SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS ARE A REFLECTION OF THE CULTURE OF THEIR LEARNERS: THE STAFF IS TRAINED IN DIVERSITY AND IS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING HIGH LEARNING STANDARDS IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF INCLUSION. THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN EASILY, NOR DOES IT OCCUR UNLESS THE ENTIRE SCHOOL IS INVOLVED. A COMPREHENSIVE, SCHOOLWIDE APPROACH FOR SCHOOL REFORM IS NECESSARY FOR CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS TO GROW SOCIOALLY AND ACADEMICALLY.

IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS, IT IS ADDITIONALLY NECESSARY TO BE EXPLICIT ABOUT THE RULES OF BEHAVIOR, LANGUAGE, AND EXPECTATIONS WHICH WILL PROMOTE SUCCESS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT AS EDUCATORS, WE FUNCTION IN A TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT CONFERSS CERTAIN ASSUMPTIONS WHICH MAY HINDER STUDENT PROGRESS. THIS BULLETIN EXAMINES THOSE ASSUMPTIONS AND DESCRIBES RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES PROMOTING LEARNER SUCCESS.

THE IMPACT OF DOMINANCE

1. The Assumption of Rightness.

U.S. culture is founded upon the principles and practices of northern and western white Europeans. Although these practices are the foundation of our democratic values and long held social, cultural, and religious traditions, there can be an implicit expectation that these practices are the only and correct way to view reality. We now live in an unparalleled multicultural environment where the voices of African, Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultural influences are a significant part of U.S. culture. In our pluralistic society there is no one way but many to guide us, and this needs to be reflected in educational practices.

2. The Luxury of Ignorance

The majority of white educators tend to know very little about the diversity of their students. "Teaching language minority students successfully means above all changing one’s attitudes towards the students, their languages and cultures, and their communities" (Nieto). Educators need to learn more about the lives of their students beyond superficial knowledge and to engage meaningfully with them in order to be more effective practitioners.
3. The Legacy of Privilege
The social and psychological insulation which comes with dominance gives us the privilege of empowerment. However, it also prevents others from equitably sharing in that privilege. We need to inculcate this privilege in all learners by explicitly teaching about how to better access what U.S. society offers to all its citizens.

PRACTICES PROMOTING LEARNING
1. The culture of the school fosters the development of a community of learners.
   Students need to feel that they belong, regardless of their background, ethnicity or interests.
2. Conceptual academic development is challenging and involves making students aware of how language is used.
   In the process of delivering instruction, teachers maintain grade-level conceptual complexity and demonstrate how language is being used to construct meaning.
3. Students’ experiential background is the departure point for exploring new ideas and for learning content.
   Rather than the text driving instruction, the student’s knowledge is the basis for making connections to the curriculum.
4. Teaching and learning are organized thematically in the delivery of content.
   Students’ ability to make sense of their learning is enhanced dramatically when the content is conceptually linked in understandable ways.
5. New ideas and tasks are contextualized.
   When the language of ideas is comprehensible, i.e., delivered in graphically, orally, and tactile-kinesthetically sensitive ways, learning increases.
6. Academic strategies, sociocultural expectations, and academic norms are taught explicitly.
   Students need to be directly told about what is and is not appropriate for learning in school.
7. Tasks and activities are relevant, meaningful, engaging, and varied.
   A blend of problem-solving, information mastery, collaboration, and self–expressive learning should be used to accommodate for the variety of learning styles represented among students.
8. Complex and flexible forms of collaboration help learners make sense of language and content.
   All learners benefit from the opportunities that collaboration provides for listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
9. Students are given multiple opportunities to extend their understanding and apply their knowledge.
   Expanding knowledge learned through other contexts is an invaluable way to solidify learning.
10. Authentic, performance-based assessment is a staple of teaching and learning.
    Observing how learners progress in their learning by recording their behaviors on academic tasks is a realistic way to enable them to demonstrate their learning.

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School practices which promote learner success in school are predicated on an examination of our traditional cultural perspectives and practices. As educators we must learn more about our diverse learners and incorporate their voices and values as we serve them in school.

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