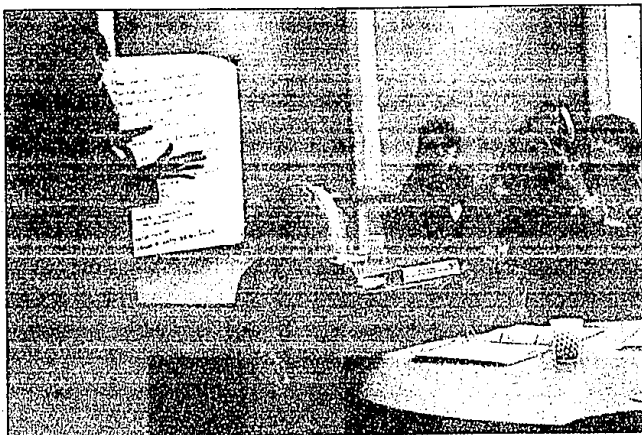




How to: During Saturday's wrap-up session Farmington elementary teacher Rosheen Kilano summarized the educators' ideas for promoting diversity.



Sharing: Jerry Fouchey of the Farmington School District acted as a facilitator. Between sessions he spoke with Pontiac teacher Ann Holmes and Elba Santiago LaBonte, assistant vice-president of student affairs at Michigan State University.

Diversity

Participants share experiences, attitudes about differences

As a child growing up in Rochester, Michigan in the early '70s, Suzanne Van Opheim remembers teachers asking her, "What are you?" The Birmingham middle school teacher recalls with dismay that she wanted to respond, "I am a girl, what do you think?"

Van Opheim, who is half Chinese, says her family accounted for the first exposure most of her neighbors had to persons from a different culture. For this reason, she says she understands the difficulties of being multicultural, and she explains this is her primary motivation for attending Oakland Community College's diversity conference entitled, "Many Faces: One Future" held March 19-20 on the Farmington Hills campus.

In addition to visiting various displays, Van Opheim found an instructional session on "Cultural Diversity in the Classroom"

'When you think of diversity ... I think the first thing that comes to mind is African Americans and Chaldeans. Yet there are many types of diversity including economic. One needs to focus on all types.'

*Suzanne VanOpheim
—Conference participant*

helpful. "In education," she states, "it's very important to know how students think. As a child, I was taught to be quiet. I was not outspoken, very shy. Teachers had a problem with this."

Van Opheim describes Oriental children as generally quiet in the classroom, and says they are taught to respect and defer to elders. She relates that such culturally based traditions can be misinterpreted in different ways by teachers unfamiliar with such

disparate customs.

As an example of cultural differences one needs to be aware of, Van Opheim says she has learned, for example, that in working with Chaldean students it is considered disrespectful to yell at or look at a student

directly in the eye when confrontation is necessary.

Yet without an appreciation for these differences, a teacher might have difficulty relating to a diverse student classroom so common today.

Van Opheim also states, "When you think of diversity ... I think the first thing that comes to mind is African Americans and Chaldeans. Yet there are many types of diversity including economic. One needs to focus on all types."

The purpose of the diversity conference, according to OCC's Polly Meyers Bachrouche, director of the international, was to "acknowledge the demographics of Oakland County and look at

CONFERENCE

diversity in all areas." Bachrouche states, "The whole student population of OCC has

changed in the last 10 years. We currently have the largest ESL (English as a Second Language) population in the state of Michigan. We have over 70 countries represented in our student

Please see DIVERSITY, A5

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