



# The Role of the School in Transmitting the Culture of All Learners in a Free and Democratic Society

Gwendolyn C. Baker

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*Schools should foster diversity rather than expecting all students to accept one way of doing things. That takes a well planned program of multicultural education.*

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The role and responsibility of the school have changed dramatically. Schools are no longer expected to respond to the needs of a religious, newly independent, and rural society. The growth and development of our nation and world have forced the institution to assume a new and different posture. Schools are now expected to develop the social, personal, and intellectual capabilities of individuals within the existing framework of a highly developed, diverse, and technological society.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not the school has assumed this responsibility is always a subject for debate. Criticism of schools, according to the authors of the 1975 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development yearbook, *Schools in Search of Meaning*, has been of five kinds:

(a) Schools are inefficient; (b) schools are socially and technically inadequate; (c) schools are inhumane; (d) schools are inauthentic; and (e) schools are culturally authentic in maintaining the social-political-economic status quo of powerless groups in our society.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the role and responsibility of the school have changed, but it appears to some that the school has not been successful in assuming its new role.

<sup>1</sup> Lowell Keith, Paul Blake, and Sidney Siedt. *Contemporary Curriculum in the Elementary School*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968. p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> James B. Macdonald and Esther Zaret, editors. *Schools in Search of Meaning*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975. p. 13.

The curriculum of the school is much the same today as it was years ago. The program is varied and the list of offerings more extensive, but for all practical purposes the focus has remained the same. The school and its curriculum have focused on one group of people, and all activity and instruction have had a monocultural thrust. The culture of the majority has been transmitted to all learners. Our schools have presented one set of values, one type of life style, and one mode of behavior, and have expected all students to accept this.

Until the present decade, most did accept, but those who could not and would not brought a new force to bear on curriculum change. Attempts at curricular change and revision have been made, but they have taken a patchwork approach. Curricular responses to meet the cultural needs of all learners have resulted in attempts to implement multicultural education. Much of what has been accomplished has been done in piecemeal fashion. Little thought or planning has been given to the process of multicultural education or to the manner by which it can be integrated into the total curriculum.

### Multicultural Education: A Process

If the school is to assume the role of transmitting the cultures of all learners in our society, then the curricula of the schools must reflect the cultural diversity of its students. Multicultural education should be viewed as a process.

Multicultural education is a process through which individuals are exposed to the diversity that exists in the United States and to the relationship of this diversity to the world. This diversity includes ethnic, racial minority populations as well as religious groups and sex differences. The exposure to diversity should be based on the foundation that every person in our society has the opportunity and option to support and maintain one or more cultures, i.e., value systems, life styles, sets of symbols; however, the individual, as a citizen of the United States, has a responsibility of contributing to and maintaining the culture which is common to all who live in this country.<sup>3</sup>

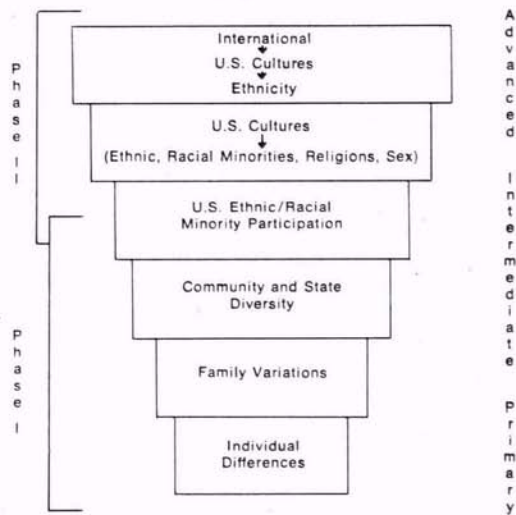
According to Berman, "The task of the

school, then, is to foster diversity but within a framework containing some common understandings."<sup>4</sup>

### Developing Multicultural Curricula

To avoid a patchwork approach to developing a multicultural curriculum, it is necessary to take a global approach to planning. In other words, careful planning must be exercised to ensure that the learner has consistent and continued exposure to cultural diversity. This can be accomplished if the planning for multicultural

Figure 1.  
A Model for Developing Multicultural Curriculum



education begins with the earliest learning experiences of the child for whom the school has responsibility. A conceptual approach that begins in the primary grades and continues throughout secondary schools can be effective. Objectives and goals should be consistent with the life experi-

<sup>3</sup> Gwendolyn C. Baker. "Multicultural Imperatives for Curriculum Development." *Teacher Education* 2(1): 73; 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Louise Berman and Jessie Roderick, editors. *Feeling, Valuing, and the Art of Growing: Insights into the Affective*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1977. p. 255.



ences of each learner. Figure 1 suggests a type of graduated learning experience that can accomplish this.

As indicated in the model, children in the primary grades can be exposed to individual differences. The learning that occurs should support the positive aspects of individual differences. This can best be accomplished by helping the learner appreciate and value differences first and similarities second. Children who can accept differences positively in themselves and others will have little difficulty understanding more obvious cultural and ethnic variations later. Integrating the basic concept of individual differences throughout all of the primary learning experiences will provide a foundation for understanding other kinds of diversity.

As the learner progresses through Phase I of the model, accepting variations in family patterns and structures will be a natural step. While it may appear to some that family variations have little to do with multicultural concepts, this is not necessarily so. To the contrary, this concept is important in developing the necessary framework on which later to base more complicated understandings as they relate to diversity. Once the learner realizes that there are many varieties of family patterns and styles and that all are acceptable, it is easier to move to the next level. Exploring other kinds of diversity outside of the immediate life experiences of the student prepares the learner for an understanding of ethnic/racial differences found in the United States.

This approach minimizes the exposure of the learner to ethnic/racial differences in the primary years and suggests that these differences are best handled by the student in the intermediate grades. The rationale for this progression is that one should understand self, family, and the more immediate type of differences before attempting to grasp the variations produced by ethnicity and/or race.

As indicated further by Figure 1, a complete exposure to the various cultures within the United States (ethnic, racial minorities, religions, and sex) is not attempted until Phase II when the learner has moved into the second half of school experiences. An appreciation and understanding of world cultures should be the focus once all else has been explored. Curriculum plan-

ning in this fashion can offer a more organized way of providing for a transmission of cultures to all learners.

## Implementation

Once the overall plan for developing a multicultural curriculum has been completed, attention should be given to classroom implementation.

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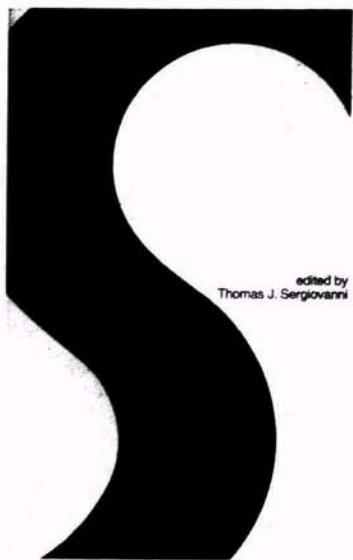
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The concepts to be developed, the objectives to be achieved, and the level of progression should be readily available to curriculum personnel and teachers. This can be accomplished through in-service training.

An impediment to successful implementation can be the concern that instructional personnel may have about acquiring enough knowledge about various cultures to ensure effective teaching. This concern can be minimized if teachers realize that implementation requires a minimal amount of knowledge to begin. Most have what is needed to make a successful start, but may need direction in how and where to begin to integrate multicultural concepts throughout all instruction. Once the implementation stage is in operation, acquisition of more knowledge is necessary to continue the process. It may be helpful to suggest three stages that can guide teachers into implementation.

The first stage can be thought of as the *acquisition* stage. This is the period when one is becoming sensitive to cultural diversity, the impact of culture in one's own development, and the importance of culture to others. This stage can also be considered as a time when one begins to establish a knowledge base. This stage is never completed but does foster the move to stage II.



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This can be considered the period of *development*. The development stage is the time when one forms a rationale or philosophy that supports multicultural concepts and objectives. The final stage is the *involvement* period when implementation occurs. At this point the teacher is providing relevant content, appropriate instructional strategies, and related material. Once implementation occurs, at whatever level, stage I is repeated until a sufficient body of knowledge is gained so as to provide for full integration and classroom implementation of multicultural concepts, content, and approaches.<sup>5</sup>

In providing guidance for teachers who are to be involved in implementation, the following process may be helpful. This process contains three levels of development: initiating, integrating, and enriching.

The multicultural instructional content and activity that occurs in the *initiating* level is minimal. This is the point at which the elementary teacher selects one or two subject areas or one or two aspects of the learning environment in which to integrate multicultural content. In the case of the middle school or secondary teacher,

it will be a phase or two of the specific subject area for which the teacher is responsible. Specifically, this may mean choosing to integrate reading, social studies, or art activity with relevant content. It may also mean integrating a unit in English, history, or science with multicultural concepts. Bulletin boards and other audiovisual materials should also create an environment to foster diversity. This level is a place to begin and, once the teacher is involved, the progression to the next level can be a natural move.

The level that follows will find the teacher *integrating* throughout all subject areas or in the entire subject so that multicultural concepts and content are pervasive. Meaningful multicultural content should only be included as it is appropriate and relevant to the instructional activity. Integrating the involvement of diverse cultural groups with related subject matter should be done as naturally as possible.

The final level of *enriching* allows the teacher to build upon what has been established in the first two levels. It will be necessary for teachers to increase their knowledge base and acquire additional information so that the enrichment process can take place.

The school can be effective in transmitting the cultures of all learners. Curriculum planning is essential if the school is to move from a monocultural approach to a multicultural one that will meet the cultural needs of all students. Implementation of a multicultural approach to education can be successful if it is approached carefully, deliberately, and sincerely. [E]

<sup>5</sup> Gwendolyn C. Baker. "Instructional Priorities in a Culturally Pluralistic School." *Educational Leadership* 32(3): 176-78; December 1974.



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