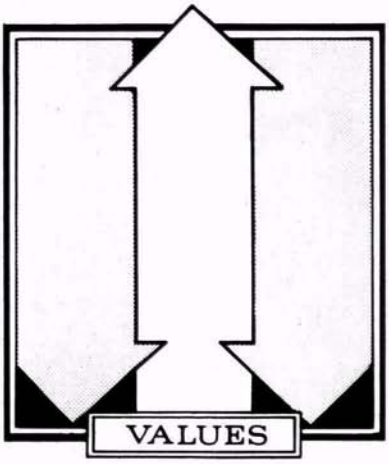
Values/Diversity in Education: A Progress Report

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What progress have we made in enhancing appreciation of values and diversity in education? This author draws up a "report card" assessing our progress toward integrating resources, both human and material, that have diverse racial and cultural values and norms into schools. What is our "grade" as of now?

When teachers interact with students, they bring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to this interaction. According to Max Lerner,[1] while knowledge may eventually be replaced, skills may become antiquated, and attitudes may be transformed by life experiences, values have the best chance of enduring. The question then becomes one of whose values and norms are being promoted in the classroom? What about the values and norms of minority groups and women? Are they being allowed to flourish within schools that for so long have been dominated by white male, middle-class values and norms? Prevailing norms and values that exist in the schools can and do, either covertly or overtly, have a direct impact on the judgmental actions of students in personal, academic, and social relationships.



This paper will assess the progress that has been made in recent years toward integrating resources, both human and material that have diverse racial and cultural values and norms into the schools. It will also explore the impact that knowledge of diverse values and norms has on understanding the concept of diversity and the consequent judgments made by educators and students. Four school-related areas will be examined for this discussion: instructional staff, testing materials, parent-community participation, and instructional materials.

Instructional Staff

It is both a common-sense and research-supported assumption that role models for children are vitally important in influencing students' values and norms. Bandura and Walters[2] have reported that people reproduce the attitudes, emotional responses, and actions exhibited by real-life or symbolized models. If this assumption is accepted, it stands to reason that schools in a society that reflects diversity should employ teachers and administrators of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, according to an HEW report, 87 percent of U.S. teachers are white and in many states minority enrollments of students greatly exceed minority percentages of teachers.[3] Moreover, the percentage of minority students in teacher education preparation programs has decreased.[4]

[1] Max Lerner. *Values in Education.* Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundations, 1976. p. 1.

[2] A. Bandura and R. H. Walters. *Social Learning and Personality Development.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963. p. 49.

[3] National Center for Education Statistics, Education Division, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. *The Condition of Education: A Statistical Report on the Condition of American Education 1975.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975. p. 70.

[4] *Ibid.*, 1977 edition, p. 39.

The teacher as role model in a racially and culturally diverse society should serve two important purposes—providing students with a real-life, everyday person they can identify with and relate to and providing students with an opportunity to interact with teacher role models from different races and cultures. Both of these purposes are fundamental to students and educators. The first purpose recognizes the importance of children—especially minority children—having teachers and administrators of their own racial and cultural background. For example, it may be difficult for a Hispanic female student to visualize herself as a principal of a school if other Hispanic women have not been seen in that position. Having role models representative of their own cultural backgrounds will encourage minority students to make positive judgments about the direction their lives should take. The second purpose recognizes the need for children—especially majority children—to interact with teachers from different racial and cultural groups in order that positive lessons of interpersonal relations may be learned. Having minority teachers also may help white students make positive judgments about the capability of minorities in positions of authority. This purpose does not ignore the fact that majority children also need role models representative of their own cultural background. It does, however, recognize the fact that both minority and majority students most frequently have white teachers.

In summary, the values that are developed and the myths that are not dispelled because of the slow progress in this area may cause students to continue to make judgments about others that are narrow and stereotypic.

Testing Materials

An examination of the recent progress made toward integrating materials and procedures that consider diverse racial and cultural norms and values into testing programs might reveal certain facts. Such an examination might show that educators, concerned organizations, and individuals are much more aware now than previously that current testing programs and procedures have caused judgments to be made that resulted in academic and social damage and injustices to students. This awareness has caused testing to become the center of national attention.

For example, in 1972, the National Education Association called for a moratorium on the use of standardized intelligence and achievement tests. This proposed moratorium served to direct needed attention toward biased testing and to rally support for critically examining the use and abuse of tests. In 1975, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also issued a call for a moratorium on tests. Since that time a number of educational organizations, including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, have raised serious questions about testing procedures. The voices of angry parents and the court litigations on the use of standardized tests in evaluation have brought further attention to the problem of bias in testing.

Moreover, some educators advocate the development of new assessment instruments that will enable teachers to determine, ". . . whether a child has mastered the subject at hand and is learning according to his/her individual style and pace, rather than emphasizing whether he or she is doing better or worse than other children at the same grade level."[5] These instruments will enhance the teachers' ability to make better judgments concerning each student's academic capacity.

Although the preceding discussion has focused on commercially prepared or standardized testing materials, it is important to give attention to teacher-made tests. These tests often are more frequently used in the classroom and communicate to students what the *teacher* believes is important. Consequently, teacher-made tests should include questions that will enable the teacher and student to evaluate learning from a diverse racial and cultural perspective. Nevertheless, my informal observations of teacher-made tests—whether designed for students engaged in Learning Center activities or as the traditional Friday Quiz—demonstrate that only minimal attention is paid to racial and cultural diversity. For example, a teacher-made multiple-choice test that asked Junior High students to identify outstanding

[5] Alan Gardner and Frank Riesman. "The Assessment Controversy." *Social Policy*: September/October 1977. p. 3.

contemporary American writers did not include in its choices any minority writers.

Educational progress toward integrating materials and procedures that consider diverse racial and cultural norms and values into testing can best be summarized in terms of the awareness level. In order to move to an action level, however, educators must develop and utilize tests, both standardized and teacher-made, that are free from racial and cultural bias for individual and personal assessment of each student.

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Parent-Community Participation

Progress toward integrating resources, both human and material, that are representative of diverse racial and cultural norms and values into education may also be explored from the perspective of parent/community participation in the schools. Traditionally, this participation in the schools has been characterized in three ways.[6] First, as a receiver of school information through mechanisms such as report cards, bulletins, and parent conferences; second, as an observer of school social functions such as graduation, theatrical programs, open house, and sports events; and third, as members of the PTA or various fund-raising groups.

These traditional forms of participation have, for the most part, kept parents and community members on the sidelines as spectators and have not allowed them to participate in making important judgments about their children's education. An illustrative example of this spectator relationship is the parent-teacher conference. This conference has two familiar ingredients: "... the teachers do most of the talking, and the parents are vaguely anxious and a little fearful about their child's performance, but often do not have a clear idea about what might be done to change or improve it."[7] The PTA, too, which has often been considered a viable way for parents to participate in school activities, has been described by Reed and Mitchell in the following manner:

> ... they (PTA members) are led by a fairly small group of leaders who do virtually all of the planning for the group; they see themselves, and are seen by school personnel, largely as "communication links" through which information about the school program is disseminated to the community.[8]

During the 1960s, however, parents and community members, especially minorities, demanded more active involvement in the schools. This demand was attributed in part to the repeated failure of their children in the schools, to their feelings of helplessness toward preventing this failure, and to the irrelevance of what was being taught and the realization that this type of educational experience would not necessarily ensure a more successful, productive, or comfortable life for their children. Consequently, as parent groups and community organizations became more active in local and state affairs, the federal government became responsive to them. This responsiveness took the form of established federal guidelines that required parent involvement through parent councils to plan, develop, operate, and evaluate federally-funded programs. Though these guidelines provided a mechanism for increased diversity in parent involvement in the school, the quality of that diversity remained in question.

The purpose of parent councils was often perceived by school officials as being merely a rubber stamp for their actions. Parents invited to participate in educational planning usually were received with a paternalistic attitude and given only token responsibility. Arnstein in summarizing the nature of the parent council meetings said,

[6] For a more detailed discussion of this concept see: Carl A. Grant, editor. *Community Participation in Education.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Fall 1978.

[7] Douglas B. Reed and Douglas E. Mitchell. *The Structure of Citizen Participation in Public Decisions for Public Schools.* Berkeley, California: McCutchan, 1975. p. 190.

[8] *Ibid.*

"It was the officials who educated, persuaded, and advised the citizens, not the reverse." [9]

Additional roadblocks to viable participation still exist and include erroneous judgments made by both educators and parents. Many educators assume, for example, that most minority and poor parents are not very interested in their children's education and that they have low achievement and career aspirations for them. On the other hand, parents often assume that educators are not very interested in their children's education when they observe teachers hurriedly "leaving the neighborhood as soon as school is over." Furthermore, sometimes educators are reluctant to accept educational suggestions from parents, particularly minority and poor parents, because they assume they do not know enough about educating children to give suggestions. Conversely, these parents often are disappointed with the school because they feel that educators "look down on them" and ignore their suggestions and help.

It can be noted from the preceding discussion that progress toward integrating diverse cultural and racial norms and values into parent/community participation is evident, but the nature and quality of this progress tends to be token and ineffective.

Instructional Materials

A force second only to the teacher in influencing the norms and values of students in the classroom is instructional materials—especially the textbook. An examination of the progress toward integrating materials that include diverse racial and cultural groups and their norms and values in school textbooks provides further insight into how students are influenced to make positive or negative judgments about themselves and others.

There has been concern over the bias in textbooks for many years. Even before the so-called integrated (multi-ethnic) books were on the market, studies apeared in the educational literature describing the deficiency of racial and cultural diversity in the books from which students learned. In particular, this concern was expressed in relation to representation of minority characters as well as the roles these characters portrayed. Pre-integrated textbook studies by the American Council on Education,[10] Marcus,[11] Klineberg[12] and the Michigan Department of Public Instruction[13] describe the representation of minorities in textbooks as either minimal or nonexistent and the roles they played as either stereotypic or insignificant.

[9] Sherry R. Arnstein. "Eight Rungs on the Ladder of Citizen Participation." Edgar S. Cahn and Barry A. Passetl, editors. *Citizen Participation: Effecting Community Change*. New York: Praeger, 1971. p. 75.

[10] Committee on the Study of Teaching Materials in Intergroup Relations. *Intergroup Relations in Teaching Materials*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1949.

[11] Lloyd Marcus. *The Treatment of Minorities in Secondary School Textbooks*. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1961. pp. 48-57.

[12] Otto Klineberg. "Life Is Fun in a Smiling, Fair-skinned World." *The Saturday Review*, February 16, 1963. pp. 75-77.

[13] Michigan Department of Public Instruction. *The Treatment of Minority Groups in Textbooks*. Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Public Instruction, 1963. p. 2.

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Multi-ethnic texts gradually became available in the early 1960s, and the following examples characterize the portrayal of minorities in these books. They were often pictured smaller than or behind white characters or turned away from the reader and often appeared in the illustrations, yet spoke very few, if any, lines of dialogue. They were featured more often and in more significant roles in the illustrations and story content when the setting was an urban area, and were featured only occasionally and in less significant roles when the setting was a suburban area. They were constantly presented as supporting rather than leading characters and were frequently placed in stereotypic roles. During this decade, very few changes were made in textbooks regarding the quantity and quality of minority group representation and participation.

In the late 1970s, more progress has been demonstrated toward integrating materials that include diverse racial and cultural norms and values in textbooks. Some textbooks have dropped their original format and focus; for example, books no longer center mainly around the adventures of one or two middle-class families, for example, Dick and Jane, but usually include stories from children's literature; and tend to exclude stories and situations that are offensive to most groups.

Included in more books are a greater number of "all"[14] stories about racial groups that were seldom previously portrayed; for example, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Moreover, many of these stories are now in contemporary settings as compared to formerly being situated in predominantly historical settings. However, an over-abundance of "all" stories means the focus of these texts is not truly multicultural but tends to be only mono multicultural.

While these improvements are commendable, there are other areas in which seemingly little or no change has occurred since the publication of multi-ethnic texts. The imbalance between males and females is significantly being redressed; however, the attempt to balance majority and minority representation has not kept pace. A quantitative analysis of second- and third-grade readers reveals the majority of "all"stories are still mostly about whites, and in most of the integrated stories the leading character is still white.[15]

In summary, students are expected to acquire knowledge from what they read and see in texts. Conversely, however, they also acquire knowledge from what they do not read and see in texts. This knowledge often covertly signals certain values, beliefs, and attitudes to the reader. As a result, judgments are made about who are the important people and the not-so-important people in society. Judgments are made about the kinds of role expectations of various individuals and groups, about who is usually passive, active, or in authority. Judgments are also made about various characteristics of people, about who are intelligent, primitive, and most likely to excel in particular endeavors.

In conclusion, the report card on assessing progress toward integrating resources, both human and material, that have diverse racial and cultural values and norms into schools would have to read: "F."

Instructional Staffing	F
Testing	C
Parent-Community Participation	F
Instructional Materials	C+

Comments: Our educational system is not fully utilizing the academic and social potential of its human and material resources. However, with increased and continual effort, the goal of integrating racial and cultural diversity into our schools can be attained.

[14] An "all" story is a story in which only one racial group appears.

[15] Carl A. Grant and Gloria W. Grant. "The Multicultural Evaluation of Some Second and Third Grade Textbooks." Unpublished manuscript, 1978.



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