Summer Institute Reflection from the Conference Chair, Zakiyyah Ali

The New York University TAC-D Summer Institute 2017 held on Friday May 19th, was a major hit and our Wisdom Panelist, Keynote Speakers, Workshop Presenters, P-TECH Brooklyn Student Volunteers and participants were the headliners! The Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality could not be more proud of this year’s conference as our theme was focused on ways in which we could collectively dismantle and eradicate disproportionality by providing interventions for all children.

The very urgent greeting remarks from New York State Regent Dr. Lester Young, Deputy Commissioner for New York State Education Department Angelica Infante-Green, and Project Associate for Education Paola Therasse from Governor Cuomo’s office were well received.

We were blessed to have the passionate and resounding message of Dr. Donna Ford of Vanderbilt University as she challenged each of us to face our deepest biases head on and not to turn away from them. When these biases occur, according to data, show that the biases negatively impact our children. She was resolute and adamant in setting the tone of our conference; and, she was also beautiful in her blue and quite a treat to experience.

Next, our participants had the pleasure of not one TAC-D ED Talk, but four very moving, engaging and appropriate ED Talks! Dr. Russell Skiba from Indiana University, Dr. Sonia Nieto Professor Emerita from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Dr. Kent McIntosh from the University of Oregon, and Dr. Django Paris from Michigan State University. Their remarks were anchored in career-long research that really helped the audience to contextualize exactly where the issues in our practices, beliefs and policies lie. Not even for one minute did any of our participants want to leave the room for fear of missing the important jewels of information they shared about our relationships, responses, and reactions to the students in our care and in the institutions in which we educate them.

As I floated around the conference like a colorful mariposa, I was thoroughly impressed by the level of research,
engagement, and participation that was happening in well-attended workshop sessions. In our Leadership Roundtable Panels facilitated by Mr. Rashid F. Davis, Principal of P-TECH Brooklyn, and Mr. Reginald Richardson, Principal of New Rochelle High School, building and district leaders had the opportunity to really express ways in which they were leading faculties and staff in eradicating disproportionality. I saw in so many of the eyes and faces of our participants a real desire to learn from our presenters. These sessions met our theme by incorporating everything from technology to self-esteem building. We even had the young people from the School for Democracy and Leadership High School present on restorative justice. They brought kits to get everybody started.

Yes. The future is bright.

Of course, the conference certainly could not have been better orchestrated than it was without the management of our Volunteer Coordinator, Miss Diamond Williams and her P-TECH Brooklyn peers. Conference traffic? Not on their watch! Our guests knew where to go, our volunteers knew how to get them there, and we all left feeling proud and confident that the future of America is in really good hands with the leadership of the student volunteers and students as workshop presenters.

For every great conference, it takes an even greater team of doers and supporters. The TAC-D Team comprises of: Director Dr. Patrick Jean-Pierre, Associate Director Dr. Maria Hernandez, Project Associates Dr. Emily Jones McGowan, Ms. Briana Santiago, Mr. John Jacobs, Research Associate Ms. Jaspreet Kaur, Graduate Assistants Dr. L. Trenton Marsh, Ms. Hui-Ling Malone, Executive Assistants Ms. Lois Goddard, Mrs. Keno Nettles, and Graduate student Ms. Mavis Smith. We also had the wonderful support system of the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools led by Executive Director, Dr. David E. Kirkland, Dr. LaRuth Gray, and New York University Television and Connect with Kids allowed the show to be steamed live online.

I could not have been more thrilled to serve as the Chairperson for this conference, where we also remembered the spirits of Playwright Lorraine Hansberry, Activist Yuri Kochiyama, and Human Rights Activist and Leader El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X) on their birthday. I certainly felt more like a fan amongst stars. Until next year where the show will go on.