

Living Use: Example of a Multicultural Approach

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CULTURAL pluralism encompassing the ethnic mixes in America will be the American culture of the not too distant future. The pluralistic society is a reality that must be faced as ethnic and cultural groups throughout the country make greater demands for identity. The strength of the United States will depend on how effectively it can ameliorate the various ethnic groups into the multicultural person.

We need to develop a multicultural curriculum in the schools if we are to understand the significance of what the future culture will be. This is not to relegate the efforts of ethnic studies and other endeavors in this area to a lesser role or importance. What is of concern is that if we are to live in a pluralistic society, there must be an acceptance of living in that pluralism of cultures.

Surface acceptance, such as "I have a friend who is Japanese," is clearly no indication that things Japanese are understood. "I like Chinese food" is also no indication of understanding the Chinese culture. The *piñata* is the major activity in the study of our neighbor south of our border. To develop a pluralistic society requires deeper understanding through close association with those activities that reflect the various cultures.

Sometimes, as we work toward a multicultural curriculum, a concept borrowed from another, and older, culture can bring new insight. So it is with the concept of "living use," borrowed from Zen.

It must transcend knowing a person, liking the food, or participating in a game of another culture.

The purpose here is to call attention to the important task that lies ahead for the curriculum developers for a pluralistic society. The beginnings of a multicultural curriculum utilizing a cultural perspective unfamiliar to most Americans in practice but which may have implications in the classroom will be discussed. A serious concern of the American people, that of the need to conserve our resources, the need to use our resources wisely, will be examined as a possible curriculum design through utilizing the teachings of another culture.

Conservation of our resources is an imperative that is becoming more and more evident. Shortages seem to be the order of the day—gasoline shortages, natural re-

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sources shortages, food shortages. . . . The hue and cry to conserve our resources is a natural outcome as the people experience long lines at the gasoline stations, higher prices for food at the markets, and witness the visible pollutions in the rivers, lakes, atmosphere, and on the land.

It is without question that conservation of our resources deserves a high priority. We need to take action immediately before the problem overwhelms us.

The writer has noted the attempts at solving the problem of conserving our resources. Much of this effort has been carried out through slogans and "thou shalt not."

To conserve electricity, we see: "Use less," "You are adding \$25 to the monthly bill by leaving the doors open," and "Don't waste." No doubt the readers can add dozens of similar examples to the list.

Has there been an appreciable decrease in the use of electricity? of gasoline? of the natural resources? Slogans and "thou shalt not" approaches seem to affect surface feel-

ings, yet behavior changes in the person do not follow.

The schools have an important responsibility in setting the stage for conserving our resources. However, much of the effort toward this objective is again of the "thou shalt not" variety.

The "thou shalt not" approach does little to the internalization process leading to behavior changes that will make a person work at conserving our resources. Only through an internalization of the problem will there be a desire to do something about it.

A "Living Use" Approach

There is in Eastern thought the importance of the *living use* of materials and goods. This is from Zen. The writer feels that teachers can benefit from the living use philosophy in their efforts to have students internalize the need for using our resources in the most efficient manner.

A few examples of living use follow:

1. The water faucet is turned on in the morning to brush your teeth. You add toothpaste and wet your toothbrush. The water is running. You brush your teeth. The water is still running. You rinse. You turn the faucet off.

In effect, the water running after adding the toothpaste to the time you are ready to rinse has no *living use*.

2. You enter the shower, wet yourself, soap, scrub, and rinse off.

There is no living use of the running water during the period of soaping and scrubbing.

3. The light is on in your room. You leave the room with the light on.

There is no living use of the electricity when the room is vacant.

4. You have your lunch in a paper sack. After lunch, although the paper sack is clean and usable, you throw it away.

The usable paper sack in the waste basket has no living use.

5. A youngster with many toys usually makes little living use of his or her toys.

6. A textbook closed and in the desk has no living use.

7. A classroom closet filled with instructional materials has no living use until used.

8. To purchase an automobile with the most efficient use of gasoline employs the concept of living use.

9. Shrubbery shredded and put back into the soil in the vegetable garden is living use.

10. Flowers picked from the garden and arranged in a manner to duplicate its natural, beautiful state is living use.

The teacher can discuss with the students whether they prefer to be the useless portion or the useful portion that works for you, be it the water or electricity. As teachers become consistent in relating the *living use* concept to daily occurrences in life situations, the students will be better able to internalize the importance of conserving our resources.

Role play will be an effective method-

ology in internalizing the problem. Taking the example of brushing one's teeth, the primary classes can witness a student in the process and make analysis of the non-living use of water. It is important that the student in the role play activity is not criticized. The analysis should be focused on the water that has no living use.

The upper grade students, utilizing a stop watch, can time the non-living use portion of the water, and calculate the volume in gallons. This can lead to measuring the actual cost of the water that has no living use. Further activities will include calculating the total volume of water that can be saved by the students in the class, by the students in the school, and by the people in the community. Moreover, the energy saved from conserving the water can also be determined.

Teachers should not interpret the living use concept to be that of frugality or stoicism. A family that enjoys camping may find that a station wagon has the best living use for its purposes whereas a small car will curtail that meaningful activity. Living use is the internalization of the situation leading to the best use decision.

The United States is celebrating its bicentennial. Two hundred years of existence is an achievement and one that all Americans take pride in. At the same time, other cultures which have contributed to the pluralistic society impetus in this country can trace their beginnings back 2500 years or more. Living use is a concept that does have its beginnings about 2500 years ago. That culture has survived through these many years and there is no indication at this time that it will fade away. Developers of multicultural curriculum must take this into consideration if the United States is to be truly a pluralistic society for the multicultural person.

The thoughts from one ethnic group have been examined as a multicultural curricular source. No doubt, each ethnic group will have much to contribute to the curriculum developers. Let us really develop a multicultural curriculum. America for the multicultural person is long overdue. □

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