



## Unity with Diversity — A Common Commitment

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*Ten years of effort to achieve pluralism and shared values make us realize how much remains to be done.*

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Twenty people were sitting around a long table in a St. Louis conference room, ten of them members of ethnic minority groups; the others white educators. It was November 1969. They had come together to think about ethnic emphasis in the curriculum, to identify problems, and to give ASCD guidance about what ought to be done. The whites were listening. The ethnic representatives were speaking their minds.

"Sometimes you just feel like throwing up your hands. We need to blow the lid off things."

"From the beginning, our history has been written in Anglo-American style and with Anglo-American biases."

"Disparagement and defamation of our ethnic groups have been going on for years. We are strangers in our own land."

"We have all been robbed—white, black, Chicano, Indian—all of us."

"We've been made to feel that it is our problem, that it is up to ethnic people to change, to conform; a good many of us don't see it as *our* problem."

"We deal in school with trivia—we haven't trusted children to get to really important issues."

"We must start with our young people—many adults will never change."

For three days the conference participants exchanged ideas, probed, and brainstormed. What are our problems? What has to be done? On what can we agree? The challenging ideas that grew out of these explorations were formally published and widely distributed.<sup>1</sup> For ASCD, it was a point of departure in its effort to encourage

<sup>1</sup> Maxine Dunfee, editor. *Ethnic Modification of the Curriculum*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1970.

ethnic modification of the curriculum and to spur a broader awareness of the values of cultural pluralism.

Now, almost ten years later, the questions "How far have we come?" and "What do we need now?" were posed to several of those who attended the 1969 conference. Their ideas and opinions and those of some of their colleagues are part of this informal assessment.

### Progress of the 1970s

What were our gains in the 1970s? Our schools, supported by professional organizations, government agencies, and ethnic group leaders, ventured into multiethnic education. The period is well summarized by Arthur Rumpf as a time of response to the confrontations of the mid-1960s with the development of special ethnic courses and materials, the involvement of groups and individuals in a reexamination of the curriculum, and the provision of in-service programs to teachers. He says that the treatment of ethnicity and the pluralistic nature of American society are no longer an "add-on" but are becoming an integral part of the instructional program. William Van Til characterizes the 1970s as a time when "individuals and teams, schools and school systems developed a wide variety of techniques, approaches, methods, and know-how."

Schools have not only made a commitment to ethnic emphasis in materials and courses, but they also have made an effort to provide a more humane experience for all their clients. Increased attention to the humanities, the development of self-concept, and the acceptance of affective goals, valuing and value clarification, individualization of learning, and implementation of curriculum alternatives have been advantageous for the entire school population. These developments are helping to bring us closer to equality in education for every child.

In the society outside the school, there is evidence of an awakened awareness and acceptance of the pluralistic nature of society. Pat Wear calls attention to a growing interest in "roots" and in genealogical studies; community activity in cultural fairs, special days, and weekend celebrations; the mobility and mixing of the population; multiethnic emphasis in advertising and entertain-



ment; and greater community and ethnic group participation in our schools.

To minority ethnics, however, these efforts are no more than cracks in the tip of the iceberg

of prejudice and discrimination. Racism exists, individual and institutional, intentional and unintentional. Effort must be continued and accelerated if we are to achieve a society that views people *first* as human beings and contributing individuals.

### Challenge of Reintegration

As the 1969 conference came to a close, there was a challenge that went beyond concern for curriculum modification. The participants asked, "What problems of reintegration face us as a society?" This challenge was echoed recently in Wear's call for the building of "a social context in the school as a social institution within which diversity may be cultivated and developed, each diverse person sharing toward the end of a more humane and open society that is creative and life-renewing and not self- and society-destructive."

"A broadened approach to study of the socialization process" is the way Alexander Frazier characterizes the need. "There remains a challenge to identify common attributes or behaviors that transcend the learned social-cultural differences; pluralism, yes—but a new unity of purpose, too." Van Til supports this position, pointing out his concern that "an excessive version of cultural pluralism which rejects all possible common values and all social cement and is sloganized as 'do your own thing' is being regarded by the thoughtful with distinct reservations."

### Values as a Foundation

Is it possible to identify these common values that cut across all ethnic groups in America? Because we are brought up in this society, we already share some cultural traditions, goals, and dreams—perhaps many more than we realize. No matter what our cultural background, we are especially aware of our "Americanness" when we go abroad. Even when we are seeking our "roots" in the countries of our forebears, we realize how life in America has changed us, and how many characteristics we exhibit in common. We are no longer a part of life in the land of our ancestors. Somewhere in all these common experiences, there must be a foundation on which to build unity with diversity.

There are five attitudes and values that Elvin

Tyrone believes must undergird our attempt to build some common thrust into the future. He places upon the school the responsibility for creating an environment for interacting, learning, and working that will draw to it all members of the society. In such an environment, he hopes children can develop "self-security that permits differences, acceptance of change, tolerance of uncertainty, open-mindedness that permits objective examination of opinions, and responsiveness to democratic values."

To pursue these common bonds, young people need knowledge and understanding. Their learning experiences must produce data that will point to statements to which all ethnic groups can subscribe and toward which we are willing to work. These ideas can forge a common bond among all groups and lead the way to a society that blends the values, beliefs, and traditions of our diverse cultures with the long-lasting values of democracy. These concepts firmly held are essential to changes in attitudes and to action that can overturn racist structures and promote equality.

What knowledge and understanding must our youth develop through the learning experiences in which they engage?

1. Because the enduring principles of democracy are based on ideas of human dignity, equality of opportunity, rights, and privileges, we have a responsibility to see that all segments of society can participate fully in the realization of these ideals.
2. Democratic ideals are not easily implemented, but they provide for all ethnic groups standards of social and political behavior that can promote unity.
3. Concepts of democracy are different from group to group and are continually growing and changing as new problems arise in the society.
4. Because the reality of democracy in America is different for many ethnic groups, and because there is often a conflict between what is ideal and what is real, we must all work to close the gap between aspiration and reality.
5. We can reduce friction and misunderstanding among groups in our society by improving our skills in human relationships, cooperative effort, and political and social action.

6. All persons should be proud of their cultural heritage, their "roots," and proud of the richness varied cultures give our country.

7. Because the cultural contributions of ethnic groups enrich our daily lives in unique ways, we should welcome and enjoy them fully.

8. No ethnic group should have to deny its cultural heritage in order to be accepted and respected by other groups.

9. Although all persons, regardless of cultural background, have aspirations and problems as they strive for a decent life in America, society and its institutions should not erect barriers that make the struggle more difficult for particular groups.

10. Although knowledge may not lead to acceptance, as we come to know members of another group well we can begin to appreciate more fully their contributions to society.

11. Cultural differences need not divide us or keep us from relating to others in positive ways if we are willing to accept and respect these differences.

12. It is our responsibility to face squarely our own feelings about other ethnic groups and to make a conscious effort to overcome the irrationality of bias and prejudice.

13. We must respect the individuality of members within groups, so that stereotypes are not perpetuated.

14. All persons need strong self-concepts and the belief that they are individually capable and culturally respected.

Recognizing our tendency to promote barriers of race and culture, our inclination to stay close to our own group, and our readiness to stereotype and label, we may view with some frustration a mandate to teach children in ways that will lead to the fulfillment of these generalizations. Regardless of the difficulties, however, there is no other way to build for the future. Without these knowledges, we cannot hope to alter old attitudes and generate new ones.

What are the values we can strive for with these knowledges as foundation? If we plan carefully and execute our strategies expertly, youth in all our ethnic groups, large and small, will stand for something—respect for themselves and for

others as human beings in a common search, appreciation of all cultures and pleasure in the artistic and inventive efforts of various ethnic groups, awareness of oppression and prejudice in the community and eagerness to participate in the redress of wrongs, willingness to explore new ideas and discard unfounded biases, and insistence upon equal rights for all persons.

Whether or not we discover the forces of reintegration depends largely upon our efforts with those who are now growing up in the society. As Wear reminds us, "Diversity cannot exist unless there are common human goals toward which the power and richness and creative elements of differentness may be compounded into a growing and developing greater civilization." Unity with diversity must be our common commitment for the future.

Acknowledgment for their contributions to the ideas of this paper is made to the following:

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*Arthur Rumpf*, Curriculum Specialist for Social Studies, Milwaukee Public Schools;

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