

Multicultural Education: Social and Educational Justice

"A thoroughly multicultural education must replace what is now considered the regular educational program. Is this possible and if so, is it desirable?" This author holds that the answer to both questions is affirmative.

The tumultuous decade of the sixties witnessed a virtual revolution in American social history from the effects of which the multifarious areas of educational theory and practice were not immune. In fact, in certain instances, pedagogy and its attendant concerns were the very arena of activity. The social and intellectual ferment of that period stimulated changes in education along a wide spectrum, encompassing such diverse concepts as the new math and the open classroom to the Head Start program and bilingual education. It is disturbing to note today the extent to which the movement in education now appears to have followed a circular rather than a linear pattern.

In retrospect, it would seem that the majority of changes in traditional educational practices stemmed from one of two basic sources. The first source originated in academic institutions, was led by scholars and educators, and focused on the psychological and ontological nature of the learning process. Discoveries in this field were accountable mainly for such innovations as individualized instruction and the open classroom. The second source of change in educational theory and practice originated in courtrooms and at lunch counters, was led by

ministers and social activists, and focused on the social context of the educational process. Progress in the area of social equity was responsible generally for the introduction of such programs as Head Start and bilingual education.

The irony of the seventies and the painful paradox of the contemporary situation for many of us is the degree to which developments of the previous decade have been halted and, in certain cases, are actually being reversed! Note the "Back to Basics" trend that is attempting to solve the novel problems of education's advancement by simply reverting to former practices with their familiar frustrations. Here the reversal is somewhat uncomplicated and comes from troubled citizens seeking to replace a new and slightly suspect set of "experiments" with tried but outdated procedures.

However, in the second area of concern the process is far more complicated and, for those of us committed to the goal of social equity in American education, far more disconcerting. While programs such as Head Start and bilingual education are rather recent facets of the complex institution of public education, they have roots in the broad record of

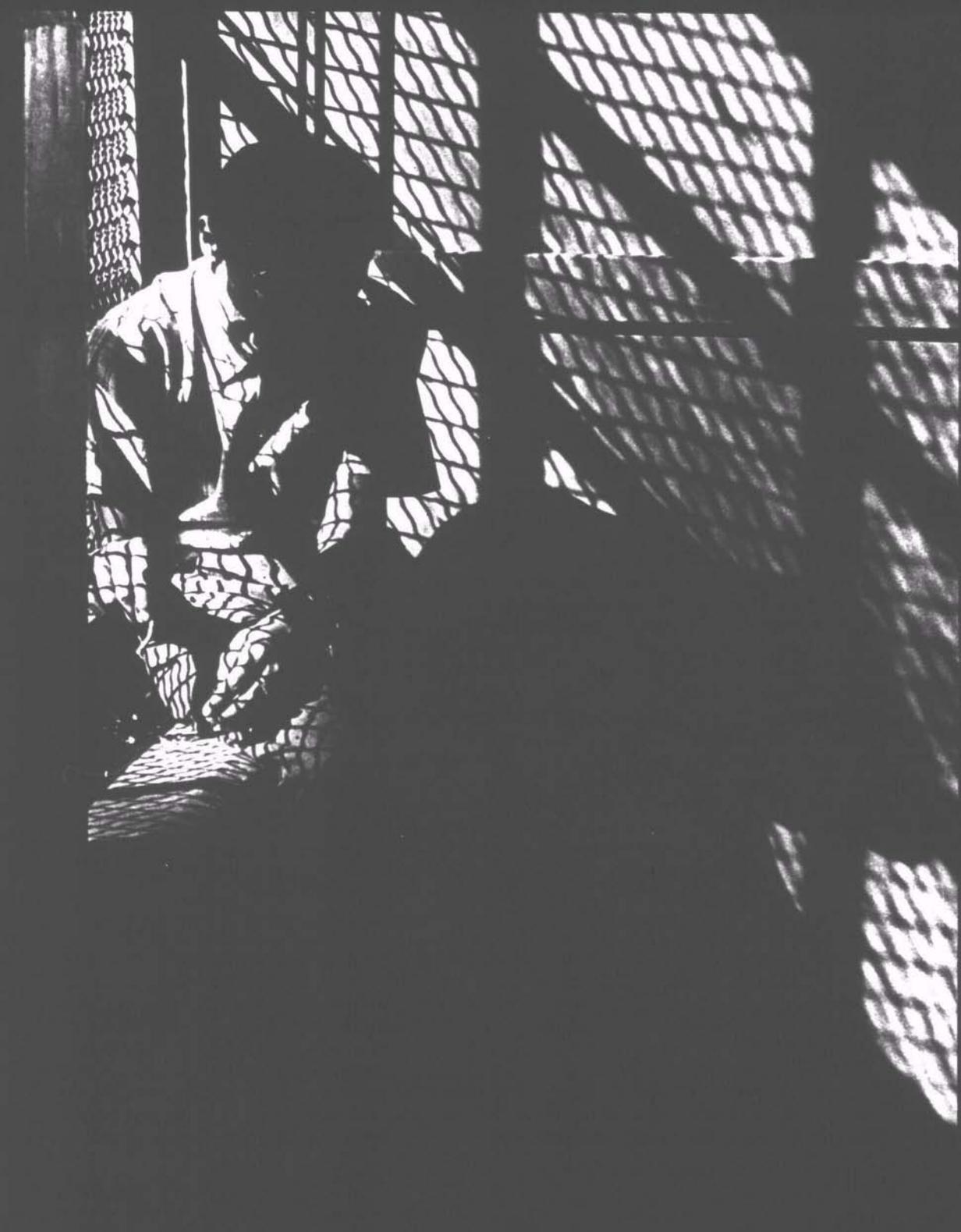


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Teacher Evaluation

January 30-31, 1978
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Supervisors, principals, and college administrators often participate in the process of teacher evaluation. Their judgments are important elements in helping teachers improve their professional capabilities, and in making tenure/promotion decision. This institute is designed to provide school practitioners with an update on the state of the art, a look at current practices, and some proposals for improving procedures in meeting teacher evaluation responsibilities. Small group discussions of the presentation will afford participants an opportunity for developmental input as well as exchange of ideas. Key ideas generated in small groups will be shared and discussed in the total group, open forum session. The overall purpose will be to provide participants with tools, experiences, and procedures for improving the teacher evaluation process in their own communities.

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social events, as well as in the specialized history of pedagogy. These programs are a more direct response to demands for social justice than they are a result of breakthroughs in educational psychology and learning theory.

Yet the disturbing irony and paradox of our times is that the very programs that were created to alleviate inequities in public education are now serving to perpetuate the very practices they were devised to eliminate. Specialized enrichment programs are now acting to resegregate students of minority cultures of American society from all other students. In order to clarify the development of this disturbing pattern, it is necessary to examine events that began in the mid-fifties.

In 1954, with the assertion that "separate is unequal," the Supreme Court of the United States outlawed school segregation. This was to be the first in a long series of steps taken in an attempt to equalize the quality of education for all students in the United States, no matter how diverse the culture, income, or race of their family. However, much of the school segregation that was so abhorrent to the Justices of the Warren Court still continues throughout the nation. While some progress has been made in the reduction of the arbitrary segregation of students by race, unfair treatment toward racial and ethnic minority students persists. The public and many educators believe that adverse discrimination continues to plague the house of education because of pervasive patterns of contemporary society: white flight, homogeneous housing patterns, high dropout rates of minority students, and delays in implementing court decisions because of appeal procedures. Furthermore, it appears that major blame is attributable to the harmful intervention of certain parents, real estate entrepreneurs, city officials, lawyers, and school trustees. However, in addition to these blatantly counterproductive forces, there is a more fundamental reason why programs that were originally designed to enhance the quality of educational opportunity for minority students have served to segregate them and thus to defeat the primary goal and intent of the 1954 Supreme Court decision.

Right Move Wrong Philosophy

When school segregation was legally abolished, the prognosis for the success of children



who were different racially and ethnically from the dominant culture of the United States still remained poor. The educational philosophy of the nation was unaltered and firmly anchored to the "melting pot" theory. According to this concept, the assimilation of culturally diverse people into the dominant "American" image was stressed through a process of acculturation. Therefore, while the physical integration of students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds was beginning to occur in the late fifties, minority students usually found themselves with teachers emphasizing the images and values of the dominant culture.

Through the next several years, the old, ineffective, and harmful treatment by educators lingered in practice. Educators were virtually wed to the melting pot philosophy and persisted in imposing an alien theory that proved incompatible when instructing culturally different students. During the sixties, as a result of this inappropriate treatment and in concert with the widespread agitation for change, minority peoples demanded changes in the schools. Black college students demonstrated on campuses, Chicano stu-

dents staged walk-outs, and Native Americans as a community insisted on involvement in their children's education.

Consequently, educators were forced to move in the direction of establishing instructional programs that would accommodate the diverse needs of neglected racial and ethnic minorities. In an effort to meet the special needs of these students, various programs were created, such as compensatory education, ethnic studies, urban studies, Head Start, and others. Unfortunately, while each instructional program was conceived with a pluralistic philosophical base, the actual curriculum predominately included only one minority culture, usually that of the target student population to be served. While the relentless focus of the singular dominant American culture on the melting pot theory was being rejected, its replacement with a genuinely multicultural philosophy was incomplete. As a result, new educational programs founded under the concept of cultural pluralism, promoting diversity among peoples, were restricted in their scope.

Resegregation Under Cultural Pluralism Banner

Currently, these specialized programs offer a partial solution to many of the chronic problems of unequal educational opportunity. Programs intended to acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity are being used by many sincere educators to alleviate long-standing abusive practices, such as distorted curriculum, inferior facilities, inadequate instructional resources, and detrimental teaching by unsympathetic instructors. Regrettably, there is a negative aspect of this phenomenon that fundamentally undercuts and may ultimately outweigh any benefits accrued earlier. In a noticeable number of situations, programs ostensibly advocating cultural pluralism are functioning to resegregate students!

For example, bilingual education was conceived to assist non-English or limited English-speaking students to learn English and their native language concurrently. Also, bilingual instruction would aid students to learn the given curriculum without falling behind. In theory, bilingual education is an instructional approach that not only permits children who speak different languages to learn together, but promotes cross-cultural learning as well. In practice, however,

bilingual programs are predominately, if not exclusively, composed of non-English or limited English-speaking students. In the southwestern states, bilingual education is serving to resegregate traditionally segregated Spanish-speaking populations.

The same is true for other instructional programs initiated to encourage cultural diversity or to improve the quality of education for minority students. Students enrolled in compensatory educational programs tend to be as homogeneously isolated on the basis of reading and math scores, as they may have been on the basis of race or ethnicity a generation before. Similarly, most ethnic studies courses are based on voluntary enrollment and have been supported generally by their own populations. Again, education programs designed to promote appreciation of cultural differences and to facilitate integration among various groups are resulting in the resegregation of the nation's school populations.

These categorical models have allowed educators to separate some students from the "mainstream" and have encouraged educators themselves to think in a separatist and discriminatory manner. What is truly needed now is a move to make the mainstream itself culturally diverse. The impulse to integrate the school population must be carried through all aspects of curriculum and instructional practice. Categorical programs may have had some advantages, but they are exceeded by disadvantages. Often rival programs foster competition, with individual groups struggling for limited financial support. In many cases, such programs isolate personnel to work mainly "among their own." These arrangements foster narrow-minded thinking, inhibit cross-cultural communication, hinder cooperative efforts with other groups, and restrict sharing and mutual assistance.

Even worse, documenting need within these specialized programs has imposed an onerous burden on culturally different children. For example, in order for a student to receive Title I assistance, he or she must score low in academic achievement. In essence, educators are condemning the student to remain an underachiever if he or she wishes to receive instruction that is tolerant of his or her culture. For to return the youngster into the regular classroom means to socialize him or her to the white anglo saxon protestant ethic.

A Major Overhaul

A thoroughly multicultural education must replace what is now considered the regular educational program. Is this possible and if so, is it desirable? The answer to both questions is affirmative. First, multicultural education is wide enough in scope to absorb other existing instructional programs. Second, the core of multicultural education is the study of all people, their customs, history, traditions, values, beliefs, and aspirations. Third, and maybe most important, multicultural education is not only appropriate, but it is necessary for the times facing the various, troubled world societies. As James Banks has written:

Events of the last decade have dramatically indicated that we live in a world society beset with momentous social and human problems, many of which are related to ethnic hostility and conflict. Effective solutions to these critical problems can be found only by an active, compassionate, and ethnically sensitive citizenry capable of making sound public decisions that will benefit our ethnically diverse world community (1:32).

Multicultural education is imperative for future generations of Americans for a variety of reasons. With a finite amount of world resources, interaction and interdependence among nations are increasing. Also, migration among neighboring and even distant countries is on the rise.

Plan of Action

If multicultural education is to replace regular education, so as to serve effectively the needs of all students, what action must be planned for and undertaken by educators? While a truly comprehensive proposal would be a lengthy and detailed *opus*, a few critical steps are presented here (2:270):

1. A humanistic attitude must dominate the curriculum and instruction.
2. Massive staff retraining programs must be launched.
3. Multicultural materials and resources must be developed.
4. Genuine community involvement must be enlisted and maintained.

The humanistic attitude called for in the first consideration has been long absent in this social

process we call formal instruction. Teachers should concern themselves with nurturing the psychological identity of their students. Accordingly, administrators must care about their staff, not merely as implementers or performers, but as persons—individual human beings. Instructional supervisors should interact with their specialists in a humane, not merely pragmatic and official manner. Parents, students, and educators should empathize and collaborate with one another. Conflict should be resolved openly and in a positive fashion. Caring for one another should take precedence over fulfilling the requirements of one's duty or role.

Massive staff retraining is mandatory and of high priority, since most public school staffs are culturally limited and thus at a disadvantage when dealing with others. The lack of substantial contact with different lifestyles by most staff members indicates the necessity for sensitivity training and information sharing. However, traditional in-service models will not be enough to compensate for lifelong isolation. Teachers, administrators, and supervisors will need to study in the barrios, work in ghettos, visit across the borders of ethnic communities, and socialize across the tracks of income and class. Retraining our own staffs to function effectively and to teach humanistically may be the educational challenge of the century.

Development of multicultural curricula is essential at a time when knowledge is increasing at a geometrical rate. Therefore, instructors will continue to rely heavily on texts, workbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary resources, such as modules, kits, and others. So, traditional texts and materials will need major revision to eliminate bias and prejudice. Also, new works must be created to present the many hidden and neglected facts about peoples of different cultures and their ways of life. Most crucial is the need for the new curricula to incorporate a multiple perspective, highlighting similarities, acknowledging differences, underscoring positive contributions, capitalizing strengths, and always attempting to foster an enlightened respect for the integrity and worth of diverse cultures.

Authentic community participation must be maintained if decisions in the best interest of the students are to be made and supported. Com-

munity involvement will reduce the negative effects of educators who as yet do not accept or respect other cultures and will provide expertise to those educators wanting to provide the best service possible. We must go beyond tokenism if cultural pluralism is to flower in our schools. Parents and community members will have to be relied on as resource persons capable of providing many services in the classrooms with teachers and students. Such community involvement should extend to the principal and other supportive staff. To those inexperienced in community interaction, it is important to remember that communities that have been excluded from their children's schools will need to be encouraged to participate actively. If misunderstanding or hesitancy is encountered, this must not be used as an excuse to abandon the entire effort at community involvement. Patience and a positive attitude are certainly in order here.

Summary

In summary, there are many educational imperatives that need action. High among the list are two: (a) ending the long practice of denying cultural diversity that in turn means stopping all forms of segregation within our public schools; and (b) reorganizing our instructional programs in order to install multicultural education as the core of our schooling and cultural pluralism as our fundamental philosophy. [E]

References

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