

Demographic Diversity and Conflict in Schools Suggested Readings



By Jean A. Madsen, Ph.D.

Dr. Jean Madsen is a Professor in the Department of Educational Administration & Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University. She worked with the Minority Student Achievement Network in her role as a Visiting Scholar to the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison during the spring semester of 2010. Dr. Madsen writes on organizational diversity and its implications for school effectiveness. Her studies examine the importance of creating positive workplace relationships to attract and retain teachers of color, principals' role in demographic groups to prevent intergroup conflict and strategic diversity strategies to improve school outcomes. She has published research in the *American Educational Research Journal*, *Teachers College Record*, *Comparative Education Review*, and *Urban Education*. She, with Dr. Reitumetse Mabokela from Michigan State University, is the author of “*Culturally Relevant Schools: Creating Positive Workplace Relationships and Preventing Intergroup differences.*”

Dr. Madsen has provided MSAN with this suggested reading list which outlines books and articles best suited for addressing conflict among demographically diverse school groups. Jean Madsen can be reached at jamadsen@tamu.edu.

Demographic Diversity and Conflict in Schools

Districts with increasing rates of demographic growth are probably experiencing a form of organizational change. Changes brought on by diversity are unique because it has prompted schools to confront topics of race and gender (Thomas, 2008). Teachers with increasing diverse student demographics are anxious about changing their instructional practices; they also do not make connections to their students. While teachers appear to be open to diversity in terms of social justice, they are still unwilling to change their practices (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Principals also need to be able to identify conflicts surrounding demographic diversity. Leaders are critical in creating responsive schools for demographic diverse schools (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

While diversity enriches our schools by broadening teachers' and students' perspectives, there also emerges the conflict that is often associated with diversity related issues. It is well documented that negative beliefs about diversity lead to diminished group cohesiveness, absenteeism and turnover (Thomas, 2008). Multiple studies have documented schools' response to diversity and the conflict that it brings. When you have a disproportionate number of demographically diverse teachers in suburban desegregated schools, there are implications for recruiting teacher of color because of misperceptions about their contributions on instruction and curriculum (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Findings from Bell's study (2002) identified the types of conflicts that occurred because of teachers' reliance on traditional instructional patterns and arguments over who has the

authority to make curriculum and placement decisions. Jones (2002) study indicates that principals of color are often dismissed when they provide suggestions for teachers to change.

Organizational resistance to issues related to demographically diverse groups has ramifications for recruiting and retaining demographically diverse personnel, organizational effectiveness and prevents collaboration (Thomas, 2008). Diversity resistance often occurs when an organization undergoes change in response to addressing the needs of demographically diverse groups (Thomas, 2008). There are many types of conflict that occur among demographically diverse groups that have implications for positive working relationships. As more demographically diverse teachers enter these homogeneous professional communities, it will affect teacher retention and working conditions (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). When European American teachers and teachers of color interact, there are conditions that will influence how they work collaboratively in these contexts (Alderfer, Alderfer, Tucker & Tucker, 1980; Alderfer & Smith, 1982; Cox, 1994).

Suggested Readings

Listed below are books and articles that are best suited for addressing conflict among demographically diverse school groups.

Culturally Responsive Schools: Leadership and Strategic Diversity Plans

Madsen, J.A. & Mabokela, R. (2005). *Culturally Relevant Schools: Creating Positive Workplace Relationships and Preventing Intergroup Differences*, New York: Routledge.

This book is one of the first of its kind as it provides an overview of what schools can do to encourage positive exchanges among demographically diverse teachers. It is a “how to” that addresses leadership and the recruitment of teachers of color. The last chapters provide very specific strategies that both principals and teachers can implement to insure their school is responsive to its students. It also includes a strategy to address the organizational implications of diversity. The book provides multiple sources for educators in demographically diverse schools.

Diversity Conflicts and Professional Learning Communities

Bell, S. (2002). Teachers’ perceptions of intergroup conflict in urban schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(1), 59-81.

This monograph is included in an edited book that identifies other workplace conflicts surrounding diversity. This article provides insights on the types of conflicts that occur between teachers of color and white teachers. It is evident that when there is no consensus on teaching students of color, it results in group boundaries and neither group will discuss how they can meet the needs of students of color. The findings make the case that cultural differences affect teachers’ instructional practices and curriculum decisions. It indicates how organizational resistance leads to conflict among teachers.

Achinstein, B. (2002). *Community, Diversity, and Conflict Among School Teachers*. New York: Teachers College Press.

While this book provides insights about the types of conflict that occurs in schools, it does not necessarily address conflicts that deal with demographic groups. It is a study of three schools and the stages of conflict that occurs in different contexts. Only one school would be considered demographically diverse, so it only touches on demographic diversity issues.

Leading Demographically Diverse Groups

Madsen, J. & Mabokela, R. (2002). African American leaders' perceptions of intergroup conflict. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(1), 35-58

This article examines the types of conflicts that occur in schools due to diversity related issues. Findings from this study indicated that principals who have a "color conscious" leadership are able to develop leader-member trust and build consensus to reduce conflicts that occur in schools. This article provides important perspective on the importance of leadership in addressing teachers' conflicts.

Jones, C. (2002). Teachers' perceptions of African American principals leadership in urban schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(1), 7-34.

Concerns about leading on issues of diversity imply that principals of color may play an important role in creating professional community with demographically diverse groups of teachers. In areas of relationship development principals of color are critical in addressing conflicts that arise over instructional practices and curriculum differences. They also attract and retain teachers of color and encourage teachers to change their practices in being more responsive to students of color.

Thomas, K. (2008). *Diversity Resistance in Organizations*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Thomas provides an overview of the types of problems that occur in dealing with diversity issues. This book examines the literature on how to deal with conflict, factors that create a negative workplace, the leader's role in dealing with conflict, and suggestions for changing the attitudes of people resistant to diversity. The book is written more for "for profit" organizations, but will be somewhat relevant for schools.