



School Culture and



NOT only are there different types of schools, there are different types of communities. Consequently, there are many possible sets of school and community relations in the United States. In human culture, communities are the unit of living, the basic minimum of personal and social relations through which cultural adaptation to nature is managed and survival is assured, and by which transmission of the adaptive tradition is accomplished.¹

A community, in its holistic sense, is a sample unit of culture. For every coherent cultural tradition there is a corresponding community form. Since the United States draws from many different cultural traditions, it is comprised of a variety of community types, ranging from the New England town brought from East Anglia in England; through the Southern county community including the county seat and rural areas; through the open country neighborhood with crossroad hamlets and main street towns of the great Midwest and Appalachian frontier; to the mill town or railroad center with banded, stratified zones of sub-variant ways of life.

While these and other representatives of older culture streams remain with us, there has emerged in this century a new form of community that corresponds with the culture

characterizing our new age of technology and social organization. Its form, however, is so vast and so complex that one has trouble forming a mental image of its pattern as a whole.

The giant metropolitan sprawl with its internal traffic arteries and myriad peripheral belts resembles a colossal wheel or set of overlapping wheels whose openings and spaces are filled with a mosaic of smaller segments, bisected and joined by traffic arteries and belt highways. Many of the mosaic segments are grids of residential developments centered around or adjacent to shopping centers, the suburbs and neighborhoods that are so strikingly homogeneous with respect to age, social class, and ethnicity. This vast mosaic of segmented segregations of peers in life cycle stage, in socioeconomic class, and in ethnic style of life is the community to which new ideas of schooling and community involvement in the work of the school must refer.

In many of the segments, the personnel and cultural patterns of the school are much like its constituency. The culture of the school and of the neighborhood, then, complement, coincide, and reinforce one another. In many other urban segments, however, the school is an interface, a point of contact for divergent social class and/or ethnicity, represented on the one side by the constituency and on the other by the professional personnel and relational patterns of the school. In

¹ Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball. *Culture and Community*. Chicago: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1965.



Social Change in the City

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this interface situation the schools' personnel are potential culture mediators or "brokers."

School and Community

Public schools in upper-middle class suburbs theoretically could be interfaces for high-status children and middle-status school personnel. But, as teacher placement offices of colleges and universities can tell one, these people—through their boards and school administration—pick young teachers who "fit" well with the life ways of the community. Any accommodation that occurs develops in the direction of the constituency's way of life. Where the culture of a constituency is subordinate in status on political and economic grounds to that represented in the professional culture of the school, the professionals engage more in acculturation (i.e., culture change initiated by the conjunction of two or more cultural systems carried on in this case by cultural transmission) than in enculturation (i.e., cultural transmission of content that is directly continuous with the culture the pupils already have learned in the primary stages of life).²

The style of and rules for community involvement in schooling differ depending upon the type of community in which the school exists and the relationship of school

culture to the life ways of the constituency. Recently many culturally different constituencies have begun to demand fuller inclusion of their life ways in the curriculum content and culture patterns of schools. New strategies of public education must face the issues raised by this movement.

Developing new strategies to assure that public schools become a positive force for needed change demands that one consider at least three major lines of questions. The first set of questions concerns the empirical knowledge of how school culture and the culture of the particular community segment in which the school is found contradict, complement, conflict, relate, resemble, or cancel out each other.

A second set of questions concerns what is possible or impossible, what is difficult or easy to accomplish, and what assumptions held by educators about the possible and impossible, the difficult or easy, may hinder consideration of new possibilities and new strategies.

Finally, there are the value questions of whether the school for any given constituency should try to displace, replace, assimilate, transform, develop, extend, add to, or ignore the primary cultures and languages of the students it deals with.

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²Social Science Research Council. "Acculturation: An Exploratory Formulation." *American Anthropologist* 56:973-1002; 1954.

To the first line of questions, little can be said conclusively, for there is great ignorance and little knowledge. Despite much rhetoric on the middle class character of school culture, the characterizations are generally deductive generalizations from studies of middle class homes and families, not systematic cultural comparisons. The need for comparative research on school culture and constituency culture is critical; sound, empirical cultural studies and comparisons of given schools and communities do not yet exist.

On the second set of questions, we can consider only two assumptions which are shared by most schools of educational thought. These assumptions are basically inaccurate or unrealistic, and they obfuscate consideration of certain new approaches to schooling in the metropolis. Until recently most social scientists and educators assumed that, to be organized and integrated, a culture system had to have members all of whom shared a basic set of core values, behavior norms, and a basic personality structure that corresponds with and "fits" the culture. On a related issue, educators have shared with clinical psychologists and many social scientists the assumption that men are unicultural creatures because of some inbuilt need for consistency. Consequently, it was thought an individual could not truly identify with and participate in more than one culture at a time without experiencing a deep sense of conflict and psychological disorientation.

The view that a culture system is based on the shared uniformity of each member, a uniformity that must be replicated in each new generation, has been challenged recently by the alternative position that orderly, expanding, changing societies are based on organization of the diversity in its individual members.³ If one keeps in mind the fundamental distinction between word or thought and deed or action, it is easy to see that an ordered set of actions in an interactive sequence need not be conceptualized nor valued in the same way by the individuals involved in order to be predictable and satis-

fying to them. Their separate cognitions of the event can be equivalent, so far as action is concerned, without being duplicates of one another.

In order to participate with mutual satisfaction in the ritual of putting a newly-pulled tooth beneath the pillow and receiving money in its place, the child who puts the tooth there need not have the same conception of the event ("a fairy brings it") or motivation for entering the event, as the parent who replaces the tooth with money. Yet, their diversity of motivation and cognition is organized into an equivalence structure.

A Repertoire of Cultures

The "organization-of-diversity" view of the relation of the individual to the culture suggests that the problem of the common school in the metropolis is not to define the core values and to devise a curriculum that will duplicate them in the new generation. Rather, in the multifarious cultural environment of the metropolis, where democratic pluralism is the ideal, the school's problem is to discover and teach the art of rapidly developing equivalence structures that help to organize the diversity of the metropolis.

From this position one also may question the view that every person must choose a single culture to be committed to and to identify with, if he is to be mentally healthy. A person theoretically can have a repertoire of cultures in which he can participate (one of which may be his primary and preferred culture) through the mechanism of equivalence structures. This alternative seems more acceptable than the "uniculture nature of man," because the older view has been contradicted by reports of observed cases of mentally healthy individuals who are "biculturals."

Recently, it was reported that Mesquakie, or Fox, Indian adolescent boys of the Tama, Iowa, Reservation were observed to be capable, mentally healthy biculturals.⁴ They are capable of operating alternatively

³ Anthony F. C. Wallace. *Culture and Personality*. New York: Random House, 1961.

⁴ Steven Polgar. "Biculturalism of Mesquakie Teen-age Boys." *American Anthropologist* 62:217-35; 1960.

as the situation demands it, in the reservation version of Mesquakie culture, which they were born into and began to learn first, and in the white version of the culture represented in the high school and the town near the reservation. Most, although not all the boys, were quite successful in their participation in both these cultures, because their biculturalism included not only bilingualism but also skill in the activities, technology, and social organizational rules of both cultures. They did not suffer from psychological conflict, disorientation, or anomie.

The conditions for developing their bicultural capacity included concurrent exposure and direct contact with both cultures; lack of stigma being attached to their participation in one culture by the people of the other culture; bilingualism; and the genuine opportunity to exercise their command of alternative modes of behavior and expression. Biculturalism then, or the socialization of individuals into *two or more* cultural situations in stabilized pluralism, is a realistic possibility in the multicultural conditions of the metropolis.

A recently initiated demonstration experiment in Rough Rock, Arizona, supports the possibility that a school can be organized to foster bicultural training.⁵ The basic philosophy behind the program of the Rough Rock Navaho Demonstration School is a "both-and" approach to Navaho and white culture. They reject the view that the Navaho child, for purposes of assimilation, must be forced to make an "either-or" choice of learning white ways and rejecting the Indian ways, or of rejecting white ways and retaining Indian ways at the cost of economic poverty. As the director of the school described the approach, a modern education is necessary to the children's being able to make their way; however, knowing both worlds well will benefit them because positive identity with "being Navaho can give them strength."⁶

The school's capacity for developing biculturalism is accomplished, however, through controversial means, particularly

⁵ Estelle Fuchs. "Innovation at Rough Rock." *Saturday Review*, September 16, 1967.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.



from the point of view of a thoroughgoing professionalism. A private, nonprofit corporation of the Navaho tribe turned over operational control of the school to a lay board of education elected by the Rough Rock community—five middle-aged Navahos of whom only one had had even a few years of schooling. This board holds operational, not just ostensive, power of decision over the director, personnel, and curriculum of the school.

The significant features of the school program are the heavy introduction of many aspects of Navaho life and language into the regular curriculum; the use of people from the primary culture to develop and expand the resources from which the curriculum is drawn; and the use of "experts" from the primary culture, for example, shaman or curers, to teach and demonstrate Navaho subjects in the curriculum. The children are taught to identify with and take pride in identity with their primary Navaho culture, while at the same time they also learn white curriculum in the traditional subject areas, through curriculum materials and teaching techniques

that accord with the principles of learning a second language and culture.

Some professional teachers have objected to the arrangement of having non-professional Indians as curriculum resource people and curriculum advisors, and of having curriculum decisions made by non-professional Indians. Some teachers have left the school, but others have stayed and have tried to meet the expectation that they would learn Navaho language, culture, and life ways, thus engaging in bicultural development of themselves.

The indices of success or failure, are not all in yet, but there are signs of success in the rapid rise of regular attendance without need for the coercive measures formerly used to impress Navaho children into attending the school. Moreover, on standardized tests of achievement, these Navaho children no longer show the typical lagging curve of scores dropping further and further below the national norms with each additional year in school. With all the attention to their primary culture they paradoxically are succeeding better in the white man's curriculum.

Question of Values

So much for the reservation—what of the metropolis and the question of values there? Ironically, there is a painful parallel between the two situations. Where Amerindians deal with absentee professionals of the massive bureaucracy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the parents of many segments of the metropolis must deal with the massive bureaucratic organizations that run the urban school systems. The very number and variety of the segments trying to communicate to a central office of absentee professionals who hold decision-making power choke off any effective feedback system. Perhaps for this reason there are, in many of the urban segments, local curriculum resources going to waste for lack of sets of limited policies that might allow their exploitation. For example, many children whom we have observed during the past year in an urban Puerto Rican school district speak Spanish in fifty to seventy-five percent of their in-

teractions with others, but are illiterate in Spanish. The rich store of cultural and intellectual materials of Spain and Latin America are closed to them, and an important basis for developing their pride and self-confidence in the identity with their primary culture is lost.

But in many of these communities the value question of assimilation, of "both-and" and "either-or," is no longer being left to the professional educators. The constituencies of the segments are making their own choice in favor of biculturalism. For example, in black districts, most people have given up the once-felt hope that skin color would come to be ignored as a boundary marker of their identity. The new dream behind the refrain "I am black *and* beautiful" is that if skin color is to be a symbol of ethnic cultural identity it will be a respected one. Many elements of Afro-American traditions, original and recent, have long been ignored, denied, or vilified; although, while much of this tradition has died, Afro-Americans have also created and developed new forms.

The schools played a role in this *denial*, for, like foreign extensions into black segments of the metropolitan mosaic, they usually did not even offer an "either-or" choice to most Afro-Americans, but effectively prepared them for a subordinate role in the social order.⁷ When, through the theory of the culturally disadvantaged, the schools began to offer a genuine "either-or" choice to these constituencies they, however, quickly passed by that belated offer to demand bicultural objectives for their schools.

Evident here are echoes of the schools' past legacy in the service of a cultural imperialism, of the inaccuracies of certain old assumptions about the relation of the individual to cultures, and of the need for a school-system organization better adapted to the massive variety and complexity of the metropolis. Some of these factors must be faced squarely if public schools are to be participants in the revitalizing social changes of the present era. □

⁷ Eleanor Leacock. Talk, National Conference on Anthropology and Education, Miami Beach, May 1968.

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