

Diversity Within Unity: Essential Principles For Teaching and Learning In a Multicultural Society

The authors offer these design principles in the hope that they will help education policy makers and practitioners realize the elusive but essential goal of a democratic and pluralistic society.

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WHAT DO WE know about education and diversity, and how do we know it? This two-part question guided the work of the Multicultural Education Consensus Panel, sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington and the Common Destiny Alliance at the University of Maryland. This article is the product of a four-year project during which the panel, with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, reviewed and synthesized the research related to diversity.

The panel members are an interdisciplinary group consisting of two psychologists, a political scientist, a sociologist, and four specialists in multicultural education. The panel was modeled after the consensus panels that develop and write reports for the National Acad-

emy of Sciences. In such panels, an expert group studies research and practice and arrives at a conclusion about what is known about a particular problem and the most effective actions that can be taken to solve it.

The findings of the Multicultural Education Con-

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culture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; JANET WARD SCHOFIELD is a professor of psychology and a senior scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh; and WALTER G. STEPHAN is a professor of psychology, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. The longer publication on which this article is based — which contains a checklist for use by school districts — can be ordered and downloaded from the website of the Center for Multicultural Education, University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/centerme/home.htm>; click on “Center Publications.”

sensus Panel, which we call *essential principles* in this article, describe ways in which education policy and practice related to diversity can be improved. These principles are derived from both research and practice. They are designed to help practitioners in all types of schools increase student academic achievement and improve intergroup skills. Another aim is to help schools successfully meet the challenges of and benefit from the diversity that characterizes the United States.

Schools can make a significant difference in the lives of students, and they are a key to maintaining a free and democratic society. Democratic societies are fragile and are works in progress. Their existence depends on a thoughtful citizenry that believes in democratic ideals and is willing and able to participate in the civic life of the nation. We realize that the public schools are experiencing a great deal of criticism. However, we believe that they are essential to ensuring the survival of our democracy.

We have organized the 12 essential principles into five categories: 1) teacher learning; 2) student learning; 3) intergroup relations; 4) school governance, organization, and equity; and 5) assessment. Although these categories overlap to some extent, we think readers will find this organization helpful.

TEACHER LEARNING

Principle 1. Professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within U.S. society and the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behavior. Continuing education about diversity is especially important for teachers because of the increasing cultural and ethnic gap that exists between the nation's teachers and students. Effective professional development programs should help educators to 1) uncover and identify their personal attitudes toward racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups; 2) acquire knowledge about the histories and cultures of the diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups within the nation and within their schools; 3) become acquainted with the diverse perspectives that exist within different ethnic and cultural communities; 4) understand the ways in which institutionalized knowledge within schools, universities, and the popular culture can perpetuate stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups; and 5) acquire the knowledge and skills needed to develop and

implement an equity pedagogy, defined by James Banks as instruction that provides all students with an equal opportunity to attain academic and social success in school.¹

Professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic



groups and how such variables as social class, religion, region, generation, extent of urbanization, and gender strongly influence ethnic and cultural behavior. These variables influence the behavior of groups both singly and interactively. Indeed, social class is one of the most important variables that mediate and influence behavior. In his widely discussed book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, William Julius Wilson argues that class is becoming increasingly important in the lives of African Americans.² The increasing significance of class rather than the declining significance of race might be a more accurate description of the phenomenon that Wilson describes. Racism continues to affect African Americans of every social class, but it does so in complex ways that to some extent — though by no means always — reflect social-class status.

If teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all students, they must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning. Although students are not solely products of their cultures and vary in the degree to which they identify with them, there are some distinctive cultural behaviors that are associated with ethnic groups.³ Thus teachers should become knowledgeable about the cultural backgrounds of their students. They should also acquire the skills needed to translate that knowledge into effective instruction and an enriched curriculum.⁴ Teaching should be culturally responsive to students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups.

Making teaching culturally responsive involves strategies such as constructing and designing relevant cultural metaphors and multicultural representations to help bridge the gap between what students already know and appreciate and what they are to be taught. Culturally responsive instructional strategies transform information about the home and community into effective classroom practice. Rather than rely on generalized notions of ethnic groups that can be misleading, effective teachers use knowledge of their students' culture and ethnicity as a framework for inquiry. They also use culturally responsive activities, resources, and strategies to organize and implement instruction.

STUDENT LEARNING

Principle 2. Schools should ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and to meet high standards. Schools can be thought of as collections of opportunities to learn.⁵ A good school maximizes the learning experiences of its students. One might judge the fairness of educational opportunity by comparing the learning opportunities students have within and across schools. The most important of these opportunities to learn are 1) teacher quality (indicators include experience, preparation to teach the content, participation in high-quality professional development, verbal ability, and opportunity to receive teacher rewards and incentives); 2) a safe and orderly learning environment; 3) time actively engaged in learning; 4) low student/teacher ratio; 5) rigor of the curriculum; 6) grouping practices that avoid tracking and rigid forms of student assignment based on past performance; 7) sophistication and currency of learning resources and information technology used by students; and 8) access to extracurricular activities.

Although the consequences of these different characteristics of schools vary with particular conditions, the available research suggests that, when two or more cohorts of students differ significantly in their access to opportunities to learn, differences in the quality of education also exist.⁶ Such differences affect student achievement and can undermine the prospects for positive intergroup relations.

THE CONTENT THAT STUDENTS ARE TAUGHT INFLUENCES THE LEVEL OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.

The content that makes up the lessons students are taught influences the level of student achievement. This is hardly surprising, but the curriculum students experience and the expectations of teachers and others about how much of the material they will learn vary from school to school. In general, students who are taught curricula that are more rigorous learn more than their peers with similar prior knowledge and backgrounds who are taught less-demanding curricula. For example, earlier access to algebra leads to greater participation in higher-level math courses and to increased academic achievement.

Principle 3. The curriculum should help students understand that knowledge is socially constructed and reflects researchers' personal experiences as well as the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work. In curriculum and teaching units and in textbooks, students often study historical events, concepts, and issues only or primarily from the points of view of the victors.⁷ The perspectives of the vanquished are frequently silenced, ignored, or marginalized. This kind of teaching privileges mainstream students — those who most often identify with the victors or dominant groups — and causes many students of color to feel left out of the American story.

Concepts such as the “discovery” of America, the westward movement, and the role of the pioneers are often taught primarily from the points of view of the European Americans who constructed them. The curriculum should help students to understand how these concepts reflect the values and perspectives of European Americans and describe their experiences in the United States. Teachers should help students learn how these concepts have very different meanings for groups indigenous to America and for those who were brought to America in chains.

Teaching students the different — and often conflicting — meanings of concepts and issues for the diverse groups that make up the U.S. population will help them to better understand the complex factors that contributed to the birth, growth, and development of the nation. Such teaching will also help students develop empathy for the points of view and perspectives of various groups and will increase their ability to think critically.

Principle 4. Schools should provide all students with opportunities to participate in extracurricular and cocurricular activities that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase academic achievement and foster positive interracial relationships. Research evidence that links student achievement to participation in extracurricular and cocurricular activities is increasing in quantity and consistency.⁸ There is significant research that supports the proposition that participation in after-school programs, sports activities, academic clubs, and school-sponsored social activities contributes to academic performance, reduces dropout rates and discipline problems, and enhances interpersonal skills among students from different ethnic backgrounds. Kris Gutiérrez and her colleagues, for example, found that “nonformal learning contexts,” such as after-school programs, are useful in bridging home and school cultures for students from diverse groups.⁹ Jomills Braddock concluded that involvement in sports activities was particularly beneficial for male African American high school students.¹⁰ When designing extracurricular activities, educators should give special attention to recruitment, selection of leaders and teams, the cost of participating, allocation of school resources, and opportunities for cooperative intergroup contact.

INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Principle 5. Schools should create or make salient superordinate or cross-cutting groups in order to improve intergroup relations. Creating superordinate groups — groups with which members of other groups in a given situation identify — improves intergroup relations.¹¹ When membership in superordinate groups is salient, other group differences become less important. Creating superordinate groups stimulates fellowship and cohesion and so can mitigate preexisting animosities.

In school settings many superordinate groups can be created or made salient. For example, it is possible to create superordinate groups through extracurricular activities. And many existing superordinate groups can be made more salient: the classroom, the grade level, the school, the community, the state, and even the nation. The most immediate superordinate groups (e.g., the school chorus rather than the state of California) are likely to be the most influential, but identification with any superordinate group can reduce prejudice.

Principle 6. Students should learn about stereotyping and other related biases that have negative effects on ra-

cial and ethnic relations. We use categories in perceiving our environment because categorization is a natural part of human information processing. But the mere act of categorizing people as members of an “in group” and an “out group” can result in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.¹² Specifically, making distinctions between groups can lead to the perception that the “other group” is more homogeneous than one’s own group, and this, in turn, can lead to an exaggeration of the extent of the group differences. Thus categorizing leads to stereotyping and to behaviors influenced by those stereotypes.

Intergroup contact can counteract stereotypes if the situation allows members of each group to behave in a variety of ways across different contexts, so that their full humanity and diversity are displayed. Negative stereotypes can also be modified in noncontact situations by providing members of the “in group” with information about members of the “out group” who disconfirm a stereotype across a variety of situations.¹³

Principle 7. Students should learn about the values shared by virtually all cultural groups (e.g., justice, equality, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity). Teaching students about the values that virtually all groups share, such as those described in the UN Universal Bill of Rights, can provide a basis for perceived similarity that can promote favorable intergroup relations.¹⁴ In addition, the values themselves serve to undercut negative intergroup relations by discouraging injustice, inequality, unfairness, conflict, and a lack of compassion. The value of egalitarianism deserves special emphasis since a number of theories suggest that it can help to undermine stereotyping and prejudiced thinking and can help restrict the direct expression of racism.¹⁵

Principle 8. Teachers should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups. One of the most effective techniques for improving intercultural relations is to teach members of the cultural groups the social skills necessary to interact effectively with members of another culture.¹⁶ Students need to learn how to perceive, understand, and respond to group differences. They need to learn not to give offense and not to take offense. They also need to be helped to realize that, when members of other groups behave in ways that are inconsistent with the norms of the students’ own group, these individuals are not necessarily behaving antagonistically.

One intergroup relations trainer asks members of the minority and majority groups to discuss what it

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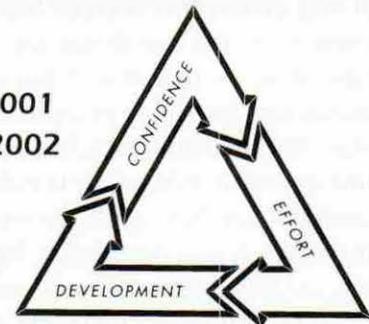
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feels like to be the target of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.¹⁷ Sharing such information informs the majority group of the pain and suffering their intentional or thoughtless acts of discrimination cause. It also allows the members of minority groups to share their experiences with one another. Other techniques that involve sharing experiences through carefully managed dialogue have also been found to improve intergroup relations.¹⁸

One skill that can be taught in schools in order to improve intergroup relations is conflict resolution.¹⁹ A number of school districts throughout the U.S. are teaching students to act as mediators in disputes between other students.

Principle 9. Schools should provide opportunities for students from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups to interact socially under conditions designed to reduce fear and anxiety. One of the primary causes of prejudice is fear.²⁰ Fear leads members of social groups to avoid interacting with members of other groups and causes them discomfort when they do. Fears about members of other groups often stem from concern about threats — both realistic and symbolic — to the “in group.” Many such fears have little ba-

sis in reality or are greatly exaggerated.

To reduce uncertainty and anxiety concerning interaction with members of other groups, the contexts in which interactions between groups take place should be relatively structured, the balance of members of the different groups should be as equal as possible, the likelihood of failure should be low, and opportunities for hostility and aggression should be minimized. Providing factual information that contradicts misperceptions can also counteract prejudice that is based on a false sense of threat. Stressing the similarities in the values of the groups should also reduce the degree of symbolic threat posed by “out groups” and thus reduce fear and prejudice.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, ORGANIZATION, AND EQUITY

Principle 10. A school's organizational strategies should ensure that decision making is widely shared and that members of the school community learn collaborative skills and dispositions in order to create a caring learning environment for students. School policies and practices are the living embodiment of a society's underlying values

and educational philosophy. They also reflect the values of those who work within schools. Whether in the form of curriculum, teaching strategies, assessment procedures, disciplinary policies, or grouping practices, school policies embody a school's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of its students.²¹ This is true whether the school is one with extensive or limited financial resources, whether its student body is relatively monocultural or richly diverse, or whether it is located in a crowded central city or an isolated rural county.

School organization and leadership can either enhance or detract from the development of learning communities that prepare students for a multicultural and democratic society. Schools that are administered from the top down are unlikely to create collaborative, caring cultures. Too often schools talk about democracy but fail to practice shared decision making. Powerful multicultural schools are organizational hubs that include a wide variety of stakeholders, ranging from students, teachers, and administrators to parents and members of the community. Indeed, there is convincing research evidence that parent involvement, in particular, is critical in enhancing student learning.²² And a just multicultural school is receptive to working with all members of the students' communities.

Principle 11. Leaders should ensure that all public schools, regardless of their locations, are funded equitably. Equity in school funding is a critical condition for creating just multicultural schools. The current inequities in the funding of public education are startling.²³ Two communities that are adjacent to one another can provide wholly different support to their public schools, based on property values and tax rates. Students who live in poor communities are punished because they must attend schools that are underfunded by comparison to the schools in more affluent communities.

The relationship between increased school expenditures and school improvement is complex.²⁴ But when investments are made in ways that significantly improve students' opportunities to learn — such as increasing teacher quality, reducing class size in targeted ways, and engaging parents in their children's education — the result is likely to be improved student knowledge and skills.

The failure of schools and school systems to provide all students with equitable resources for learning will, of course, work to the disadvantage of those receiving inadequate resources and will usually widen the achievement gap between schools. Since achievement correlates highly with students' family income

and since people of color are disproportionately represented in the low-income sector, inequity in opportunities to learn contributes to the achievement gap between students of color and white students.

ASSESSMENT

Principle 12. Teachers should use multiple culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills. Evaluating the progress of students from diverse racial and ethnic groups and social classes is complicated by differences in language, learning styles, and cultures. Hence the use of a single method of assessment will probably further disadvantage students from particular social classes and ethnic groups.

Teachers should adopt a range of formative and summative assessment strategies that give students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery. These strategies should include observations, oral examinations, performances, and teacher-made as well as standardized assessments. Students learn and demonstrate their competencies in different ways. The preferred mode of demonstrating task mastery for some is writing, while others do better speaking, visualizing, or performing; some are stimulated by competition and others by cooperation; some prefer to work alone, while others would rather work in groups. Consequently, a variety of assessment procedures and outcomes that are compatible with different learning, performance, work, and presentation styles should be used to determine whether students are mastering the skills they need to function effectively in a multicultural society.

Assessment should go beyond traditional measures of subject-matter knowledge and include consideration of complex cognitive and social skills. Effective citizenship in a multicultural society requires individuals who have the values and abilities to promote equality and justice among culturally diverse groups.

CONCLUSION

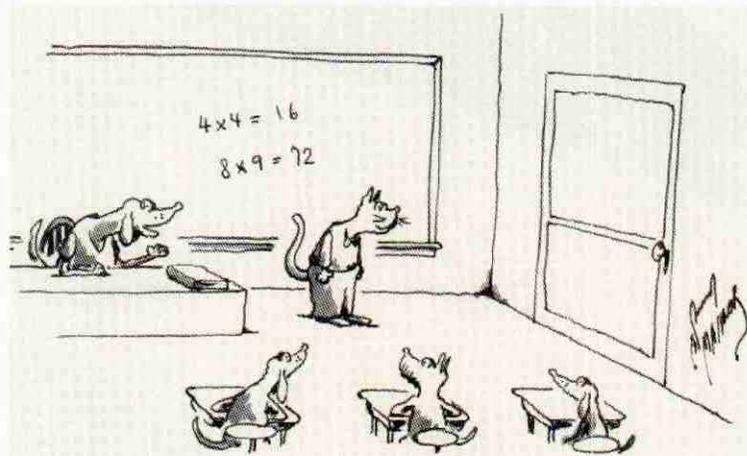
Powerful multicultural schools help students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, and language groups to experience academic success. Academic knowledge and skills are essential in today's global society. However, they are not sufficient to guarantee full and active participation in that society. Students must also develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to interact positively with people from diverse groups and to participate in the civic life of the nation. Students must be

competent in intergroup and civic skills if they are to function effectively in today's complex and ethnically polarized nation and world.

Diversity in the nation's schools is both an opportunity and a challenge. The nation is enriched by the ethnic, cultural, and language diversity of its citizens. However, whenever diverse groups interact, intergroup tension, stereotypes, and institutionalized discrimination develop. Schools must find ways to respect the diversity of their students and to help create a unified nation to which all citizens have allegiance. Structural inclusion in the public life of the nation together with power sharing will engender feelings of allegiance among diverse groups. Diversity within unity is the delicate goal toward which our nation and its schools should strive. We offer these design principles in the hope that they will help education policy makers and practitioners realize the elusive but essential goals of a democratic and pluralistic society.

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