


Keeping a Close Watch: A Cultural Philosophy of School Change

Melanie Carter and Leslie T. Fenwick

Under new leadership, one school in Atlanta has moved in a positive direction to create an authentic community of learning and to become known as "technology aggressive." Personal convictions about staff development and student achievement help support the school as the community undergoes demographic shifts.

 Southside Comprehensive High School, with its slate gray, angular, expansive facade, is a prize-winning architectural structure. Constructed in the early 1980s, the building's solar panels reflect the era's preoccupation with energy conservation. There are two unusual characteristics of the facility: Southside was built into a carved-out section of a hill. The roof of the school is dirt, giving the inside of the building an underground feel. The interior of this S-shaped structure is a broad labyrinth of hallways and classrooms. Although it is clear upon entering the building that this is a unique structure, it is also apparent that educators were not consulted about the building's layout. The angular hallways are aesthetically compelling, but they pose a challenge to teachers and administrators who must monitor nooks and crannies that can become student hideouts. Despite this concern, Southside, with its spacious hallways, glass-enclosed stairwells, and plant-filled interior spaces, is an exceptionally pleasant environment for learning and teaching.

The Transformation of a Student Body

Southside draws a significant number of its students from three neighborhoods: Capital Homes, Grady Homes, and the former Eastlake Meadows are inner-city communities plagued by increasing levels of poverty, crime, and

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decay. Despite the similarities of the three neighborhoods, many Southside students derive their sense of community from their own particular neighborhood. Loyalty to residential communities often results in turf issues and tensions among the students.

Several students from outside the community also attend Southside. Attracted to its emphasis on technology, these students and their parents chose Southside because of its exemplary programs. Initially the presence of these students was a challenge to the cultivation of a unified student body. Moreover, because Southside replaced two closed high schools—Roosevelt and Smith—many of these students had never attended school together. Southside was a school without a history. Absent the generational ties that familiarize rising middle school students with their prospective high schools, Southside student pride was nonexistent. To combat apathy among students and to stimulate school cohesiveness, educators first worked on the school culture to improve the school climate.

Southside is often categorized as an “urban” school. This term, at best, is an attempt to describe various aspects of a school, such as its geographic location, its access to resources, and its students. Within an educational context, however, the term urban often connotes schools whose student populations are predominantly Black or other minority and are economically disadvantaged, although these same characteristics may apply to some rural schools as well. With African Americans accounting for 91 percent of the population of approximately 1,100 students, Southside certainly falls into the urban category. Yet in many respects merely describing Southside as urban flattens the textured realities of the school. The urban descriptor captures neither the spirit nor the character of the Southside students, faculty, and administrators we interviewed. Labels such as “urban,” “at-risk,” “disadvantaged,” and “underachieving” emerge from a cultural deficit model that hinders rather than facilitates a broader understanding of students and their communities. Although we challenge the pervasive and uncritical use of these labels, we acknowledge that urban schools face specific challenges. However, we hope to address those challenges within a cultural framework that encourages and expects school success rather than school failure. The interviews that form the basis for this article reflect our attempts to ensure that the voices of Southside Comprehensive High School become critical components of schooling discourse (Lightfoot 1983).

The atmosphere at Southside has improved significantly, although the school is still struggling with some small pockets of student resistance. Two teachers who migrated from the closed Roosevelt and Smith High Schools are convinced that as a whole the school community is much closer than it once was, a sentiment shared by other teachers at Southside. This change in atmosphere is evidenced by visible expressions of school pride

by administrators, teachers, and students. Students are eager to purchase “anything with Southside on it.” Teachers initiate and support student organizations and activities. Moreover, the principal continues to encourage and support, in word and in deed, the efforts of Southside students and faculty.

Creating a Shared Culture of Academic Excellence

In recent years Southside has received many accolades, most notably the Georgia School of Excellence Award in 1999. Despite demographic data that typically predict student and school failure (65 percent of the students participate in the free and reduced-price lunch program and 61 percent come from single family homes that receive public assistance), Southside students have experienced significant success. Even though standardized test scores have risen in many key areas, commitment to academic excellence is not evidenced by quantitative measures alone. Interviews with faculty, students, support staff, and administrators revealed the comprehensive and aggressive approach to academic achievement that permeates the school’s culture.

Southside principal William Shepherd, upon his appointment in 1992, was determined to create an environment conducive to student success. The school’s motto, “Communication, Cooperation, and Collaboration Leading to High Standards of Excellence,” is in keeping with his vision to move Southside in a positive direction. As one teacher commented, “Dr. Shepherd invites everyone to share in cultivating a comprehensive school vision—one that is flexible and inclusive.” It is apparent that authentic teamwork, at all levels of the decision-making process, is a critical core value of the Southside culture.

In addition to support from school administrators, teachers feel that their efforts have greatly benefited from Georgia’s high school graduation test requirement. Instituted in 1994, students are required to score passing marks in five test areas: language arts, mathematics, writing, social studies, and science. For those students and parents who have not taken academic achievement seriously, this requirement serves as a necessary wake-up call. For some students, the tests have helped them to understand the importance of the education process. Teachers, though, do not see the tests as an end in themselves. Instead they view the tests as the minimum standard for their students. As one teacher said, “If you teach children what they need to know, I believe that they’ll pass the test. Then when you teach beyond that they’ll succeed in life.” This philosophy, articulated by this veteran teacher, has led to what a new teacher termed “over-support” of students. Whether providing students with tokens for public transportation or offering tutoring after school, teachers “go above and beyond to accommodate and support students.” Teachers do not perceive this philosophy and practice as fostering a “culture of dependency” among students but instead view this as an

opportunity to create an authentic community of learning. Students interpret these efforts as reflective of a caring community (Walker 1996).

According to one student, "Southside has grown and you can actually feel it. It's more of a family environment." The approach must be working, because Southside has the highest passing rate on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (98 percent), according the Atlanta Public Schools' website (see <http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us/schoolsw/R&E/Testing2/ghsgt04.htm>).

Technology: A Launchpad for Instructional Improvement

The use of technology has been an integral part of Southside since its beginning. The school opened in August 1985 as a comprehensive high school with a focus on technology. Yet only recently was Southside designated as an information-processing magnet school and acknowledged as the top technology high school in the city.

When Shepherd assumed the principalship, the school's technology mission had been largely unfulfilled. Labs and classrooms were not equipped with the latest computer hardware or software. Most of the computer labs were empty and more often than not computers were down. Teachers were unfamiliar with and reluctant to use computers. Computer use was largely confined to the business technology and magnet programs.

As newly appointed principal—the fourth principal at Southside in seven years—Shepherd did not view himself as highly computer literate. He championed the importance of technology by learning to use it himself. True to his motto, "Don't wait too long to change," Shepherd arrived at school by 6:00 each morning where a tutor taught him the basics of computer applications for an hour. Later he began making PowerPoint presentations in faculty meetings and student assemblies.

Shepherd used this modeling technique to convince teachers, students, and parents of the importance of learning something new. By his and the faculty's admission, it was not an easy task to actualize the school's technology mission. His strategy for accomplishing the goal was multifaceted:

- Model the desired behavior
- Talk to teachers about their use of technology to determine prevalent barriers and relevant remedies
- Provide on-site computer and technology inservices for teachers
- Require all teachers to substantively integrate the computer into instruction and provide them with the necessary resources and incentives to do so
- Hire and support full-time staff to serve as a resource to faculty and to

coordinate the school's computer labs and other technology equipment, particularly to keep it running and current

- Rely on the insights and expertise of technology specialists to inform program decisions
- Mobilize strategic business partners to fund and support the school's technology program
- Continually and consistently press the vision of the school as a budding hub for technology.

Today, Southside is defined as a technology-aggressive school with no idle labs, a buzzing parent technology center, and every teacher and student using technology, albeit with varying levels of proficiency. Teachers and students speak the language of technology with confidence. Although Shepherd acknowledges that the school still has benchmarks to achieve, it is clear that he, the faculty, and the staff have used the school's technology mission to focus their efforts on strengthening the broader instructional program.

The Southside Family

When the principal, faculty, and students described Southside they spoke of "the Southside family," an open, friendly "home away from home" where they "are not alone." Students said that Shepherd treats them like his own children (Delpit 1995). They see him as a highly visible, caring principal who takes a personal interest in each of them and keeps a "close watch" over their behavior by acknowledging their successes and firmly and fairly counseling them through their missteps. They described him as an "open person" who "speaks his mind" and is "very encouraging to students."

Shepherd acknowledges that he has cultivated a habit of accessibility. He wants to create a school in which students' voices are heard, respected, and responded to. He does not want to force students to "fit a peg." Toward this end, he has regular catered lunches with students in his stately conference room. During this time he listens to students' requests, complaints, and concerns about their classes, school policies and practices, and their lives in general.

A hallmark of Shepherd's leadership style is the personal notes he writes to students congratulating them on their achievements, recognizing progress, or providing encouraging words. One student noted, "You know, it's great to say you had a teacher who made a difference in your life...do something special for you. But how many kids can say 'my principal wrote me a letter, did something special just for me'?"

taken measured steps to eradicate the negative stereotypes that abound about Black men. He has recruited many Black men, several of whom possess educational doctorates, to the administrative staff and faculty. These men do not staff the posts of coach or disciplinarian; rather they are directors of technology, assistant principals, guidance counselors, and teachers. Students notice the men's presence and view it as unusual and positive. They articulate a profound understanding of the value of African American male teachers. One student remarked:

That was one of the first things I noticed when I came here. Before, all the principals and the teachers I knew were women. When I watch TV everyone says Black men are in jail, doing drugs, fighting each other. But when I come to school I see all these Black men working together, getting along, and it makes me think that maybe there are a lot of Black men doing this.

Southside's Future

Southside's student population is changing. As in other cities, high-priced lofts, single-family dwellings, and condominiums are replacing the downtown communities from which Southside has traditionally drawn students. As middle-class and affluent professionals return to the inner city, public housing is vulnerable. In fact, one of Southside's veteran teachers predicted that within 10 years "Capital Homes will not still be standing." Many of these new young urban dwellers will have their own set of expectations for Southside.

In addition to the demographic shift of students, Southside faculty will experience major changes. In three to five years, approximately half of the school's teaching staff will retire. It is essential to hire new teachers who are committed to carrying on the work of the teachers who came before them. Southside has achieved much success under the leadership of Shepherd and his committed team of educators. The greatest challenge they face is to "keep it going." 🐘

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EDA 560 – Educational Leadership Practicum I

Dr. William Shephard

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Ronald Edmonds Effective Schools

Ronald Edmonds

- Ron Edmonds was born in Ypsilanti, Michigan on May 24, 1935.
- He was an African American educator, author, and pioneer of effective schools.
- Edmonds began his profession as a **teacher** at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1964.
- Along the way he wore several instructional hats ranging from: **faculty member** at the University of Michigan's Labor School, **director** of the Center for Urban Studies in Harvard's graduate education program, **professor** in the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University, **assistant superintendent** with the Michigan Department of Public Instruction, and **senior assistant** for instruction with New York City Public Schools. Edmonds died in Lansing, Michigan on July 15, 1983 at the age of 48.

Edmonds vs Coleman

- Edmonds' research into the quintessential qualities of effective schools emerged as a rebuttal to the controversial 1966 Coleman Report.
- James Coleman's report titled, "Equality of Educational Opportunity" affirmed that family background not the school was the major determinant of student achievement.

- Research published by Christopher Jencks in 1972 contributed to Coleman's findings, suggesting that equality of opportunity will not equate in equality of condition because congenital and socioeconomic factors cause so much inequality.
- However, while Edmonds acknowledge that socio-economic background has an impact on academic achievement, he maintains that educators would be cleared from their responsibility to be effective if they believed that family background determined student achievement.

Edmond's Resounding Rebuttal

- Edmonds and other academics refused to accept the conclusions of the Coleman Report.
- Thus, in his research Edmonds identified several schools across the United States where minority children from low income families achieved academic excellence.
- Edmonds compared these schools with other successful and unsuccessful schools to demonstrate that effective instruction plays a critical role in student achievement rather than race or socioeconomic factors.

Effective Schools for the Urban Poor

- In 1979, Edmonds published "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor" to demonstrate the inaccuracies of the Coleman Report.
- In his study Edmonds highlighted several schools across the U.S. with 90% students of minority, 90% belonging to a low socioeconomic status yet they scored in the 90th percentile on standardized tests.

Correlates of Effective Schools

1. **Instructional Leadership** – The principal is a leader of empowered teachers.
2. **Emphasis on Learning** – All staff responsible for improved student learning. Instruction is the most important activity.
3. **Safe and Orderly Climate** – Teachers believe that all children can learn.
4. **Assessing Progress** – norm referenced and criterion referenced tests are used to ensure that no child is left behind.
5. **High Expectations on the Part of Both Students and Staff** – Teachers believe they can teach the students in their charge. Students believe in their ability to learn.

Quote

“We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.” – Ron Edmonds

Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES)

By: AL Yousef, Yousef A

LKES is a uniform evaluation system developed by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) that includes multiple measures designed to assess the impact of leaders in increasing student achievement.

LKES consists of four components which contribute to an overall Leader Effectiveness Measure (LEM):

Part I: Leader Assessment on Performance Standards 30%

Evaluators should always refer to the Performance Standards when rating a leader.

Part II: Student Growth 40%

Student Growth is comprised of Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) for students of SGP Grades and Courses which shall be calculated annually for student growth based on state assessment data.

PART III: CCRPI School Climate Star Rating Survey 10%

CCRPI Five Star School Climate Star Rating Survey provides school climate information to school and district leaders as a leading indicator of achievement.

PART IV: Combination of Additional Data (Achievement Gap Reduction, Beat the Odds, CCRPI Data) 20%

Achievement Gap Reduction: this calculation measures a school's progress in closing or having small or nonexistent achievement gaps on state tests between a school's lowest 25% of achievers and the state mean performance.

Beat the Odds To complete the Beating the Odds analysis, an annual unique cross-sectional dataset is created using information from the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's Report Card, and the Georgia Department of Education's Student Record.

CCRPI Data the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that promotes college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students.

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Positive Behavior Intervention

What is PBI?

PBI is an approach that schools can use to improve school safety and promote positive behavior. It's also a way for schools to decide how to respond to a child who misbehaves.

PBI is not a treatment or therapy. It's more like a framework for teachers, administrators and parents. And it's used with all students in the school.

How This Program Started?

It was first developed as an intervention for students with disabilities that showed self-injury and aggression. It focuses on designing and supporting school environments that would enhance their lifestyles. But, today it is applied with much success to all types of students.

What are the objectives of the PBI?

This intervention must be based on data and targets to reduce the disciplinary issues, improve the school's environment, and increase the academic outcomes. The program designed to support all the students in the classroom and non-classroom locations, such as restroom, hallways, and buses. (According to several studies, PBIS leads to better student behavior. In schools that use PBI, students receive fewer detentions and suspensions. There's less bullying students also have better grades.)

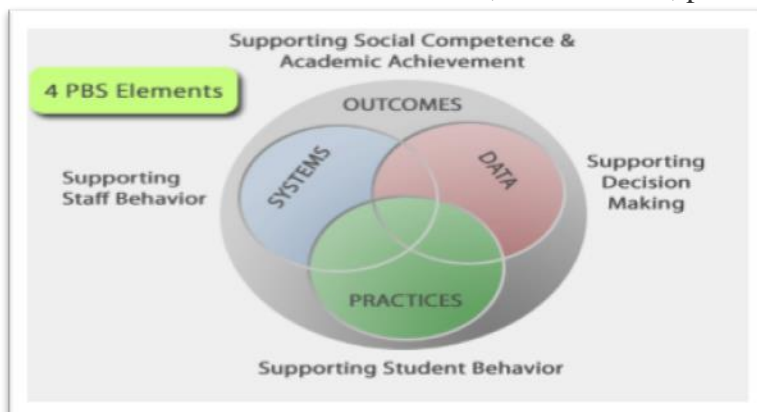
How PBI Works?

In a school with a traditional approach to discipline, teachers may try to correct behavior through punishment. Here's an example: A student sitting in the back of a classroom throws things or make a loud noise. The teacher reacts by sending her to the principal's office. After the student is punished, she'll return to class and be expected to behave. All students follow the same rules. Punishment is the same for any child who breaks the rules. If there's more bad behavior, the punishment might be increased.

However, in a school using PBI, the focus is on avoiding problems. From the start, students learn about what behavior is right, just like they learn math or science. Students are educated social skills, including how to act in different settings, such as the classroom, on the bus or with friends. They may learn through role-playing or through actual lessons. Staff at the school regularly praise kids for good behavior.

What are the classroom PBI strategies?

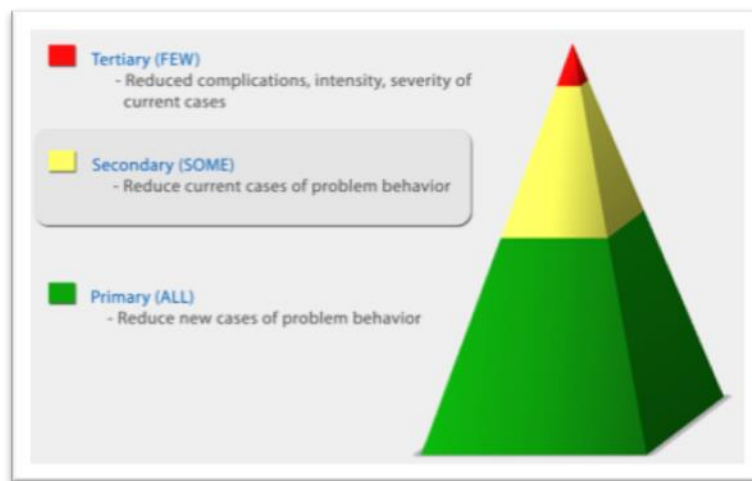
Classroom PBI strategies are important tools to decrease disruptions, increase instructional time, and improve student social behavior and academic outcomes, which is critical as schools are held to greater accountability for student outcomes and teacher effectiveness. Positive behavior intervention uses behavioral science, social values, practical interventions and a systems perspective in application.



The Four Elements of Positive Behavior Intervention:

There Are Three Types of students:

- 1- Students who experience success every day supported by general systems and practices.
- 2- Students who are at-risk for disengagement or failure and need some added support to prevent bigger problems.
- 3- Students who need intensive and individualized support.



The PBIS triangle is three tiers of social, emotional, and behavioral support:

Tire 1: school-wide and classroom support is a system of developing, implementing and maintaining the evidence based strategy for all students. The goal of PBIS is to decrease bad behaviors, improve academic performance, increase safety, and establish positive school culture.

Tire2: Targeted group support: Tier 2 support is designed to provide intensive or targeted interventions to support students who are not responding to Tier 1 Support efforts. Interventions within Tier 2 are more intensive since a smaller number of students requiring services from within the yellow part of the triangle are at risk for engaging in more serious problem behavior and need a little more support.

Tire3: individualized and intensive support: Tier three is provided for students who continued struggling behaviorally even after targeted intervention.

Conclusion:

PBI requires educators to develop new social and communication skills that would reduce the problem behavior including remaking factors that would encourage more desired behaviors and social skills (Akin-Little, 2009). positive behavior intervention should be flexible especially with an unlike student population. Schools should have behavioral support plans and evaluations systems in place to ensure they positively intervening with a student's life. Intervention sees the potential of each student wherein a positive behavioral intervention helps in improve the student's quality of life both in the long and short term (Simonsen and Myers, 2014).

References:

- Akin-Little, A. (2009). *Behavioral Interventions in Schools: Evidence-based Positive Strategies*. New York: American Psychological Association
- Simonsen, B. and Myers, D. (2014). *Classwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports: A Guide to Proactive Classroom Management*. USA: Guilford Publications
- <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/pbis-how-schools-support-positive-behavior>
- <https://www.pbis.org/school/pbis-in-the-classroom>

Research Focus Schools / Priority School

By: Abdullah Alghamdi

Focus Schools

Purpose

- To focus on closing achievement gaps and enabling all subgroups of students to meet performance targets identified in the ESEA Flexibility Waiver in the academic areas
- To focus on strategies to increase the graduation rate

Focus School Definition

Title I schools

- Must not meet the definition of a Priority School
- 3-year average of Achievement Gap scores
 - Achievement Gap will be weighted by enrollment for schools with more than one grade band
 - Schools must have 3 years of data
- Rank schools by 3-year average of Achievement Gap scores
- Select lowest 10%
- Schools identified as Focus Schools in 2012 which do not meet the exit criteria will be re-identified as Focus Schools

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) work collaboratively to provide the following:

- RESA school improvement specialists who assist Focus Schools by providing ongoing technical assistance to Title I Focus Schools within the RESA regions.
- The GaDOE provides:
 - School Improvement Funds, Title I, Part A, 1003(a) to Title I Focus Schools.
 - Professional learning opportunities such as the Instructional Leadership Academy for district and building leaders working in Title I Focus Schools.
- The GaDOE and RESA school effectiveness specialists assist and support school and district leaders with Indistar implementation in Title I Focus Schools.

School Improvement Grant 1003(a) Purpose

- To provide financial resources to local educational agencies (LEA) on behalf of Title 1 schools identified as Alert, Focus, or Priority.

Priority Schools

Purpose

To focus on closing achievement gaps and enabling all subgroups of students to meet performance targets identified in the ESEA Flexibility Waiver in the academic areas

Priority School (non-SIG School) Definition

- Title I Schools
- 3-year average of Content Mastery category performance
 - Category performance will be weighted by enrollment for schools with more than one grade band
 - Schools must have 3 years of data
- Rank schools by 3-year average of category performance
- Select lowest 5%
- Add schools with graduation rates <60% for 2 consecutive years
 - 2013-2014 4-year cohort graduation rate
- Schools identified as Priority Schools in 2012 which did not meet the exit criteria will be re-identified as Priority Schools

School Improvement Grant 1003(a) Purpose

- To provide financial resources to local educational agencies (LEA) on behalf of Title I schools identified as Alert, Focus, or Priority.

Reference

- Georgia Department of Education (priority schools)
- Georgia Department of Education (focus schools)
- <http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/Priority-Schools.aspx>

The Office of International Programs

By: Reham S. Norman

Why having international students on campus?

Economic Benefits

The economic advantages of having foreign students on U.S. campuses are significant. According to the Brookings Institute, foreign students “paid \$22 billion in tuition between 2008 and 2013 as well as at least \$13 billion in living expenses.” According to the U.S. Department of Commerce: “In 2015, International students contributed more than \$30.5 billion to the U.S. economy, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.”

Cultural, Scientific, Technical Research Benefits

The engagement and active interaction between the American students and international students in universities and colleges has attracted impactful and tremendously positive benefits especially on the American scholars (Gao, 2008). Through this interaction and exposure, there are high chances for American students to speak or read other languages (foreign), value art, music, different cultural literatures, as well as look at the problems they are currently facing in a historical perspective (Gao, 2008). In addition, the American scholars are likely to develop curiosity and interest apart from being open minded in reviewing their political and religious beliefs on other ethnicities and races (Gao, 2008). This may even go as far as considering travel beyond the U.S. borders and studying in other countries (Gao, 2008).

Moreover, having international students in the U. S universities and colleges contributes significantly to the technical and scientific research in America. These students come with their personal experience stories and international perspectives and introduce them in U.S. classes (Gao, 2008). This plays a great role in preparing American students to be well equipped for the wider job market (Gao, 2008). As a result, long-term economic benefits and business relationships will be fostered between these students (American and international) after their graduation (Gao, 2008).

Challenges that international students face:

Culture Shock

The first and foremost issue that every international student has to deal with is the cultural shock that they have to go through in order to be accustomed to life in a new country (Gao, 2008).

Academic Difficulties

Foreign students studying in America may have difficulties in their classrooms. One of the obvious issues that is immediately experienced is about language limitation. Due to this situation, international students may not easily or fully comprehend what is expected of them by their professors especially at the beginning of their lectures (Gao, 2008). This extends even to their participation in classroom discussions. However, if these students cannot speak out on what they are experiencing, it may be difficult for professors to understand their needs. This may in turn amplify workload burden indirectly (Gao, 2008). For instance, a student whose first language is not English may take 3 hours to finish a book while an American student finishes the

same book in 1 hour. On the other hand, education culture is not the same in all countries e.g. Classroom participation is prioritized in the U.S. universities compared to other countries. Approaches used in the U.S. educational systems may not be familiar to foreign scholars who are used to getting help from their teachers (Gao, 2008).

Financial Pressure

Financial pressure is another issue foreign students have to face, especially those who do not have scholarships and have to pay school fees and living expenses all by themselves (Gao, 2008).

International Office Mission and Vision (The Office of International Programs,2017):

The Office of International Programs and Services (OIPS) supports and advances the University's commitment to diversity, multiculturalism and the development of students to function effectively in a global society (The Office of International Programs).

The OIPS serves as the central resource for international students and coordinates the University's domestic and international exchange programs.

Vision Statement: The OIPS will be recognized as the supportive University unit for international initiatives.