



Ethnic Minority Studies:

ETHNIC Studies, as an innovative means of paying homage to the diversified minority cultures in school curricula, presenting a more realistic portrayal of cultural pluralism, and providing minority youth with relevant education, are a relatively new phenomenon. Few, if any, of these programs predate 1967. Since then ethnic studies of all kinds and intensity have been created by colleges and public schools throughout the country.

1969 was the year of reckoning. Minority student groups' demands for educational programs sensitive to their cultural experiences reached fruition. Public school curriculum committees revised social studies and literature courses to achieve an integrated, or culturally balanced, effect. Publishing companies flooded the market with textbooks, supplements, and multi-media materials on all American minorities, especially Blacks. More ethnic studies programs were created in this year alone than ever existed before.

Programs Are Widespread and Diversified

The most comprehensive ethnic studies programs have been created by colleges and universities. Cleveland (1969) found, in a survey of 212 institutions of higher education, that 193 had some kind of Black Studies

program. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (1969) reports that Black, Mexican American, Indian, and Oriental Studies programs exist in 160 colleges and universities in 13 Western states. Regionally, the Midwest and the Northeast lead in the number of institutions offering Black Studies, while the West and Southwest concentrate more on Oriental, Mexican American, and other Spanish-speaking cultures. However, colleges throughout the country have been touched, in some way, by this educational venture. Most of them now offer courses which can be called "ethnic studies."

Most ethnic studies in public schools have been instituted on the secondary level. Elementary programs are sparse and have received only minimal treatment in the professional literature.

In 1969 the National Office of the NAACP surveyed 250 school districts to determine the extent of their Black Studies programs (Smith, 1970). The U.S. Office of Education conducted a survey of the 50 states in the same year. Twenty-eight states reported having materials about minority cultures available, and four others were in the process of developing materials. Filter's (1970) survey of the 19 member-states in the North Central Association, and the 250 heads of social studies departments in the sample schools, revealed at least half have some kind of ethnic studies programs.

How Widespread? How Successful?

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Black Studies in Schools (1970) describes 15 case histories of Black Studies programs in public schools. According to this *Education U.S.A. Special Report*, only seven states have laws requiring the inclusion of minority cultures in school curricula. Six others have issued policy statements recommending curriculum revisions to accommodate minority contributions. These findings were substantiated by a similar study, conducted in the spring of 1970 by this writer.

An overwhelming majority of the state departments of education felt it was not their prerogative to require schools to implement ethnic studies. Rather, curriculum innovations were the responsibility of local autonomous school districts. The most they could do was give advice, make recommendations, and lend assistance if asked.

The April 1970 edition of the *NASSP Bulletin* is devoted to "Minority Cultures in the Curriculum." The contributing authors discuss the rationale and merits of ethnic studies generally, and specific programs implemented by secondary schools in Colorado, New York, Illinois, California, and Massachusetts. One reports ethnic studies in 92 New York City high schools. Another notes that there are at least 50 programs about ethnic cultures in Massachusetts' public schools.

The Texas State Education Agency reports that Texas public schools offer elective

courses in Latin-American, Afro-American, Mexican American, and African Studies. A survey of pupil enrollment in courses for the 1970-71 academic year indicates that, of a total pupil population of 2,711,608 in grades K-12, only 2,323 were enrolled in these courses.

Despite the initial upsurge, ethnic studies programs appear to be waning. In the past year they have appeared only infrequently in mass media and have received limited coverage in professional literature. Teacher competencies, accountability, and performance-based programs dominate the contemporary education scene. Social scientists are now deeply involved in ecology and other environmental crises. Politicians are more concerned with the Vietnamese War, inflation, and rising unemployment than with the plight of ethnic minorities.

Several other factors are accountable for the lull in ethnic studies programs during the past two years. College and high school campuses have been unusually calm in comparison to the events of the previous year. Their halls no longer rang loudly with stu-

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dent voices demanding Black, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Indian Studies. With the immediate pressure removed and protest groups appeased, there now appears to be little commitment to strengthening and incorporating ethnic studies programs as essential and permanent components of school curricula.

Many institutions which have created ethnic studies seem content to continue offering them as they were initially conceived, instead of using the experience of the first year as a basis for evaluation and revision. The result is a rapid deterioration of these hastily created programs. Pioneering teachers, frequently equipped only with good will instead of adequate qualifications, are returning to their chosen disciplines or specialties. The status and acclaim which came almost automatically to any institution with minority studies programs two years ago, irrespective of their quality, have ceased to exist. Courses are now more carefully scrutinized for their quality, and too many are found wanting in depth, innovativeness, and a comprehensible body of knowledge worthy of scholarly investigation. Many others are flagrant misnomers whose content is incongruent with their professed objectives.

The movement to teach ethnic studies only within the context of given disciplines is gaining momentum. It suggests that the study of disciplines has once again gained ascendancy over ethnic studies *per se*. Black socialization, Mexican American protest, and Indian folklore have become sources of enrichment and variety to the study of sociology, politics, and folklore in general, instead of means through which to engage in a comprehensive investigation of the complex nature of ethnic minority cultures.

Common Characteristics

Although varied in kind and comprehension, the ethnic studies programs share several common characteristics. They range from updating American history, to separate electives, to a series of courses cutting across subject matter fields. State departments have

left the implementation of such programs almost totally to the discretion of local school districts. Most have become a part of school curricula as electives, supplementary units, and "enrichment" to existing courses, particularly American history and literature. Separate courses on ethnic cultures are considered useful as compensatory and conciliatory means of filling the void during the time it takes to revise existing curriculum materials.

The greatest number of ethnic studies programs are found in large state universities, private colleges, and suburban public school districts, where the percentage of minority student representation is minimal. These courses focus primarily on providing more accurate information about minority groups' contributions to American culture.

Only limited research has been conducted on the effects of ethnic studies programs on students' academic achievement, perceptions of self and others, racial attitudes, and intergroup relations. The little that does exist deals with the effects of Black Studies and integrated social studies in elementary schools on White students' attitudes toward Blacks and Black students' self-perceptions (Hoffman, 1969; Roth, 1969; Gezi and Johnson, 1970; Georgeoff *et al.*, 1970).

Social and Cultural Realities Ignored

Educational institutions tend to consider the acquisition of factual information about the histories, contributions, and contemporary social problems of minority groups as constituting ethnic studies. As a result most ethnic studies programs, especially in public schools, entail little more than cataloguing lists of heroic feats and achievements of individual minority leaders. Little attention is given to the masses, and to understanding their values, beliefs, expectations, perceptions, behavior, and mechanisms used to cope with the demands of daily existence. Yet these are vital to gaining insights into the complexities of factors and experiences which combine to produce distinct minority cultural entities.

Because ethnic studies have not con-

centrated on understanding the existential realities and operational aspects of minority cultures, students emerge from these programs unprepared to understand the essence of minority cultural heritages, or to perceive their contributions in proper cultural context. The result is the perpetuation of a distorted view of ethnic minorities, and the creation of a shallow basis on which to build appreciation for the richness inherent in the cultural plurality of our society.

Only fleeting recognition has been given to how minority norms differ from those practiced by the majority. Although educational programs concede that minorities have encountered discriminatory practices which result in alienation and isolation, they still contend these groups conform more to mainstream values than to developing their own. Emphasizing differences is discouraged lest they lead to further separation and polarization.

America is still portrayed as a big happy family of adopted children, originally from many different lands, whose separate identities have fused, after years of living together, to form a new identity. Admittedly, for some the transition has been harder than for others, and there are occasional disturbances caused by sibling rivalries—as is true of any normal American family—but the relationship is essentially happy and harmonious. Unfortunately, these are idealistic notions which do not come close to approximating the cultural and social realities of our country.

This undue concern with emphasizing similarities permeates the objectives, content, and focus of ethnic studies programs. This concern makes it virtually impossible for students to comprehend the values inherent in cultural diversity, since they are not allowed opportunities to study the factors which account for the *real* cultural differences apparent among ethnic minorities.

Ethnic groups of color historically have been separated from the rest of the American population. Of necessity, distinctive cultural characteristics developed among these alienated and isolated groups, and are continuously being reinforced. To pretend that this

is not so is to ignore a reality that is essential to understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, and preparing youth to become more effective participants in our culturally pluralistic society. Little progress can be made until ethnic differences are recognized and accepted for what they are. If this is to occur, it is imperative that students and teachers alike acquire a comprehensive knowledge of both the factual and affective dimensions of the cultural experiences of different ethnic groups.

The American majority must also understand that simply because ethnic minorities are not "just like them," this does not automatically mean that they are inferior, or that their cultural norms, attitudes, and behavior are pathological or dysfunctional.

Refocusing Ethnic Studies

Ethnic studies programs must concentrate more on the study of the intricate cultural patterns of Black, Mexican American, Indian, and other minority groups, and the factors which account for their cultural distinctiveness. The study of their histories and contributions to American culture alone is not sufficient to achieve this objective. These programs must also include principles employed by such disciplines as social psychology, cultural and social anthropology, and sociology.

Knowing about the minority person's historical biography is important, but knowing him as he lives—how and why he thinks, behaves, and perceives as he does—is crucial to understanding and accepting the essence of his cultural identity. Furthermore, ethnic studies programs must give as much attention to identifying, analyzing, and clarifying racial attitudes and values, as to the acquisition of factual information about ethnic minorities. Religion, folklore, music, psychology, socio-linguistics, and socialization and enculturation processes must be added to history and literature to make the programs more comprehensive.

The programs must concentrate on how these principles operate *within* the cultural context of the specific ethnic group, instead

of presenting structural frameworks as perceived by mainstream norms. For example, it would be much more productive in developing insights into Black culture if ethnic studies were to emphasize the social and cultural implications of Black music instead of its structural characteristics. A more worthwhile function would be served by studying how Black families enculturate and socialize their children to the mores of their own communities, and the role they play in mainstream society, than by documenting the frequency of illegitimate births and female-headed households.

More attention must be given to developing ethnic studies which are designed specifically for members of ethnic groups. These programs, whether they be for elementary, secondary, or higher education, must include learning experiences which are sensitive to the unique cultural experiences of the particular ethnic group for which they are designed. The teacher must learn to teach the Black, Mexican American, or Indian student social studies, math, science, English, or any other subject vis-à-vis *his own* cultural perspective. Effective implementation of this pedagogical approach requires teachers who are well versed in the cultural mores of minority children and youth.

Undoubtedly, ethnic studies programs created thus far have served a useful function. They have made "forgotten Americans" less invisible. They have presented a more accurate portrayal of the role ethnic minorities have played in the development of American culture.

Some of the most glaring misconceptions, distortions, and stereotypes of these groups have been abated. However, such programs have yet to present a comprehensive view of the existential conditions, world views or perspectives, mechanisms of need-satisfaction, and the behavioral and attitudinal patterns prevalent among, and unique to, ethnic minorities.

Therefore, as ethnic studies programs are evaluated and revised, it is essential that provisions be made for pre- and in-service teacher preparation, testing the effectiveness of the programs, pedagogical devices which proceed via the cultural context of specific ethnic minorities, and for studying the existential aspects of ethnic minority cultures. These considerations are crucial if we hope to create ethnic studies programs which will provide realistic learning experiences and adequately prepare youth to handle the demands of living in a culturally pluralistic society.

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