

need to move beyond slogans and straw men. They will need to acknowledge that cultural literacy extends far beyond what "literate persons collectively" declare it to be. Cultural literacy is a process of participating fully and actively in society, a product of home and schooling, and above all of living in society. It is not something that will ever be mastered by "piling up facts" independently of the child's need to participate in that culture. □

1. Two recent comprehensive reviews of this research are Anne M. Bussis, "Burn It At the Casket: Research, Reading Instruction, and Children's Learning of the First R," *Phi Delta Kappan* (December 1982): 237-241; and Wayne Sawyer, "Literature and Literacy: A Review of Research," *Lan-*

guage Arts 64 (January 1987): 33-39.

2. See Arthur Applebee, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974); and David England and Stephen Judy, eds., "An Historical Primer on the Teaching of English," *The English Journal* 68 (April 1979).

3. For a detailed examination of the myth of a golden age of literacy, see Harvey Daniels, *Famous Last Words* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983) or my *ABCs of Literacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Lawrence Cremin's *The Transformation of the Schools: Progressivism in American Education*, cited by Professor Hirsch, also clearly documents the failures of traditional nineteenth century education, particularly when directed toward children who were not members of the middle classes.

4. A particularly strong discussion of the flaws in basal readers can be found in Kenneth S. Goodman (for the Reading Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English), "Basal Readers: A Call for Action," *Language Arts* 63 (April 1986): 358-363.

5. I discuss the dangers of what I call the "adult standards approach," which presents mature adult knowledge as the model for the in-process acquisition of thinking, knowledge, and language by young people, in *Explorations in the Teaching of English*, Chapter 2, "Language, Experience, and the Teaching of English" (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

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E. D. HIRSCH, JR.

The Paradox of Traditional Literacy: Response to Tchudi

Teaching traditional content is socially progressive, insists Hirsch.

As I understand the substance of Professor Tchudi's rejoinder, he joins me in rejecting the overly simple principles that I have criticized. His complaint is that I have tarred too many people with the same

brush. He, for one, does not hold those principles as I have described them, and neither do many other educators. I accept this correction, assuming that Professor Tchudi is right, and I applaud the fact. I am, after all, oppos-

ing faulty ideas, not attacking people, and I wish to be part of a collective effort toward school reform, not a mere oppositionist. To the extent that Dr. Tchudi's views are representative, I could not be more pleased that the

ideas I deplore are less widely held than I suggest.

His view that traditional information is less important than I claim is another matter. The knowledge that is necessary to high literacy is inherently traditional. It changes slowly, because it is the property of many generations, and is recorded in hundreds of thousands of books. I find in Professor Tchudi's remarks a greater disagreement with my insistence on traditional content than with my criticism of three faulty educational theories. He seems to equate my emphasis on teaching traditional content with general social conservatism. The truth is more complex. Traditional content is essential to schooling because literacy in English is itself conservative. It is so widely

diffused throughout time and space that it can change only very slowly.

Thus we confront a paradox which Dr. Tchudi has, I think, missed. Conservative curricular content is socially progressive. Giving all students access to traditional literate culture gives all students the key to mainstream economic and political life. That is a progressive aim. By contrast, not giving all students traditional materials keeps some of them out of the mainstream. That is a socially regressive result.

Some of the strongest supporters of my call for the teaching of traditional literate materials have been teachers of minority students. Their letters to me have been eloquent. They know

from experiences in the trenches that teaching traditional content is, in fact, not socially conservative, but is, on the contrary, the only avenue to social and economic justice for minority as well as middle-class students. When Dr. Tchudi and other educators master the paradox that teaching traditional content is a socially progressive act, I shall be delighted to follow their expert advice about methods. □

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—STEPHEN TCHUDI—

A Final Comment

But, queries Tchudi, who gets to define traditional content?

I would like to make three brief statements in reaction to Professor Hirsch's reply:

1. Whether traditional content is socially progressive or regressive depends very much on who gets to define "traditional content."

2. Compelling students to master a traditional content has not been demonstrated to be "the only avenue to social and economic justice for minor-

ity as well as middle-class students"; nor is there evidence that refusing to compel students to study such common content (which Professor Hirsch seems to confuse with a deliberate withholding of content) excludes minorities or middle-class students from mainstream life.

3. The education profession needs a much deeper understanding of the processes by which materials become a part of traditional and popular cul-

ture and of the ways in which children assimilate cultural materials to become active participants in those cultures. □

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