

# The Counselor and Cultural Pluralism

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*The counselor can play a pivotal role in making cultural pluralism "work" in the school setting. Implications for the counselor's role are indicated here.*

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**C**ULTURAL pluralism assumes that the individual is not expected to forego his or her own cultural heritage and/or identity in order to exist and develop within the context of the broad American social system. In fact, as Itzkoff (3) has indicated, "Potentially, pluralism is an answer to the question of how a vast and variegated mass society can succor diversity and avoid drifting into a miasma of anonymity, conformity, and totalitarianism." Havighurst (2) reinforces this notion when he defines cultural pluralism as:

1. Mutual appreciation and understanding of the various cultures in the society
2. Cooperation of the various groups in the civic and economic institutions of the society
3. Peaceful coexistence of diverse life styles, folkways, manners, language patterns, religious beliefs, and family structures
4. Autonomy for each subcultural group to work out its own social future, as long as it does not interfere with the same right for the other groups.

Literature is replete with articles dealing with the prospects and potential efficacy of teaching for cultural pluralism. For ex-

ample, the April 1974 issue of *Educational Leadership* had as its theme, "Curriculum for Economic & Ethnic Diversity." This paper, therefore, will not delve into the implications of cultural pluralism for the field of education per se. The intent of this paper, rather, is to focus on the implications of cultural pluralism for the school counselor because of the problems this area could present to pupils of minority group status or extraction, particularly those of ethnic minority groups.

## Problems in Cultural Pluralism

The concept of cultural pluralism stresses the uniqueness and worth of the individual within the broader context of the American social order. This concept, however, does present some problems to the individual particularly in terms of the sociological and psychological developmental processes. One problem, for example, is the dilemma faced by the ethnic minority group adolescent who in effect is torn between two worlds. The realities of life may, on the one hand, force the Mexican American, Native American, or Black adolescent to consider seriously the necessity to assimilate the dominant middle-class culture. Accompanying this need is the pressure to conform to his or her own inher-

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ent cultural values and mores. Rios and Ofman (4) speak to this dilemma in terms of the Mexican American student:

If the Chicano becomes like the Anglo he may become successful in "that" world, but the consequences are a shame of and loss of connectedness with his family. If he "sticks" with his rootedness, he becomes an alien in the school and in the larger community. He becomes "caught" on the point between the idea of cultural pluralism and the press of the melting pot (p. 254).

This dilemma, the marginal man concept, would seem to apply to individuals regardless of minority group membership.

Another problem that confronts the ethnic minority group member is that of discrimination with respect to physical features and language. Many educators continue to exert subtle, if not overt, pressure on minority group youths to minimize their use of languages other than English. This is evidenced even in teachers who may come from a like minority group. Skin color continues to influence the attitudes of teachers and other school personnel who work with these youths. The implications of these types of discrimination in terms of cultural pluralism would seem rather obvious. If the individual is purportedly the universe around which cultural pluralism revolves, how can it truly exist when diverse life styles, language patterns, and different physical features are not respected or accepted?

A third major problem facing ethnic minority group youths with respect to cultural pluralism is the incongruence on the part of many educators between *understanding* and *accepting* their unique cultures and their characteristics. Many teachers, administrators, and counselors *understand* that a particular minority group culture may be characterized as:

- Living in extended families
- Non-joining of organizations
- Preference for the old rather than the new
- Marked anti-intellectualism
- Machismo (maleness)
- Use of physical force to settle arguments or control children
- Need for immediate gratification

Feeling of little control over events, nature, and institutions (1).

A problem exists, however, in that many educators fail genuinely to *accept* these characteristics and traditions. They project superficial images of accepting these youths in terms of what they represent, but in reality they reject these characteristics as being "impractical," "immature," and "fatalistic." This is evidenced in many respects by such phenomena as the "self-fulfilling" prophecy. It is one thing to understand something but another to accept it. There is a distance (incongruence), then, between what some educators may profess to understand and what they truly accept. This inconsistency seems to confuse further the minority group youth and create yet another dilemma.

One could, no doubt, enumerate a number of other problems of minority group youths that accompany cultural pluralism. The foregoing, however, are representative of such concerns. At this point it may be timely to enumerate strategies that the school counselor might engage in with respect to his or her role in the endeavor toward cultural pluralism.

### Implications for the Counselor

One of the key persons in the educational enterprise who has the commission of personalizing education for youth is the school counselor. Following are some sug-

***To endorse cultural pluralism is to endorse the principle that there is no one model American. To endorse cultural pluralism is to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among the nation's citizens. It is to see these differences as a positive force in the continuing development of a society which professes a wholesome respect for the intrinsic worth of every individual.—AACTE, "No One Model American."***



The concept of cultural pluralism stresses the uniqueness and worth of the individual within the broader context of the American social order.

gestions for the counselor who is genuinely interested in helping young people deal with problems accompanying cultural pluralism. It is suggested that the counselor:

1. Use a counseling approach which minimizes the counseling relationship as a vehicle for making minority group youths change from their own cultural frame of reference to the majority or dominant society at the expense of their own desires and identity.
2. Fight prejudice against minority group young people on a personal and professional basis wherever or whenever it is encountered in individuals or institutions.
3. Make efforts to project the image of wanting to help all students. It is also important to understand that it is futile to classify persons solely by their cultural characteristics without truly accepting them as they are.
4. Realize that the attitude with which the counselor confronts the minority group member is the major factor in his or her being effective with the individual having

difficulty in the area of cultural pluralism. This attitude should be based on the firm commitment of the counselor to help the student cope with the contrasting orientations of the dominant culture and his or her own minority culture. The counselor should believe personally, and convince the minority group member that respect and acceptance of other cultures and values are consistent with living in a real democracy.

5. Should convince the client that he or she is not there to judge, categorize, discipline, or remold the client. Make efforts to combat and minimize the stereotypes and myths that prevail with regard to minority group members. Many educators, for example, would benefit immensely if the counselor encouraged them to view minority group youths as "culturally different" as opposed to "culturally deprived."

6. Convey an attitude that indicates an active approach as opposed to one which seemingly projects a passive-acquiescent role. The differences between the counselor and student with respect to cultural reference points may dictate a role on the part of the counselor which goes beyond the verbalizing that is typical of the counseling relationship. The counselor may have to actively intervene on behalf of the student who may need very specific and concrete help in resolving some difficulties.

7. Make every effort to encourage other educators to consider the premise that the needs of the minority group child as a human being may transcend cultural differences. Failure with minority group children is not so much a function of a lack of background knowledge of the student as it is a failure to convey to minority group students that we hold them in dignity and respect, regardless of background.

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