

The Thrust Toward Pluralism: What Progress?

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THE issue of moving schools and universities toward a culturally pluralistic state may appear, to some, to be a simple matter. The fact is, however, that the thrust toward achieving cultural pluralism in educational form and practice is a complex and value laden undertaking. It strikes directly to the heart of some of our most hallowed traditional practices involving the distribution of educational benefits. Meaningful reforms along pluralistic lines inevitably will require confronting structural characteristics in the present system which tend toward the continuation of an unequal distribution of educational opportunities for ethnic minorities in America.

The acceptance of cultural pluralism as the organizing *modus operandi* then must begin with the outright rejection of the assimilationist tradition in the public schools of this country. As proponents point out, no longer can schools seek to melt away cultural differences. Instead, schools will have to openly affirm cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences as good and positive resources which are worthy of preserving and enhancing. Since cultural diversity is recognized as a fact of life in American society, its schools need to insist on the reorganization

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of programs and the reorientation of teaching staffs to capitalize and build on basic differences which heretofore they had been so committed to wipe out.

The current AACTE policy statement on multicultural education summarizes well the type of response called for in moving toward such a new reality:

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. Cultural pluralism is more than a temporary accommodation to placate racial and ethnic minorities. It is a concept that aims toward a heightened sense of being and of wholeness of the entire society based on the unique strengths of each of its parts.¹

¹ AACTE Statement on Multicultural Education. "No One Model American." *Journal of Teacher Education* 24 (4); Winter 1973.

Given this and other recent developments, there should be little question any more but that pluralism in American education as a guiding principle is desirable. Ideally, it offers the opportunity whereby public educators, university scholars, and community people can collaborate in determining the education process. This is an important ray of hope in an otherwise rather dismal

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educational horizon regarding public education's response to minority student clients.

There is no need here to dwell extensively on the well known litany of wrongs perpetrated on minority students by the typical white middle-class oriented school. Experience with the reforms of the past—whether recent or not so recent, whether Sputnik-inspired or whatever—has demonstrated that conventional wisdom simply does not work well in teaching culturally and linguistically different children. As a matter of fact, it hasn't worked well for most children. To be successful, teaching and learning must be interesting to students. Student motivational styles can only be accurately deciphered if schools are made to care enough so that they find out who their students are in terms of social, cultural, and historical backgrounds.

Given the multiplicity of ethnic groups in this country, increasing national commitment to equalization of opportunity, and the assertion of ethnic pride in groups, education systems cannot continue to ignore the impact and significance of cultural differences in American society. They can't afford the luxury. We must acknowledge and accept in form and practice what children learn in the home and community, as well as in school. Learning goes on rapidly and well with young

people. It is only when the incongruities between school and the learning style of its clients are at great variance that negative judgments about the place of the client in the school are made. That is called making value judgments. America's schools have actively chosen not to value cultural, linguistic, and racial differences which may be at variance from the norm. This has to be the crux of meaningful reform efforts.

In a broader context this country needs to move rapidly to end the isolationism which created the monolingual, monocultural society of white middle-class America. The schools must be restructured to meet the educational needs of the total society. Curricular programs should enable children to communicate in more than one language and function effectively in multicultural settings by the time they reach their fourth year of formal schooling. In short, educational processes are needed which will enable *all* students to become positive contributors to a culturally dynamic society consistent with cultural origins, and which recognize the worth of other cultural groups. It is only in promoting and practicing this ideal that the rights and needs of minorities—of the culturally and linguistically different—can be effectively responded to.

The Issue of Equal Opportunity

In spite of a recent flurry of reforms and innovations, and large amounts of federal dollars spent on education, schools remain remarkably unchanged. Books such as *Teachers for the Real World* and *Crisis in the Classroom* have had little effect on the nation's schools. Silberman writes:

The 1950's and 60's saw one of the largest and most sustained educational reform movements in American history, an effort that many observers . . . thought would transform the schools. Nothing of the sort has happened; the reform movement has produced innumerable changes and yet the schools themselves are largely unchanged.²

² Charles E. Silberman. *Crisis in the Classroom*. New York: Random House, 1970.

Equal Access vs. Equal Benefits

Recently, a review of research and development efforts aimed at the culturally different in this country showed two disparate points of view concerning what constitutes equality: (a) the "equal access to schooling view," and (b) the "equal benefits view."⁴ The "equal access to schooling view," which preceded the "equal benefits view," contends that equal education opportunity is provided when all segments of the population have an equal opportunity to compete for the benefits of the education system. Green summarizes this view by saying that:

... there be provided for every person within the society some school with approximately comparable curricula, facilities, staff, and management. If there are children for whom no school at all exists, then those children do not have equal educational opportunity. Moreover, if the schools available for some are significantly deficient, then the children who attend those schools do not have equal educational opportunity.⁵

To put it another way, equal education opportunities are provided when there is equal access to the school for all, and when all schools are roughly equal in staffing, instructional material, and physical facilities. As Coleman noted, this notion of free education assumes the nonexistence of inequalities in opportunity because of low economic status and ignores the problem of the poor staying in school beyond the age of employment. Second, it is assumed that through simple exposure to the common curriculum, equal opportunity will be provided. The school is placed in the passive role of being responsible simply for making available the opportunity to learn. The task of

⁴ Tomás A. Arciniega. "The Myth of the Compensatory Education Model in Education of Chicanos." In: Rudolph O. de la Garza, Z. Anthony Kruszewski, and Tomás A. Arciniega, editors. *Chicanos and Native Americans: The Territorial Minorities*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973. pp. 174-75.

⁵ Thomas Green. *Educational Planning in Perspective*. Guilford, Surrey, England: Futures, Inc., IPC Science & Technology Press, Ltd., 1971. p. 27. Also referred to in Arciniega, *ibid.*, p. 176.



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Modern schools are undergoing a period of extraordinary sociocultural development that demands a change in both the structure and function of schooling.³ I am convinced that the demand for attainment of equal education opportunity in this country will become a most serious domestic issue in the ensuing decade.

The monolingual, monocultural society reflected in the curricula of the American school started to crumble when ethnic America began demanding its share of the dream of equality. The Black movement accentuated by the 1956 nonviolent bus boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr., in Montgomery, Alabama, spurred the "Movimiento Chicano." The march of the National Farm Workers' Association led by Cesar Chavez in 1966 and the continuing American Indian Movement (AIM) protest against government control have demonstrated that the culturally different peoples of this country will no longer tolerate inequality.

³ David E. Purpel and Maurice Belanger, editors. *Curriculum and the Cultural Revolution*. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1972.

benefiting from the opportunity is left to the child.⁶

The equal benefits view, on the other hand, focuses on the benefits derived from schooling. Equality exists only if there is an equal opportunity to benefit from schooling, and not merely equal access to schooling itself. This is not to say that the range of achievement should be at the same level for all, but rather that it should be at about the same level for the various groups being served. Achievement of this goal may necessitate unequal allocation of resources and substantial increases in accessibility to the opportunities of the school. This position has been affirmed in recent Supreme Court decisions, for example, *Lau v. Nichols* and *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez*.⁷

Given the notion that equal education opportunity is only provided when equal benefits can be derived, there are two divergent approaches concerning how minority groups can best achieve equal benefits from the school system. One is by attempting to overcome the so called negative effects of "deprived" home and cultural environments; the other is by focusing on the school itself. The former is reflected in compensatory education and other efforts designed to compensate for supposedly inadequate learning environments in the home and communities

⁶ James S. Coleman. *The Concepts of Equal Educational Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966. Also referred to in Arciniega, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁷ *Lau v. Nichols* 414 U.S. 563 (1974); *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* 411 U.S. 1 (1973); see also *Serrano v. Priest* 5 Cal 3rd 584, 487 P. 2nd 1241 (1971) for discussion of issues later decided in *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez*.

of culturally and linguistically different children, efforts which propose to acculturate children into middle-class values and standards of behavior. An alternative more viable approach (more consistent with pluralistic principles) would be for teachers to acknowledge the worth and contributions of home and cultural communities in the emotions of children. The intent is to promote cultural and linguistic differences in children as positive values for American education. Equal benefits for the Chicano, the Black, and the Indian child will not occur in a system that attempts to make them over into some hypothetical image desired by white middle-class society.

If America is to fulfill its dream of equality, it must begin with schools that promote and reflect a culturally pluralistic society. The schools and universities of this country must restructure themselves to provide students with basic knowledge, basic skills, and political awareness to enable them to derive equal benefits—to function effectively and contribute to American society as healthy and accepted members of their own cultural and linguistic communities.

Bluntly stated, what must be grappled with all too often is how best to meet the needs of culturally different children taught by cross-culturally deficient educators, to cite Aragon.⁸ Related to the previous discussion of equal benefits, the issue becomes: How do we move toward equal education opportunity in an equal-benefits sense, along culturally

⁸ Juan Aragon. "An Impediment to Cultural Pluralism: Culturally Deficient Educators Attempting to Teach Culturally Different Children." In: Madelon D. Stent, William R. Hazard, and Harry N. Rivlin, editors. *Cultural Pluralism in Education*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973.

Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1976	March 13-17	Miami Beach	Convention Center
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pluralistic lines rather than along compensatory-education ones?

Compensatory education is what has prevailed in this country's effort to provide equal education opportunities and equal benefits to children from culturally different groups. The negative consequences of compensatory-education approaches have been well documented.⁹ The important point

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is that approaches which define the problem in terms of cultural and linguistic handicap are doomed to failure. The problem is with schools, and it is schools that must be the focus for change. Both school districts and teacher training institutions must face up to that hard fact.

Implications which flow from accepting a culturally pluralistic paradigm are extensive. In the case of the Chicano-Anglo school environment, for example, schools would need to give equal status and prestige to both languages, both cultural heritages, and both histories on an equal basis. This would require the commitment and involvement of teachers, administrators, and counselors in developing curricula based on the use of both languages and cultures interchangeably in the classrooms, in school communications, and in cocurricular activities. Public school educators ideally would be bicultural and active promoters of cultural pluralism. Students graduating from such schools could anticipate being able to learn how to function, and function well, in two cultural modalities. This means that *all* students, upon completion of the school program, would be able to speak, read, and write in two languages and, more importantly, they would be able to learn academic conceptual material in either language. One of the most beautiful benefits to be derived from such a

system is the creative ability to approach problem-solving activities with a built-in repertoire of bicultural perspectives. This is what is involved when we talk about eliminating incongruities between the cultural lifestyles of ethnic minority students and current schools. Even the best bilingual and multicultural education programs have only incompletely addressed that issue. What is troublesome about this is not only the failure of the majority of school programs but, more seriously, the apparent lack of commitment to even deal with these culturally pluralistic concerns in design and conceptual rhetoric. All too often in the past, those directly responsible for minority education programs have been too prone to dismiss the pleas of ethnic scholars and practitioners as being simply “cries of anguish of those poor estranged disadvantaged.” Such dismissals are justified usually in terms of a need for more “objective approaches.”

The reality of school business is that nothing really changes without major ideological reform. It is not that I view everything about public education negatively. Nonsense! Of course there are healthy and promising innovations occurring in schools throughout this land. My quarrel is simply with the value premises inherent in current efforts as we strive to deliver on the promise of equalizing educational opportunities for all children.

So Whither From Here?

Where are we? Where do we go from here? The authors of the articles contained in this timely issue of *Educational Leadership* respond to the challenge inherent in those questions. All provide important, although differing perspectives and views of the issues raised. If they provide (as we expect) important food for thought and continued discussion among the membership and friends of ASCD, then the optimistic purposes set for this issue by its planners will have been accomplished.

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⁹ Arciniega, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

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