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ABSTRACT

To maintain within a national unity the richness of cultural diversity that has made America great, school curriculums should develop in the child a knowledge of the country's varying cultures. Teachers should initiate for children meaningful experiences with other cultures to help them appreciate the differences and similarities among people. One way to develop positive self-images in culturally different children and thus introduce the sharing of home traditions with classmates is through the "show and tell" time in class. Tape recorders and cameras can be useful in recording stories and classroom projects; puppets, songs, dances, and masks can draw children into role playing; ceremonies and feast days of ethnic groups can stimulate the learning of traditions; parents and community members may participate in discussions of their cultural backgrounds; and books can enlarge children's contacts with other groups of people. Through such meaningful experiences, children can engage in interdisciplinary study, acquire pride in their own culture, practice the cultural roles they will play as adults, and, later as adults, be able to respond to other cultures on an international level. (JM)

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AMERICA'S CULTURALLY DIFFERENT CHILDREN

I used to think I was poor.
Then they told me I wasn't poor,
I was needy or indigent.
Then they told me it was self-defeating
to think of myself as needy or indigent,
I was deprived.
Then they told me underprivileged
was overused,
I was culturally disadvantaged.
I still don't have a dime,
But I have a great vocabulary.

--author unknown

During the last decade there has been a search for a term in educational vocabularies to accurately describe children who need extra help to reach the middle-class standards on which our schools are built. Culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged are two terms which have been widely used to describe these children. The use of these terms does not take into consideration that every group has its own culture.

Every culture, taken in its totality, reveals distinctive traits which differentiate it from others and shape the behavior of those within that culture. In other words, we are products of our cultures.

Anthropologists use "culture" as a technical term, and no simple dictionary definition explains its use. It is never used, for example, to imply "high" or "low" attainments; nor does it designate the stage of civilization of any race or group; nor the activities in any particular field, such as music, art, or literature. Culture, they say, is one facet of human life. It is that part which is learned by people as the result of belonging to some particular group, and is that part of learned behavior which is shared with others of our group. It is our social legacy. Ruth Benedict (PATTERNS OF CULTURE, 1934) gave a very comprehensive definition when she said, "Culture is what binds men together".

In a nation such as the United States, composed of individuals of numerous races, creeds, and national origins, there are many small cultural groups. Our American culture is a compendium of such cultural groups.

Teachers are misjudging students if they do not see that students, who in some educational literature are classified as "culturally deprived", have very real and characteristic cultures. True, they may not be the same as their own. To them many of the cultures seem to revolve in a vacuum of social, political, and economic helplessness and in an atmosphere filled with substandard housing, discrimination, disease, and death. Yet, the cultures do exist--producing their own sets of aspirations and standards.

Many of the cultures labeled as "deprived" are concentrated in the decaying hearts of our great cities. Predominantly Negro, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Southern rural, mountain or rural white, and American Indian, these economically disadvantaged people are bearers of cultural attitudes alien to those of the dominant society. Children from these families come to school with a rich cultural heritage.

However, they are disadvantaged to the degree that their culture has failed to provide them with the "experiences" on which the school curriculum is built.

Not all children from impoverished families are the same. Many come from homes where emphasis is placed on such values as honesty, self-reliance, initiative, cleanliness and neatness, family responsibility, and education as preparation for adulthood. These children many times have developed unusual responsibility for others and loyalty to their group. They have many virtues to be emulated and respected. Their sense of humor, physical and manipulative skills, and pragmatism are many times lacking in children from so-called middle-class homes. The qualities which make for healthy personality and maturity are not the exclusive monopoly of any cultural group.

It is tremendously important that teachers and middle-class children understand the differences and the many similarities among the cultural groups making up our national culture. Education is a creative force. Its task should be that of analyzing and evaluating minority cultures so that all students may better see the contribution each cultural group is making to our total society.

Culturally different rather than culturally deprived best expresses the concept teachers should have about the students described above. These students are not culturally deprived in the sense that they are cultureless, but rather that their culture may differ from the teachers' own and the ones cultivated by the middle-class oriented schools which they attend. They must recognize and respect the differences among students; and, that difference means just that--different. It does not mean that the factor of being different makes some children better and others worse. These values must be judged on the basis of individual ability and potential. Teachers can be challenged by this knowledge and utilize cultural difference in each classroom to meet the educational needs of every learner.

Our school curriculums should be skillfully built around a knowledge of the traditions, trends, and emerging conditions of American culture and the group cultures of which it is composed. Plans must be made for the diversity found in each class, bearing in mind that the laws of learning reveal it to be an on-going developmental process dependent upon the demands of the environment. The products of learning are evaluated by changed behavior brought about by the acquisition of new knowledge, meanings, skills, and attitudes. If teachers wish to modify and improve the behavior of student learners, they must recognize the importance of many environmental opportunities planned to bring about this desirable change. Following are some practical ways that teachers have used to achieve these educational objectives.

The child needs a bridge between the home and the school. In order to do this the school must develop a positive self-image for the culturally different child. A good way to begin is to use experiences that encourage "sharing" and "telling". These many times may be in the child's native tongue. (This is where we find the native-speaking teacher aide so invaluable.) The child should be made to feel that his everyday experiences are important to others as well as to himself. He will then begin to share freely the incidents which provide understanding of his home and community life. This not only makes him feel better about himself, but it will also provide an opportunity for the entire class to be enriched by expanding its experiences.

In a group where the children speak different dialects of English, a tape recorder is very useful. During sharing time different patterns of speech present

within the group could be recorded. This would involve no depreciation or belittling of dialect and geographic or racial variations, but rather an appreciation for and an acceptance of the differences which add color to our language. This does not mean that so-called correct "standard English" patterns should not be taught. Children should be encouraged to use the tape recorder during informal activities, such as group discussions, role playing, and recitations. The teacher can then listen to the tapes and give individual instruction to children who she finds need help.

This is not the only use of the tape recorder. An innovative teacher will find it can serve other important purposes. For example, stories might be dictated by the children which are later transcribed by the teacher and used as reading material for an individual child or a group of children. This adds additional meaning to the reading materials for the learners since the story comes from their own experiences.

Teachers have found a camera useful in the classroom. No pictures stimulate conversation like pictures of ourselves. When pictures are made into slides or regular pictures are projected on a screen or mounted on a chart, children will begin to talk. Class books can be illustrated with pictures taken during a class trip. Cultural differences are widely illustrated by pictures of people from every culture.

Words taken from other languages often can be introduced informally through children's stories of their experiences or through songs, games, and stories which the teacher introduces. Often there are adults from a variety of cultures living near the school who will gladly serve as resource persons for the school. By capitalizing on such resources, you involve the community in the school and its activities.

Holidays, ceremonials, and religious feast days provide wonderful and natural ways to introduce children to the pluralistic nature of our society. In this way the teacher can emphasize the richness of our American heritage as well as build a diversified vocabulary for students.

Auditory discrimination skills may be developed through music and rhythm, but they also may be used to provide excellent opportunities to note cultural differences. These differences may be revealed through songs and dances and also by the kinds of instruments used to accompany them.

If children are hesitant or afraid to discuss their backgrounds, the use of puppetry can help free them. Puppets can speak for the child too shy to speak for himself. Role playing with puppets or simple masks, whether in response to a stimulating picture, a story or fable, or an experience some child relates, encourages children to dramatic oral development of ideas. The taping and subsequent transcribing of the oral matter can become written material for the children to read. The world of the child's imagination is much richer and more productive, much more provocative than the sterile primers of "Look, look -- See, see" type produced by unimaginative adults.

Older children also need stress on the development of self-image. Every library and classroom should be provided with good books <u>by</u> and <u>about</u> all ethnic groups. Where actual experiences are not possible, reading can enlarge the children's sensitivities so that they can better cope with an expanding world. It provides an opportunity for children to understand both the differences that exist between cultures and the common needs and problems shared by all.

Children should discuss what they read in a relaxed atmosphere where everyone's contributions are solicited. Sociodramas are a natural outcome of this activity. Learning about America's cultural diversity helps destroy stereotyped thinking about any subgroups, develops self-image, and generally develops an understanding of our society.

Teachers should continue storytelling with older children. They should be encouraged to tell stories using overhead and opaque projectors, flannel boards, puppets, dramatization, and other media. A high school in Arizona enrolling a large number of Indian students has successfully used a video studio to bring about new educational procedures. When an individual learner is sufficiently motivated to begin his study, any successful participation in interesting activities satisfies his ego. His ego is bolstered by the approval of his schoolmates and teachers.

The video program mentioned in the above paragraph was part of the language arts program at the Phoenix (Arizona) Indian School. The teacher directing the project gives the following evaluation:

> In this age of scores of millions of automobile drivers, professional drag racers and astronauts, computer operators, scientists of integrated circuitry, engineers of atomic power development, and nimble assemblers of miniaturized electronic equipment, the youth in the schools are way ahead of their parents and teachers. Their imaginations soar in space ships. The forms of the old art and literature--the novel, the play, the essay, the short story, the poem, chamber music, etc., seem inadequate and old fashioned. Youth seeks new forms, and in multiple instances ignores the old. But even in an ultra-brain-powered technological society, youth will always thrill at the ability to fashion the written word into a bit of personalized drama. As he starts to include video in his home and school communication centers, he will be in a position to express anew the genius of the human race and to retrieve possibly some of the American family's experiences of democratic living.

There are many non-verbal ways of insulting a culture. Children are sensitive to the tone of a teacher's voice and his facial expressions. Looks and gestures frequently may be more damaging than a verbal insult. The child who is culturally different must be not only accepted individually but the teacher must respect the values which his subculture holds, realizing that before a student can respect the values of <u>other</u> cultural groups he must respect his <u>own</u> cultural values. If we are to respect others we must first respect ourselves. When a teacher truly respects his own values and the values of any member of the group, he will find it not necessary to force his values upon the children in his class but to lead them to appreciation of themselves and others. Not only must each individual be led to have positive feelings about his own culture, the teacher also should have as a prime objective the task of creating in students positive attitudes toward different cultures. Students should be guided to think critically so that they will be able to spot propaganda and deal with it.

Teachers can use hard cold facts to destroy misinformation which students may have. Use textbooks and visual aid materials which stress the contributions each culture has made to our heritage. Social studies further this effort but it should permeate every area of the curriculum.

Facts are important but they are not enough to change attitudes; the teacher must plan experiences which will involve his students emotionally with different cultures. Face-to-face contact with a perceptive person of another culture encourages dialogue and often leads to continuing interest and awareness. Encourage children to talk of their cultural heritage, to bring in artifacts, household articles and other things that may be of interest to the other children.

Inviting parents to participate in this sharing brings in a cross section of the community. Their accomplishments provide models for the children and help to draw school and community closer together. There is no better way to involve parents than to ask them to share in a school activity such as a "Festival of Nations" where folk art, handicrafts, and foods of the world are exhibited. Songs and dances of native as well as of foreign origin might also be included. In one of our Arizona schools, the lunchroom has special days when foods from other lands are featured on the menu.

In a fifth grade classroom each child investigated his own background. The "family trees" listed the name of each forebear as far back as the children could trace. These were then used for a bulletin board display to illustrate that the United States is a land of immigrants who were added to the native Indian population. Children soon discovered that the American Negroes were more American than many white persons since their forefathers had been in America longer. A chart also was made to show the countries of origin of the forebears. Oral and written activity revolved around the subject. There was independent research as history "came alive". By using such projects each child becomes involved with reasonable freedom of activity stimulated but not directed by the teacher.

Similarities as well as differences in cultures must be recognized and appreciated. This dual approach makes the children's experiences more meaningful. It affords the children an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary investigation. To examine a culture one must account for its art, music, educational system, religions, history, laws, customs, traditions, values, and beliefs.

People from many races have enriched American life. The study of these people and their achievement deepens children's understanding of the cultural pluralism of society and instills in students of different ethnic groups a heightened sense of dignity and status.

Whatever is done for children from divergent cultural backgrounds is, in the long run, done for all the children in the class. Difference in people must be understood. This does not mean helping one at the expense of another. Democracy cannot truly flourish unless there is a respect for and an appreciation of the worth, dignity, and difference between men and the value of each individual man. Programs must be adapted to the ability and need of each individual, regardless of how widely abilities differ in a classroom. A good program for the culturally different child can promote growth in learning for all children in the class.

Let us summarize how cultural similarities and differences within a classroom can be used in several ways for several purposes.

1. We have discussed how cultural similarities and differences can serve as a basis for meaningful learning experiences. In these experiences, children are given an opportunity to study and deepen their insights into other cultures; in doing so, they strengthen their understanding of their own culture.

2. Meaningful experiences with other cultures help children to understand not only differences but also similarities among people. Thus, respect for the dignity and work of each individual is fostered.

3. Children by examination of other cultures have a chance to engage in interdisciplinary study. This study acquaints the children with the tools and skills of each area or discipline.

4. Pride in one's own culture is gained by study of other cultures.

5. Children are adults in the making and as adults they will play an essential role in the preservation and advancement of their society, a society which is composed of persons from many cultural backgrounds. Early understanding of different cultures contributes greatly to the development of children into mature, responsible adults.

6. Children of today not only will be responsible for the well-being of their own society, but also for the society of the world. Understanding of the different cultures in their own little world can be applied later to the international level.

America was made great by the richness and diversity of cultural differences. The ideals on which our country was built can be kept alive by understanding this diversity with its common core of similarities. Integration should be the fulfillment of the American dream of unity without conformity. In the final analysis, the greatest resource which must be tapped is people. The great engines of creative energy in peoples are hope and pride. If teachers can find the touchstone to spur hope and pride in children, they will unleash their creative energies and a new dynamism will enter the lives of not only the culturally different child but all their students before which even stubborn obstacles will fall.

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