

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY IN IMPLEMENTING CULTURAL PLURALISM

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Hopefully, through a combined and concerted effort we can change the educational institutions of our society so that they will be representative of, responsive to, and meaningful for all learners.

WHAT are some basic factors that contribute to involving the community in implementing cultural pluralism in the school curriculum? Specific items to be considered here are as follows: (a) cultural pluralism—what the community must know; (b) awareness and understanding by the school's staff; and (c) things the community can do.

Cultural Pluralism—What the Community Must Know

Before involving the community in any change endeavor, the persons initiating such action should clearly understand the change concepts they advocate and be able to articulate those concepts. If a community is requested to study cultural pluralism in the school, that community is entitled to know explicitly what that means. It is necessary for the community to know that cultural pluralism is not singularly a Black or Latino History Week, nor is it merely a Native

American powwow or an ethnic festival. Certainly it is not an ethnic studies class condemned to a second class status among the other more-than-equal parts of the curriculum. It should be noted as well that cultural pluralism is not limited to social studies or English. Its presence must be felt throughout the totality of the school curriculum. Finally, the community should be aware that cultural pluralism is a necessary curriculum variable whether the school's student population is all black, all brown, all white, or multiracial.

By cultural pluralism, I mean the realities of American history—the history that chronicles the struggles, tragedies, experiences, and contributions of *all* the peoples of the United States, the realities that indisputably illustrate that the blood shed in defending this country was and is culturally plural, that the tragedies of war and economic depressions were and are culturally plural, that initiative and responsibility are experiences of *all* peoples of the United States, and that contributions to science and technology, economics, politics, literature, and the arts were and continue to be culturally plural.

It is equally important to note when an

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educational institution with all its parts reflects only the Anglo aspects of a pluralistic culture. This does not merely damage the self-confidence and self-knowledge of those students drawn from the highly visible minority groups, but it is in fact an *embezzlement* perpetrated on the *white* student as well. Such an embezzlement only permits her or him to sanction one language, to learn about one perspective of United States history, to be exposed to only one musical tradition, to learn about one literature, one kind of art, to see and sanction one kind of world—one that is white, chauvinistic, monocultural, unreal, and dishonest. The community must know factors such as these if it is to proceed as an effective body in implementing cultural pluralism in the school.

Awareness and Understanding by the School's Staff

Involving the community in a culturally pluralistic approach to schooling is a crucial contemporary endeavor. Even more, it is a noble and democratic educational gesture. However, for one seriously to pursue such a formidable and substantive notion, one would have to first establish some degree of understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of cultural pluralism in the school by that school's staff. Likewise, to pursue involving the school staff in a culturally pluralistic approach to schooling, the community's awareness, understanding, and support would be most crucial to effect meaningful change.

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If change is to be formally institutionalized as it is introduced, those who will ultimately be affected by that change, and possibly charged to implement and institutionalize its objectives, must at least understand the proposed change and its rationale, and must serve as its advocates. To pursue the institutionalization of cultural pluralism in the school's curriculum without this consideration will unduly increase the ranks of the adversary and enhance the likelihood of the program's failure. Keep in mind one thing if nothing else: If "Third World"¹ persons in the United States are considered to be a distinct minority and thus experience a political disadvantage, then those who are advocates of cultural pluralism in the school curriculum must equally be thought of as a distinct minority. One basic objective under these conditions is to build not to diminish support.

Assuming that the school staff has become involved in fostering cultural pluralism in the school and that the change process employed has at least minimized, and hopefully, neutralized, the myths and distortions presented by the monocultural approach, I will proceed to the next part of this discussion.

What the Community Can Do

The community can be a most viable agent in implementing cultural pluralism in the school curriculum if careful consideration is given to identifying and utilizing the reservoir of skills that may not be obvious to many of us. Once the skills have been identified, a mechanism must be established to make maximum use of their capability. In addressing cultural pluralism, a mechanism to make optimum use of the skill bank of the community might be as follows:

1. The school should seek to establish a Community-School Multiethnic Curriculum Committee.

¹ Highly visible ethnic groups (Blacks, Browns, Reds, and Yellows) that are politically and economically oppressed. Also called minorities.

2. The membership of this committee should reflect the various components of each group in the community: parents, senior citizens, various economic groups, and various ethnic groups; and in the school: students, custodians, secretaries, teachers, and administrators.

3. The primary function of this committee will be to assist the school in fostering a curriculum that reflects the dignity and worth of all human beings.

Some of the tasks this Multiethnic Committee might perform in implementing cultural pluralism in the school curriculum are the following:

1. Develop a file of community resource persons who would be willing to "rap" with classes about certain aspects of the Third World experience in American history.

2. Conduct and tape interviews with Third World and other community people (senior citizens would be a good target population) relative to their experiences in the neighborhood. The following questions might be raised: What brought them there? What adjustment difficulties were experienced? What experiences do they think were unique to their cultural group? What experiences do they think were similar to those of other cultural groups? What holidays are unique to their culture? Who are the heroines and heroes of their culture? What recreational games are unique to their culture? What music do they play and appreciate? What clothing and foods are unique to their culture?

3. Develop a list of outstanding Third World people within the local community from its founding.

4. Develop skills in evaluating instructional material relative to ethnic and sex bias, so as to be able to train other community and school personnel to conduct this analysis.

5. Establish a pilot program to implement cultural pluralism in two classrooms over a one-year period with the intent of adding at least two classrooms each year thereafter to the program.

6. Conduct a survey of the community to establish a "Cultural Group Myth Distortion List" which will be used in classroom activities to discuss "language as a murder weapon" relative to Third World groups.

7. Identify and acquire pertinent materials (audio and printed) that reflect the dignity and worth of all people and establish a multiethnic room in each school building, local library, and community recreational facility.

8. Sponsor a Multiethnic Forum and Festival. This would be a major event and could be an annual activity which would be characterized by community people and students displaying and presenting their "major" works in the various disciplines of literature, art, dramatics, music, math, and science, which reflect their respective cultures.

The community, like educators, must become aware of the necessity for the incorporation of cultural pluralism in the school curriculum and must participate in its institutionalization. As educators we must welcome and encourage community involvement. Hopefully, through a combined and concerted effort we can change the educational institutions of our society so that they will indeed be representative of, responsive to, and meaningful for all learners.

References

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