

Synergy: for the common good.

Ultimately Synergy represents a calling, as represented in the career and the retirement work of Melvin Tate and associates. A person is “called” to action by the conditions and demands of the times. It takes the right personality, character, leadership style, and vision to respond to the needs of a given time and place, and one must understand the demands of the times. Such were the blessings bestowed upon Melvin Tate both during his tenure as a career professional educator for nearly 30 years, and the epoch beginning upon his retirement from the Kent School District as an administrator in January of 2004. After retirement Melvin was called to continue his work of helping individuals, groups, organizations and institutions adapt to one another and work with synergy for the common good. What follows first is a synopsis of Melvin’s work as an educator before retirement, and second, a synopsis of his work after retirement, which continues as we speak. To see current and recent activities scroll to “After Retirement” below.

Before Retirement

As a Teacher: During the first thirteen years of employment with the Kent School District as a teacher reinforced something his university professor insisted upon; that is, white kids need to see positive black role models as well, and so did their families. Naturally a lot more was learned and shared as Melvin taught US History to seniors, and world history and sociology to sophomores for most of the 13 years at two separate high schools in Kent. He received recognition and awards for his teaching to a predominance of white students.

Even as a teacher, a major part of the job as the only black teacher in the buildings most of his career was to resolve conflict between black students who were small in number back then, and some white students who numbered about 1800.

Assistant Principal and District Level Administrator: As an assistant principal at the high school the district continued to call on Melvin for several years to mediate and resolve cross cultural conflicts of all kinds as the district became increasingly more diverse. Eventually the district instituted the Community Outreach Department; placed the role of district ombudsman and a range of diversity/equity functions in the department; and appointed Melvin Director of the Community Outreach Department. The office engaged in the following activities:

- **Staff Development:** helped district staff adapt to the influx of diverse groups coming into the district. Provided staff development opportunities, such as bringing Cultural Competence and Behavior Management; snapshots of different cultural experiences provided by members of those cultures; multicultural activities lists for each school; district wide MLK celebration
- **Community Organizing, Diversity Task Force, and Diversity Plan:** Pulled together diverse community groups to support their children’s education and to support schools, such as restructuring the district’s Role Model Committee to be a partnership between community members and school staff. This partnership later became a key element in the district’s highly

acclaimed Diversity Plan and Diversity Task Force, in both of which Melvin was an architect. The district's Diversity Plan was hailed a model for the nation by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories; recognized by Washington State School Directors Association, the Office of Civil Rights, and state education organizations. As a result of its diversity plan and work in the area of diversity the Washington Education Association presented the district with an award.

- **Community Empowerment:** Encouraged diverse community members to run for political office, serve on committees and boards, attend meetings and give input, and to generally get involved in decision making processes that affect their lives. Groups were formed and people were appointed to committees, and the district was pressured to appoint its first black board member.
- **Youth Programs and Collaboration:** Worked with a number of community organizations and government entities to collaborate on youth programs, chairing the Lighthouse Steering Committee and creating structures for the use of school facilities by the Lighthouse program for youth activities. Melvin later created the Futures Club for children under age 12, who were not of age to participate in the Lighthouse program. The lighthouse model exists in schools today and The Futures Club was represented to the United States Congress by Senator Slade Gordon as a model program for its collaboration, use of community resources, and service to children. Learn more detail and verify...
- **Ombudsman Program:** Researched and created the Kent School District Ombudsman program, documented the principles and operating procedures for the program, named it Ombudservices, and made it part of the KSD Diversity plan. It was the first K-12 Ombudsman program in the state and among the first in the Nation. The program investigated numerous complaints, e.g., sexual harassment, racial harassment, religious harassment, discrimination in grading, grading policies, district policies, and more. District principals called on the office to resolve conflicts. Complaints were settled without litigation. As district ombudsman Melvin also investigated and mediated conflicts between community groups not relating to school issues as well.

Kent Human Services Commission: During thirteen years as a Kent School District administrator Melvin served ten of those years on the Kent Human Services Commission, which provided and even further reach an influence into the region of South King County. As a commissioner Melvin helped to disperse one percent of the city's budget to nonprofits from throughout the region who provide an array of services to Kent residents. As he critiqued the applications and spoke with service providers at commission meetings he emphasized serving the people who were living in Kent now, which included diverse populations; having the employee demographics of nonprofits reflect the populations being served; collaboration; and creating opportunities for new organizations in the region to provide services to Kent residents.

Melvin L. Tate Day in the City of Kent: Upon his retirement from the Kent School District 2004, the Mayor of Kent Proclaimed May 14 Melvin L. Tate Day in the City of Kent identifying much of his work in the area of diversity and equity in the city and the district as the reason for the proclamation. The

proclamation was a great tribute after almost three decades of diligence in fostering synergy between all groups in a myriad of diversity and providing services to the schools and the communities affected by schools and by city government.

Ultimately the calling was stated in the job description of the Community Outreach Director: “to facilitate a mind paradigm shift in the district relative to diversity” and equity. Even as a district employee Melvin couldn’t see facilitating a mind paradigm shift in the district without affecting the community. That’s a major reason much of his work focused on the community. In retirement his work continued in the community but affecting schools, districts, city hall, and other organizations.

After Retirement

Such is the synopsis of the calling to foster Synergy before retirement. In many ways the work continued and even expanded after retirement. After only three years into retirement Melvin could no longer resist the call of Key people in the city of Kent and in the community to return and get involved in education issues, city issues, and community issues, which at various times were all blended.

Writing

Writing persuasive letters has always been a tool for Melvin to make his points, educate people on the research that should call them to action, or simply to educate people on a given issue. The letter writing began to combine with an interest and expertise in photography. Eventually the Synrgy publication began in 2007. Most recently Melvin has extended his writing to include writing regular editorials. The Synrgy website was constructed and place online around the turn of the century to offer a variety of services Melvin and associates provide, to make available to the public much of the work Melvin and associate do.

Letter Writing: In 2007 Melvin began a letter writing campaign addressing a range of disproportionality issues in the school district. This campaign was actually a continuation of similar work the district had trained paid him to do as the district’s Community Outreach Director. He provided research to help inform the superintendents and board’s decisions and actions regarding disproportionality; that is, research and perspectives from which the board might benefit, in addition to whatever the administration was presenting. Since retirement writing letters to elected officials, bureaucrats, individuals, organizations, and community members continues to be a major tool to address issues in institutions and in the community, and ultimately to foster synergy between all groups. The letters are often critiques with recommendations for changes for the common good of all.

Synrgy Quarterly: Although letters and emails were a great tool they often criticized institutions and sometimes criticized individual bureaucrats and politicians. Melvin created the Synrgy Newsletter, a quarterly publication, to present perspectives on some of the issues raised by community organizations not printed in the traditional press; to highlight the positive achievements of institutions and leaders; to educate parents, community members, business, and other organizations around a variety of diversity and equity issues; to highlight education issues; and to foster synergy at large. The newsletter is sent via email to a little over two thousand on a growing distribution list, including school leaders, boards,

councils, and many bureaucrats and elected officials throughout the state. Others access the newsletter online and distribute it to their distribution lists, websites, Facebook pages, and other social and business networks.

Editorials

Melvin regularly writes editorials for the Kent Reporter's print publication and the online publication. The editorials focus on education issues in general as well as diversity and equity issues, often utilizing local events and concerns that are relevant to communities nationwide. The editorials are also published later in the Synrgy archives.

Synrgy Website

The Synrgy website is designed to provide access to a detailed description variety of services offered by Melvin and Associates relative to diversity and equity. Some of the services include Cultural Proficiency workshops, personal and organizational evaluation and advice on diversity and equity efforts, Behavior Management workshops, Ombudsman Services, and more. The website also carries research information on education and other issues, the Synrgy Quarterly publication and special publications, editorials and other writings, and other information.

Community Organizing

Melvin is guided by the philosophy of the founding fathers who believed that the government institutions belong to the people they serve, and the people have a responsibility to change those institutions to serve the people better better. Therefore, in democratic the populace must be well informed; provide input to all leaders that influence their lives; and get involved. Getting involved means not only voting but running for public office; serving on school boards and committees; forming groups to address issues; developing and supporting allies on a variety of issues; discussing and debating issues; and relentlessly working for the common good. To these ends Melvin fostered the development of community organizations to get involved not only for the benefit of their ethnic groups but for the common good of the community. It is far better to be sitting at the table when decisions are being made than to be sitting in front of the television crying racism after decisions have been made. Also, the best cultural proficiency learning is when people are sitting across the table from one another making decisions for the common good of all.

Resurgence of the PAID Coalition : As in the case of the school district Melvin restructured the Role Model Committee which created a community faction, he realized the need for an independent community organization. He had long since concluded that community members could not rely on the institutions to monitor themselves; the institutions belong to the communities they serve; and people needed to form completely independent groups and alliances as a means of addressing common issues and interests; that's largely what democracy is about.

Melvin found several of the former Kent School District Diversity Task Force Co-chairs, and a few community activists, and formed PAID (People Advocating Involvement in Democracy). PAID was an all

black group in the beginning taking on both disproportionality issues in the school district and city hall, and dealing with police department issues. PAID was also a voice for the black community. PAID membership was deliberately kept very small, but with leaders, or people who had a history of leadership and often had a following. The membership grew from about 8 to about 14 as it became little more diverse. Most notably the members of PAID came out on the top of a two year battle with city hall after the US department of justice, siding with PAID, shut down the city's Weed and Seed effort for stacking the Weed and Seed Steering Committee with city staff, and for several other reasons, all pointed out by PAID to the Department of Justice.

Community Network Council: When the Weed and Seed effort came to an end, in partnership with leaders of the Police department and the Department of Justice, Melvin helped form the East Hill Community Network Council, now the CNC, as a means of continuing to address some of the Kent East Hill community concerns. Melvin worked things behind the scenes to help identify, recruit, and support a president of the CNC. And, to help the CNC build partnerships and implement programs for youth and families.

Some members of PAID wanted to move from a coalition to a more cohesive group, solidifying a certain set of values and becoming more formal. Simultaneously Melvin believed that the group was too dependent on him, after all he had recruited each member for specific reasons. In 2010 he began letting the group know that new leadership needed to step up and lead the group to become more formal and not dependent on one person. No one stepped up and PAID lay mostly dormant for months, while Melvin and a few black members of the group continued to deal with certain kinds of issues as they arose.

Kent Black Action Commission: With the decline of PAID Melvin believed that a black organization needed to continue to work with disproportionality in the school district and city hall, and deal with other issues that might surface affecting black people. During the spring and summer of 2011 he vigorously agitated in emails, letters, on the phone, and in private meetings; calling out black people to get involved and come together as a group to address a range of issues affecting black people in Kent and in the region. Others joined in. Those efforts resulted in the formation of the Kent Black Action Commission in the summer of 2011, of which Melvin chose to participate, not to lead, but rather to help develop, support the leadership, and advise.

Services

Synrgy offers services that help people understand one another better and that fosters the common good. Sometimes the services are provided by Synrgy Associates depending on the type of service needed and the level of service in terms of time commitments, etc. Some of the workshops can be held at the 5 acre lot with mountain cabin, about one hour East of Seattle just East of Snoqualmie Pass Summit.

Cultural Proficiency: The Synrgy approach to cultural competence, utilizes the 5 elements of cultural competence in workshops where participants interact in an environment created by the facilitator where all perceptions are acknowledged and valued. The belief is that creating an environment where

participants feel safe to share their views and experiences does more to accomplish the goals of helping people understand and practice tolerance than imposing the values of the facilitator upon the participants. [Learn more...](#)

Diversity and Equity Evaluation/Advice: Individuals and/or organizations may choose to have an evaluation of where they are on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum and look for advice on what steps to take to become more proficient. Individuals and organizations may choose to keep the evaluation and advice strictly confidential, as well as keep confidential any follow up support. [Learn more...](#)

Behavior Management: Organizations and individuals working with the public learn to manage the behavior of individuals receiving their services, e.g., students, customers, even family members, in a firm yet caring and safe manner to benefit the welfare of all involved. In phase one the focus is on prevention and intervention before a crisis escalates, examining the signs and indicators of a potential crisis and utilizing appropriate skills to de-escalate the behavior. Although the first phase is generally sufficient for most organizations, under certain circumstances an organization may choose to be trained in the second phase; physical interventions. [Learn more...](#)

Community Ombudsman Services: An Ombudsman primary role is to seek justice and what is right for all parties involved in a conflict or situation as he or she investigates complaints and inquiries of a different nature. The ombudsman operates on the principles of confidentiality, neutrality, and independence. After investigating and inquiries the ombudsman makes recommendations for solutions with the hope of helping either party involved avoid litigation. Although the Ombudsman may on occasion advocate for complainants a major role it to empower the complainant to be their own best advocate. Business and/or organizations businesses and organizations that care about justice and what is right for all parties will call upon the ombudsman to help determine the validity or veracity of a complaint and seek recommendation for a just resolution. [Learn more...](#)

Volunteer/Pro bono Work: Synrgy and associates does an enormous amount of volunteer work as well as pro bono work. Some of that work includes finding people to serve on committees and boards; ombudsman work; providing advice and support; developing programs and activities that serve the community; finding the right person or organization to do a specific task; attending meetings and functions and sharing that information with the diverse communities or appropriate persons for action for the common good; advising and providing guidance to various leaders; providing feedback and commentary to leaders; and more depending on the need.

So, what is Synrgy?

The short story of Synrgy is the work of Melvin Tate, MA Ed. Now retired from the Kent School District he continues his work in the community and expanded upon that work he was called to do as a career educator in the communities served by the district, including the city of Kent. The work involved responding to and helping the district and newcomers adapt as the district grew from a monocultural community to become one of the most diverse school district's and cities in the state; the fourth largest district in the state, and the sixth largest city. As an ombudsman reporting directly to the superintendent's office, Melvin investigated hundreds of complaints and cases, defusing issues before

they led to crisis or to litigation. Through Synrgy Melvin and associates provides ombudsman services for the community now. Through Synrgy he also provides workshops like Cultural Competence and Behavior Management to the community at large. Similar to the way he advised a former school superintendent and other employees, Synrgy also provides advice around diversity and equity issues. Synrgy can help create diversity and equity plans, evaluate organizations relative to diversity/equity and inclusion; help organizations and individuals adapt to change; educates continuously around diversity and equity issues in a variety of ways.

Synrgy uses an array of tools to do his work, including participation in meetings, writing letters, editorials, a website, newsletter; serves on panels; speaking engagements; supports community leaders; and more. Synrgy feels compelled to help each individual and organization reach their full potential for assuming responsibility and getting involved; and help others to understand what it takes to effectively navigate in a world with a myriad of diversity: this, not only for the benefit of themselves as individuals, their group or organization, but just as importantly for the common good of all. [Read more ...](#)