

ORGANIZING A CULTURALLY CURRIC

ETHNICALLY pluralistic curriculum content has the potential of producing fundamental changes in the total school climate, and also of reforming the entire nature of American education. For this potential to be realized information about ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity in curriculum designs must be handled carefully and conscientiously.

Fragmented and isolated units, courses, and bits of information about ethnic groups interspersed sporadically into school curriculum and instructional programs will not do the job. Nor will additive approaches, wherein school curricula remain basically the same, and ethnic content becomes an appendage to these curricula. Rather, in designing curriculum, well-conceived, systematic, organizational plans must be employed that allow for ethnically specific content to become integral parts of all aspects of the school's educational programs. Otherwise, our experiments with education for ethnic and cultural diversity are likely to prove to be of no avail; or they may even prove to be counterproductive.

Curriculum Characteristics

Regardless of the subject matter or course which serves to introduce ethnically

pluralistic content into the curriculum, there are some common design criteria that must be observed to achieve optimum effectiveness. Curriculum designs must reflect a real sense of purpose, and a clearly articulated philosophy. They must be organized around clearly discernible objectives which can easily be translated into instructional plans. Materials, activities, and experiences that are authentic, interdisciplinary, multidimensional, comprehensive, integrative, and that employ both cognitive and affective skills should be used to help students understand ethnic differences and cultural diversity.

Multicultural curricula are obligated to address the many different dimensions of the lives of ethnic group members. These include their cultural characteristics, intra-group variations, their present status in society, conditions of their political, economic, and social existence in historical perspective, and their contributions to the development of American culture and the advancement of humankind.

Multiethnic curriculum should also be broadly conceptualized to include the experiences of all ethnic groups, both majority and minority, in American society. Specifically, this means including Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, as well as white ethnic groups, such as Anglo Ameri-

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cans, Polish Americans, Jews, Irish Americans, and Italian Americans. This suggestion does not mean that students need to memorize a barrage of factual information about each of these ethnic groups. Nor does it mean giving equal instructional time and curriculum space to all ethnic groups.

Factual information is important but the curriculum should process it through emphases on concepts and generalizations about ethnic groups; recurrent psycho-social themes and eco-political issues applicable to all groups; and using comparative ethnic perspectives in examining social, political, and economic issues and ideas pertinent to various ethnic groups. Ethnic content should be an integral part of all fundamental educational experiences, and a regular feature of the daily curriculum, instead of being reserved for special units, courses, and occasions. Thus, ethnic content affects all students in many different ways.

Global Objectives

While it is true that specific objectives of particular culturally pluralistic curricula will be determined by the needs of the populations to be served, there are some global objectives that are, and ought to be, applicable to all situations, and equally as appropriate

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for all students. These include helping students to develop skills in ethnic knowledge comprehension, reflective self-analysis, clarification of racial attitudes and values, comparative analyses of ethnic and cultural phenomena, and eliminating the ethnic isolation and psychological captivity resulting from distorted attitudes about ethnicity.

Most Americans know very little about their own ethnicity, and even less about ethnic groups other than their own. This lack of knowledge often leads to inter-ethnic group hostilities and misunderstandings. School experiences designed to develop pride in one's own ethnic and cultural heritages, expose students to alternative life styles and cultural options, and develop understanding of and appreciation for the validity of others' ethnicity, help to fill the educational voids

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most students have concerning racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Thus, they merit high priority in delineating multicultural curriculum.

Culturally pluralistic curriculum should also seek to eliminate ethnic illiteracy, make students capable of functioning well in different ethnic settings, politically efficacious, and socially activist. It should increase their cognitive knowledge bases about ethnicity, their empathetic capabilities, and their experiential contacts with regard to ethnic groups and their existence in American society, history, and culture.

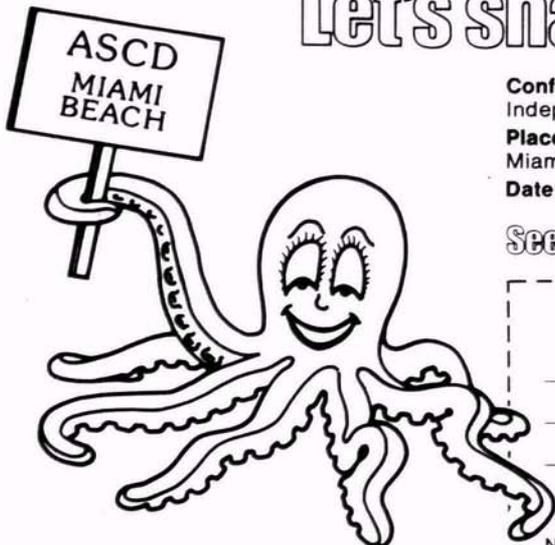
Design Strategies

The potential of education to help students develop understanding of and acceptance for the vitality of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity in American life will not be realized unless some well-defined, systematic approaches are employed to revise

school curricula so that they will be pluralistic. Curriculum reforms cannot be left to happenstance; nor to the whims of individuals within school systems. They must be carefully conceptualized and instituted on a systemwide basis. Otherwise, attempts at culturally pluralistic curriculum reforms are likely to result in fragmented, poorly organized, and ineffective programs similar to those of the early days of minority studies. Without well conceived organizational plans it will be impossible for curriculum developers and classroom teachers to structure the mass of data about ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity in ways that are manageable for students, and to achieve the objectives necessary for living effectively in a culturally pluralistic society.

Several different design strategies offer promising possibilities for making school curricula more ethnically diversified and culturally pluralistic. Probably the most popular approach is to integrate ethnic content into

Let's shake on it!



The octopus is smiling and holding a sign on its left tentacle. The sign reads 'ASCD MIAMI BEACH'. The octopus has large eyes and a friendly expression.

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Ethnic materials should be used to teach such fundamental skills as reading, writing, calculating, and reasoning.

existing curricula and pluralize curriculum materials, particularly elementary basal readers, and secondary social studies and language arts. Other curriculum reform strategies include using a modified basic skills approach, a thematic approach, a conceptual approach, a cultural components approach, and a branching design.

Each of these design strategies has the capability of giving needed structure and direction to the process of incorporating

ethnic content into school curricula. Each is inclusive in that it is not limited to any one subject area or grade level. They can all be adapted for use in most subjects for all grade levels, kindergarten through college.

Modifying Basic Skills Approach

This design strategy is based on the premise that ethnic and cultural diversity should permeate all aspects of education. Therefore, ethnic materials should be used to teach such fundamental skills as reading, writing, calculating, and reasoning. Students can learn reading skills using materials written by and about Blacks, Mexican Americans, Italian Americans, and Jewish Americans as well as they can from reading "Dick and Jane." Ethnic literature is as well endowed with examples of "quality" and with literary techniques as is literature written by Anglo Americans. Such literature can be used to teach plot, climax, metaphor, grammatical structure, and symbolism as well as anything written by Anglo Americans. Biology, chemistry, mathematics, and the other sciences can be made more personal, interesting, and comprehensible by including individuals from different ethnic groups who have contributed to the advancement of these fields of knowledge.

Modifying basic skills teaching also argues for the inclusion of ethnic literacy, reflective self-analysis, decision making, and social activism among the basic skills all students should master. These are as essential for living effectively in a culturally and ethnically pluralistic society and world as are knowing how to read and having a salable skill.

By using different kinds of ethnic content which has experiential meaning and psycho-cultural significance to members of different ethnic groups to teach fundamental skills, several other objectives can be achieved simultaneously. Students' ethnic identity is enhanced; individual students receive new knowledge about different ethnic heritages and are forced to confront their ethnic stereotypes and racial attitudes; the use of ethnically diversified and culturally pluralistic

materials becomes routine in teaching and learning; and students become aware of multiethnic perspectives regarding value systems, social behaviors, and learning styles. Ethnic content interwoven into the study of basic skills can function as a motivational device for ethnically different youth. It increases the relevance of their classroom activities by making these more compatible with their home experiences. Ethnic content also serves the purpose of bringing academic tasks from the realm of the alien and the abstract into the experiential frames of reference of ethnically different youth, through media which are meaningful to them.

Conceptual Approach

There is a complex, multidimensional body of knowledge about ethnic and racial groups which students need to comprehend if they are to develop positive attitudes and accepting behaviors toward cultural pluralism. Mere mastery of factual information and memory of chronological events are insufficient. A more useful technique is to design multiethnic curriculum around a series of concepts selected from multiple disciplines, which are applicable to all ethnic group experiences. These might include such generic concepts as identity, power, survival, culture, communication, socialization, racism, location, acculturation and enculturation, change, and ethnicity. Additional concepts can be selected from such disciplines as demography, cultural geography, anthropology, sociology, psychology, sociolinguistics, economics, and political science.

Since these concepts are chosen from different subject matter disciplines and are inherent to the human condition—both individually and collectively—they lend themselves readily to multidimensional and interdisciplinary analyses, using comparative and multiethnic perspectives. The concept of identity is as much a biological, sociological, and historical issue as it is a psychological one. Studying the concept of power means analyzing it from historical and contemporary political, sociological, and economic perspectives.

Culture as an anthropological concept has implications for analysis for the social sciences, the natural sciences, the fine arts, communications, the language arts, and interpersonal interactions. Therefore, all dimensions of the school's instructional programs can be made to accommodate ethnically significant concepts.

The curriculum development process should include selecting key concepts and supportive concepts from the various disciplines; identifying major and minor general-

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zations emanating from the concepts; delineating appropriate objectives; selecting and organizing curriculum materials, learning experiences, and instructional strategies to teach the concepts; assigning responsibilities to various school departments accountable for implementing the different parts of the curriculum designs; and making plans for maintaining cohesiveness in the processes of implementation and evaluation.

Thematic Approach

There are many recurrent themes which characterize the human condition, the social realities, and cultural experiences of ethnic groups in American society. These are persistent and pervasive in that they are significant to all ethnic groups, and permeate the entire spectrum of their historical development. Ways in which ethnic groups and the society-at-large have responded to these themes have had a determining influence in shaping the life styles of different groups and individuals. Illustrative of these recurrent themes or concerns are a search for ethnic identity, or “ethnicity”; protest against injustices and inequities; the fight against dehumanization and depersonalization; the

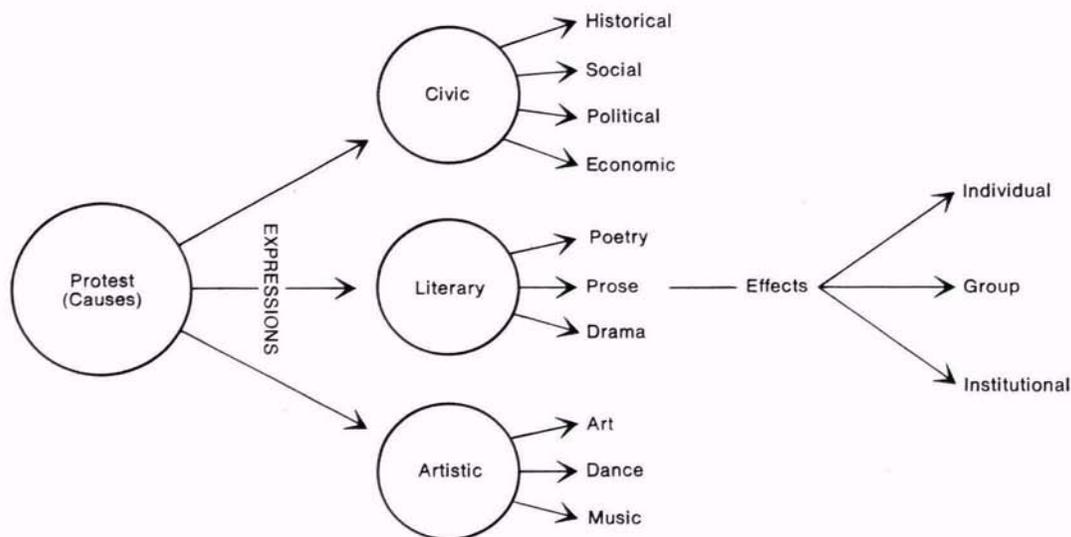


Figure 1. A Branching Design for Developing Culturally Pluralistic Curriculum

struggle for freedom; and the ever-present influence of ethnic groups on the American scene.

In a curriculum design that uses these themes as the organizing principles, the focus of attention is on the themes as opposed to the ethnic groups. Interdisciplinary techniques are used to examine the themes to determine how they relate to different ethnic group experiences. Thus, comparative, multi-ethnic perspectives are as applicable here as in using conceptual curriculum design strategies. It is equally as appropriate to examine Afro-American, Anglo American, Asian American, and Latino philosophies and literatures in studying their search for identity as it is to examine their music, their sociology, their psychology, and their history. Analyzing ethnic groups' struggles against injustices and inequities requires as much attention to their psychology and geography as it does to their political and social activism, their consumer habits, and their artistic and aesthetic expressions.

A multiethnic curriculum of this magnitude would consistently ask of students: How do the circumstances, causes, and responses of one ethnic group to a particular issue compare with those of other ethnic groups? Are these concerns inherent in the human condition? Are there conditions peculiar to the American setting that spawn these activities? These questions allow students to extend their analyses of recurrent themes significant to ethnic groups to a multinational level. This approach to curriculum design offers a novel, exciting way of studying different ethnic groups and their cultures, both within the United States and in other parts of the world.

Cultural Components Approach

This approach to curriculum reform focuses on those characteristics of different ethnic groups that combine to form unique cultural traditions. It is somewhat less comprehensive than the conceptual or the the-

matic approach. Whereas the former design strategies concentrate on achieving a holistic or total view of ethnic groups and their lives, the cultural components approach focuses only on the culture of ethnic groups. Primary emphasis is placed on extricating from among the generic cultural components of Americans those that are unique to specific ethnic groups. Ethnic perceptions, expectations, behavioral patterns, communications systems, socialization processes, value systems, and the styles of interpersonal interactions form the core of the curriculum. Materials necessary for examining these are selected from ethnic groups' literatures, histories, customs, traditions, folklores, religions, philosophies, cultural anthropologies, and family structures.

Branching Designs

The branching design to multiethnic curriculum reform is not so much a set of guidelines as to which ethnic content should be selected for use in the curriculum as it is an organizational technique for making ethnic content more comprehensible, cohesive, and pervasive throughout the school's total instructional programs. It suggests that students have a better chance of comprehending the complexities of ethnic groups' life styles, their cultural heritages, and their existential conditions in society if contact with ethnic content extends beyond a single course, or a single period of the school day. This can be achieved by taking an idea, issue, concept, or problem pertinent to ethnic groups that is being studied in one subject, extend it to another subject area, and add the perspectives of that particular discipline to the analyses of the topic under examination.

A branching design using "protest" as an illustrative example is depicted visually in Figure 1. It indicates that protest is a phenomenon familiar to all ethnic groups, and that it is multidimensional. These dimensional analyses of protest must include, for example, civic, literary, and artistic protest, and the various sub-categories within each of these. Any study of ethnic protest in whatever subject area would also want to

explore the causes, the expressions or forms, and the effects of protest.

The branching approach to designing culturally pluralistic curriculum gives students the opportunity to examine a given ethnic issue in depth, to become involved with the issue to a degree greater than superficiality, and in ways that they begin to immerse themselves totally in the experiences instead of merely dealing with ethnic issues on an academic level only. It also allows teachers the security of working within the framework of their disciplines. Traditional lines of division among subject areas need not be abandoned, but teachers do need to work cooperatively to build complementary instructional programs on similar ethnic issues.

In summary, the strategies offered here for organizing and designing culturally pluralistic curriculum are no panacea. They do, however, have the potential for providing some needed structure and focus on efforts to incorporate content about ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity into school curricula.

Perhaps some will consider these strategies quite ambitious and beyond the present capabilities of many school systems. These approaches, however, can be adapted to accommodate local situations, and can be used as a means of reforming the entire curriculum development process. They provide ways of better managing the mass of data about ethnicity and ethnic groups that teachers and students must process if they are to develop authentic knowledge of and real appreciation for these vital features of American society. Their effective implementation depends upon serious commitment to the ideas and principles of cultural pluralism and multiethnic education, the resources school systems are willing to invest in the pursuit of quality education that is ethnically and culturally pluralistic, and the capabilities of the school personnel who are assigned the tasks of designing multiethnic curriculum and implementing it in the classroom. However great the potentials of curriculum design strategies may be, in actuality they are only as good as those who legislate, design, and implement them. □

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