdays, 1 pm-4 pm***

***Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 2 pm-6 pm***

***All other times, by appointment only.***

Check out our website for policies and procedures for reserving the MRC.

### From the Inter-district Partnership Coach...

Planning is underway for exciting partnership opportunities for next year! Interested SPPS staff should contact me if they are might like to participate in a partnership with a teacher from another district. You needn't have a person in mind. I can help find you a partner. Funding is available for planning time, transportation, and other curricular projects. Contact me at 487.7363 or [stephen.severance@spps.org](mailto:stephen.severance@spps.org). For more information, check out my website at <http://partnerships.spps.org>.

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