

Educational Pluralism

Edward G. Ponder

TRADITIONALLY, one of the major roles of the schools has been that of educating *all* for "Americanization." Put another way, the schools (reflecting society) have been educating our divergent racial and ethnic groups based upon the "melting pot" concept: "*We're all the same—Americans.*"

Yet we witness today a reversal of this trend in the schools and colleges, and rightly so. The Black youth of the mid-sixties with their sit-ins for equality initiated and gave impetus to this new direction. Moreover, the thrust in the late sixties to develop Black Studies programs grew out of a realization of gross omissions in social studies and history texts and the other social sciences. The initiation of such programs served as a catalyst to spur other minority groups toward demands for greater self-identity and for more adequate inclusion in the school curriculum. For example, the embracement of the slogans, "Black Power" and "Black Is Beautiful," by many Negroes spilled over to other minority groups who adopted similar slogans for enhancing self-identity, such as "Brown Power" by Spanish-speaking Americans (particularly Chicanos) and "Red Power" by American Indians.

Why were and are these significant and timely events?

Immigration: A Brief Look

Migration is a well-known phenomenon in our country. Indeed, the history of our country is built upon migratory trends (except for the American Indians). Each group has made its port-of-entry generally in the lower socioeconomic area of the city and has then spread to the other rings of the greater community as individuals and families became more successful.

The history of immigration in this country, however, paints less than a rosy picture. Many ethnic groups have suffered loss of culture and self-esteem because of what was happening in the classrooms of schools throughout the country. Generally these classrooms were organized to teach "Americanization." In this process, it was assumed that "assimilation" into the mainstream would be possible, though it might be a slow process. Often a deliberate effort was made to change those who were "different" from "Americans," thereby changing values and goals considered to be incompatible.

It should be understood that changing

people's values is most often not a rational matter and that serious questions come into play, such as: Whose values are to prevail? Based upon whose judgments? Also, although "Americanization" classes were charged with facilitating the "melting pot" concept, it is generally well-known that some immigrants were more "preferred" than others. Success and mobility were based upon a social stratification system, and those immigrants who were closest to the preferred White Anglo-Saxon background were generally rewarded first. Accordingly, the schools failed in attaining the goal of facilitating the "melting pot" concept.

After the immigration legislation of 1924 which halted the arrival of large waves of immigrants, greater numbers of American citizens, especially the Blacks, began migration to cities. This Black migration caused more emotional and hysterical anxieties than all other groups who migrated internally. Emotions against Blacks ran even higher than they did against the immigrants. Thus, while there were problems in assimilating white ethnic immigrant groups into the American mainstream, greater problems existed (and, unfortunately, continue to exist) for Blacks in assimilating into the larger society. This was and is also true, though to a lesser degree, for other nonwhite groups.

Need for Deculturalization

Given the foregoing discussion, it seems little wonder that we need to help to "deculturalize" many of our colleagues in both schools and colleges if education for pluralism is to approach reality. For our history as a people would appear to indicate that we need to examine seriously our traditional values, beliefs, and goals and to revise them so that they become more inclusive and reflect positively the cultures and races of *all the people*.

In this way, it may be possible to better sensitize those educators who are *allegedly oblivious* to racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. Such persons can often be overheard saying, for example, "I am not aware

of racial differences in my classroom; they (the children) are all the same to me." While the intent of such a statement may reflect sincerity, it is also possible that the intent of the same statement could reflect prejudice, hostility, and hence a "cop out" by such persons to deal honestly with their own feelings and values in a racially mixed classroom. Moreover, such a statement would seem to alienate many students who are proud of their uniqueness as individuals and as members of a particular referent group.

On Becoming "American"

Although today's social scene in America is a revolutionary one, particularly involving minority groups struggling for self-determination, one can discern positive signs of movement toward the concept of cultural diversity. Witness, for example, the high interest in heritage identity, ethnic minority, and multi-ethnic, multi-racial studies. It seems of crucial importance then that schools and colleges seriously commit themselves to develop high caliber studies of these types. This might be the route toward riding ourselves of many present hypocritical and distorted social studies and history texts used in classrooms.

While these studies may not be the "cure all" for achieving educational pluralism, they should have considerable impact on eradicating some stereotypes found in the general populace, and more particularly they should serve to provide a positive base for understanding and greater awareness between Blacks and Whites.

The Kerner Commission Report in 1968 told us that, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black and one White, separate and unequal." Although this statement focused national attention on a well-known historical phenomenon, schools and colleges have made only minimal efforts to bridge the gap, let alone address themselves to the larger problems of cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity so evident in our population.

As one outcome of our present social revolution, it may well be that our schools, colleges, and universities will reflect a greater

diversity in both the student and faculty populations along racial, ethnic, and social class lines. When one considers the relative smallness of the world because of technological and space age advancements, it becomes of crucial importance that schools plan to provide all students with varied and positive opportunities for experiences with others who are different. The present as well as the future status of our country and indeed our world as being interdependent requires that we cannot either accept or afford leaders and other citizens who cannot deal sensibly and intelligently with others who are both alike and different.

The flight to suburbia by families to protect their children in "isolated splendor" would appear to handicap many of these children in a monotonous environment and life unlike the "real world" in which they will have to compete and survive. Likewise, the same is true of parents and children limited to slum and racial minority environs. Therefore, we as educators should ask ourselves if we are seriously committed to promoting educational pluralism; if so, we must get on with the job in the classrooms.

—EDWARD G. PONDER, *Associate Professor of Education, New York University, New York City.*

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