

## Desegregating the Curriculum

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**A**MERICAN education has served large portions of the populace without difficulty in many areas; yet the curricular programs which characterize our schools at every level have tended to remain monocultural, mono-racial, and mono-ethnic. Consistently, we see elementary schools with little or no emphasis on or study of any people other than white Americans. Can we desegregate the curriculum? Can we revise it and make it more reflective of the learners who must be served by it? What does it mean to desegregate the curriculum?

Each segment of the program of studies in our schools deserves the opportunity to examine itself for the degree of diversity in its emphasis. This examination should include the nature and use of curriculum materials as well as teaching methodology, but should not be especially designed for eliminating *all* which school people hold dear. Instead, the movement to desegregate persons (placing racially different learners and teachers together) must now be extended to content, process, and evaluation.

A fundamental function of the public school curriculum has been to transmit to the young the values and competencies needed to function effectively in the culture. There is evidence that this function is not being fulfilled adequately, particularly in regard to the

education of Black Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, and others, most of whom attend public schools served by curriculum developers and teachers. The schools have, through deliberate design or complacency, neglected to change much of the curricular focus in the past decade despite the major social, economic, political, and affective changes all around us. This neglect to include (at a meaningful level) numerous facets and facts related to the minorities in America extends to both the disadvantaged and the advantaged. In reality, one might conclude that the results of pupil desegregation have been to have learners "fit the mold of the existing curricular thrust." This is inadequate.

The traditional skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic are essential, but they are no longer sufficient. Human relations skills and the development of the ability to relate functionally to other people who may be racially or ethnically different must become major components of the desegregated curriculum.

Some take the position that schools are designed for the perpetuation of cognitive skills; however, in many of our institutions of learning, pupils and their parents have told us that we need to do more than provide for cognitive development.

## Appreciating the Difference

Some curriculum experts deny the need for desegregating the curriculum on the basis of its capability for producing conflict among and between learners. No such position could be more misleading, because conflict is a natural characteristic of our society and also of the relationship between multiracial schools and unequal opportunities for satisfying various group and individual expectations. Schools must answer these concerns if they are to exist.

Kenworthy<sup>1</sup> indicates that teachers in all grades must be constantly aware of the need to work on preconceived ideas that children have about other human beings.

Children must be taught, through a desegregated, diversified curriculum, that differences are to be appreciated rather than challenged. Inclusion of minorities (of all descriptions) into the curricular program helps to bring about that appreciation. Historically, writers and publishers have excluded the records and accomplishments of outstanding Blacks, Mexican Americans, and other minorities whose contributions helped to shape America and to make it the great nation our schools teach that it is. This exclusion has left the white learners (as well as some minority learners) feeling that minorities are not to be appreciated and respected, since these reactions are usually in accordance with recognized contributions.

### Values

It may be this very concern which prevents curriculum developers from moving ahead in this regard. It may be that the

<sup>1</sup> Leonard Kenworthy. *Guide to Social Studies Teaching*. Second edition. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1966.

values (appreciating differences in human learners) are the very factors which schools do not want to perpetuate and diffuse. Lack of awareness of techniques and methodology for achieving this is not a justifiable reason for the slow progress in this direction because those who are responsible for desegregating the curriculum are among America's most gifted educators and share the expertise for bringing this to reality.

To desegregate the curriculum suggests that ample time, materials, teaching, emphasis, and respect be given to development of appreciation of racially and ethnically different people by children in schools. This should not be limited to a "Minority Studies Week" nor an "Achievement Month" but should be an ongoing part of the desegregated curriculum.

When one views the "excluded learner" on one side of a barren playground and then views the unchanged school program which exists only in books and square rooms, it is not difficult to analyze why the desegregated curriculum is so sorely needed. Such programs would tend to decrease alienation, decrease pressures, and increase achievement.

White learners need to know as much about minority achievement as minority learners are required to know about white achievement. When teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers accept this as a basic challenge and responsibility, then we shall all share a fundamental view which allows us to respect the dignity and worth of all people. Should not this be a major concern for curriculum implementation at all levels?

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## Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1974	March 9-13	Anaheim	Anaheim Convention Center
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