

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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