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ABSTRACT

This kit provides a summary of a scholarly paper, discussion questions, and activities to promote constructive debate between scholars and ethnic groups about the concepts of cultural identity and multiethnicity in American education. Although in the early 1900s the political ideal of "The Great American Melting Pot" discouraged bilingual-bicultural approaches, a few schools managed to provide cultural education. German and Polish-American schools are examples. Only in the past two decades has the concept of "multiethnic education" influenced the philosophy and curriculum of American schools. Research shows that bilingual and multiethnic programs strengthen children's development and that learning from a child's cultural mode can be destructive. An important concern is that community groups are able to participate in educational decision making. Among discussion questions are why is the school singled out as the primary social institution for achieving a pluralistic society, and what pros and cons of multicultural education can be identified. Related activities include role-playing the concerns of an immigrant family and educators who promote bilingual programs, and identifying social agents other than schools which promote cultural pluralism. (AV)

INSTITUTE ON PLURALISM AND GROUP IDENTITY

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# GROUP IDENTITY, MULTIETHNICITY AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN EDUCATION

"CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES KIT" No. 3



Based on an essay by Isidro Lucas
of the University of Chicago

Kit developed by C. Frederick Risinger
Indiana University, Bloomington



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Issued as part of the Project, "Bridge-Building Between Scholars and Chicago's Ethnic and Minority Communities." Supported by a grant from the American Issues Forum Chicago, a program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Ronald Grossman
Project Director

# INTRODUCTION

These "Controversial Issues Kits" were produced by the Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity for a project entitled BRIDGE-BUILDING BETWEEN SCHOLARS AND CHICAGO'S ETHNIC AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES. The project was made possible by a grant from the American Issues Forum Chicago, a program developed for the nation's Bicentennial under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities and with the co-sponsorship of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration.

When the American Issues Forum announced its mandate to bring Americans together to "discuss issues that excite debate among us," the Institute could think of no two parties who were more in need of a constructive debate than scholars, and ethnic and minority groups. On the one hand there is a tendency among scholars and other professionals to regard ethnic, minority and neighborhood groups not as rich resources for solving human problems, but as problems in themselves. On the other hand, ethnic, minority, and women's groups and neighborhood organizations are all becoming increasingly vocal in demanding that "elite professionals" including scholars and others who design and administer educational, mental care and neighborhood services respond within the cultural norms of the group.

Clearly what is needed is a new partnership built around a pluralist ethic that respects both professional training and expertise, and the everyday experience and common sense of people.

To accomplish this goal, the Institute convened a seminar of Chicago-based scholars with an interest in contemporary urban problems. Several scholars were commissioned to author papers on various public policy issues suggested by the American Issues Forum nine-month calendar, and known to be of concern to the ethnic and minority groups that work with the Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity. A preliminary draft of the papers was shared with leaders of community groups, who then invited several scholars to attend their regular business meetings and to debate the issues in the papers with their members. The insights gleaned from these discussions were incorporated into a revised version of the papers which then became the basis for the "Controversial Issues Kits."

The Kits include a summary of the scholarly papers as modified by the experience of sharing them with the community groups, a series of discussion questions raised by the issues in the paper, suggested group activities, and a guide for running discussions.

It is the Institute's hope that these "Kits" will generate an even wider circle of debate among us, since they contain both the expertise of the scholars and the everyday experience of community groups. It is also hoped that this project will serve as a model for a new approach to cooperation between scholars and community groups, one that allows each to play more fulfilling roles in relation to the other.

The Kit, "Women in Working Class Ethnic Communities," originated in a paper by Dr. Kathleen McCourt of the National Opinion Research Center and Loyola University; the Kit, "Group Identity, Multiethnicity and Cultural Variations in Education," originated in a paper by Dr. Isidro Lucas of the University of Chicago; the Kit, "The Neighborhood and American Society," originated in a paper by Professors Ronald Grossman of Lake Forest College, and Len Calabrese of Northwestern University. The Kits themselves are the work of C. Frederick Risinger, Coordinator for School Social Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. Secretarial and editorial assistance were provided by Patricia Ann Eckman and Lynn Marie Klocek.

The Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity grew out of the American Jewish Committee's pioneering National Project on Ethnic America. Established in 1968 to develop public policy approaches to issues which bridge differences between groups, the Project has been recognized for deepening the public's understanding of the legitimate needs and concerns of ethnic and working-class populations. As the Project grew into the Institute in 1974, its initial focus on ethnicity was broadened to include a consideration of how ethnicity is modified by other identity factors such as class, sex, religion, and region. The Institute works through local and national networks of the social service professions, the educational community, neighborhood groups, the government, and ethnic, minority, feminist and intergroup relations agencies.

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# GROUP IDENTITY, MULTIETHNICITY AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN EDUCATION

The theme of this paper is illustrated by two brief statements. Both are "American"; both deal with education. The difference is that one was made about six decades before the other.

> Everywhere these people settle in groups or settlements to set up their national manners, customs, and observances. Our task is to break up these groups or settlements, to amalgamate these people as part of our American race and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order and our popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth. (Ellwood T. Cubberley, School Funds and Their Apportionment, 1906)

> The term "program of bilingual education" means...instruction given in, and study of, English and,... the native language of the children of limited English-speaking ability, and such instruction is given with appreciation for the cultural heritage of such children, and,...such instruction shall,...be in all courses or subjects of study which will allow a child to progress effectively through the educational system. (Excerpts from the 1974 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.).

Obviously, the purpose of education changed between 1906 and 1974. This process of change is continuing and will have significant impact on schools, our nation's children and the total society. America is moving closer to a pluralistic society; and as usual, the schools are a primary vehicle for the achievement of this goal. But several issues must be considered and resolved to make the eventual goal more clear and more attainable. Whether a citizen of an urban ethnic neighborhood, a newly-built suburban subdivision, or a rural small town, each individual American should be afforded the opportunity of participating in the process of decision-making.

Historically, it is somewhat inaccurate to think that all American schools have been mono-lingual and mono-cultural. While the "melting pot" concept has been the accepted norm for America's schools, there were significant efforts to retain cultural and lingual identity. For example, German schools (using German teachers and textbooks) existed on an optional basis in Wisconsin and Illinois during the mid and late 1800's. Japanese language schools were established on a private and "after-hours" basis in the 1880's and lasted (amidst much controversy) until World War II. Most of the successful ethnic-oriented schools were parochial, and therefore subject to less state pressure than neighborhood public schools. Chicago's Holy Trinity was a completely

Polish-English bilingual school until the late 1950's. Even into the 1970's, suburban students traveled from Chicago's suburbs to Polish and Ukrainian "Saturday Schools" to study the language, literature, music, and crafts of their immigrant parents and grandparents. Jewish communities have long provided similar opportunities for their young people.

In short, although mono-cultural and mono-lingual education has been overwhelmingly predominant in American education, some measure of bilingual-bicultural schooling has nearly always existed. When it was prohibited--as it was during the "Know-nothing Era" and the period of World War I and the Red Scare--it was prohibited on political, not educational, grounds. In other words, few people ever argued that it was educationally unsound for students to be involved in a bilingual-bicultural school. Instead, the schools were used to achieve a political purpose--the Great American Melting Pot.

In the last few years, interest and support has developed for a somewhat different form of bilingual-bicultural education. Much of the impetus began during the 1960's as demands for Black consciousness and Afro-American studies were made. Latino and American Indian groups soon joined the movement. More recently, white ethnic groups like Greek Americans, Polish Americans, Italian Americans, and American Jews have been pressing for ways to retain their ethnic identity. Educators, government officials, foundations and private citizens have molded a new educational concept that has replaced the melting pot as a major goal of the schools. This concept goes by several names. Among the most common are "educational pluralism," "multiethnic education," and "multi-lingual education." Its basic goals are to: (1) allow students to study and function in two or more cultures--with the ability to spontaneously make transitions from one to the other; (2) help students develop healthy self-views as well as understanding and friendly views toward others; (3) increase community involvement in educational decision-making; and (4) establish the principle that attendance centers in a school district should be organized to reflect different educational philosophies and learning styles.

The reasons why this new concept in American education has received "official" approval and is gaining public acceptance are still somewhat vague. Perhaps the best answer is national maturity and national self-acceptance. In general we seem less fearful of "others" than we were in the past. America's national identity is being achieved--and it is being achieved by joining hundreds of cultures, languages, religions, and ethnic identities. In a sense, then, educational pluralism does not threaten, but actually strengthens the American national character.

Moreover, recent research illustrates two extremely important characteristics about child development. First, bilingual and multiethnic studies do not confuse children--instead they become intellectually stronger and more flexible. They are able to learn quickly and sort through their multi-cultural experiences to make new conceptual linkages. Second, we have also learned that forcing children to learn in a cultural mode that is not their own is not only inefficient--it is destructive, both mentally and psychologically. Therefore, to deny students--even those of dominant cultural groups--the advantages of a bilingual and multiethnic education is to retard their potential at best, and at worst, possibly to destroy their self-concept and chances for success.

Pluralistic education is a concept that is still being shaped. Even in the 1974 ESEA Act, quoted at the beginning of this paper, bilingual education was considered "remedial" or "transitional." Even the Lau vs. Nichols case, decided unanimously by the Supreme Court in 1974, dealt specifically with students "who do not understand English" and said that they were being denied equality of treatment. Recently, however, there are signs that a shift from merely providing remedial or transitional education to "maintenance" bilingual education is developing. The Ethnic Heritage Studies Act does not refer to "English-deficient" students. Instead, the purpose seems to be to maintain (and even encourage) multi-lingual abilities and positive ethnic and minority group identity. Perhaps this is the first step toward making educational pluralism more than just "something added on" to the curriculum in areas of high minority student population. It could be the first step toward a new form of education that is truly integrated, bilingual and ethnically aware, and that maintains broad local support through a visible increase in the quality of education for all children.

A major dilemma exists which must be solved before this idealistic goal can be achieved: What is the proper role for community groups in educational decision-making? In a sense, our ability to educate for a new pluralism is tied up with the future of urban neighborhoods and the future of citizen participation in educational decision-making. If the schools, whether public or parochial, become more responsive to the needs of families, neighborhoods, and ethnic and minority groups, they will retain their support, meaning and effectiveness. A look at the differences between urban public and parochial schools supports this point. Many urban parochial schools are locally controlled to a much greater extent than public schools, and their educational effectiveness--especially in the inner city--is often significantly higher.

Therefore, public policy and public action must be dir ted toward preserving and accentuating the concept of "educational responsiveness." Decisions which were once made in the neighborhood are now made "downtown", or in Springfield and Washington, D. C. This trend must be reversed so that those who are most affected by the decisions become more able to participate in the making of them.

Neighborhood groups, ethnic and minority organizations, and concerned educators will have to build coalitions that surmount racial and ethnic differences as well as "professional-client" differences.

If, as many people now believe, ethnic, minority and neighborhood groups, like labor unions, are negotiating forces in our society, then ways must be found to bring them into the educational system without turning our schools into battlegrounds that destroy opportunities for others.

Demonstrating that neighborhood-based ethnic and minority groups and professional educators can, through negotiations, reach accommodations that are equitable to all groups would be an appropriate gift for these groups to offer America's schools as we celebrate our Bicentennial. The schools in turn could reciprocate by recognizing that the common culture of America is indeed pluralism.

# GROUP IDENTITY, MULTIETHNICITY, AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN EDUCATION

## -DISCUSSION QUESTIONS-

1. The paper that you read briefly mentioned several historical precedents for multi-lingual and multiethnic education. Can you list some of them? Do you know of any other examples in the Chicago area or elsewhere? What reasons can you suggest why these earlier examples of multi-lingual, multiethnic education declined in number?

2. What arguments can you make to support those who argue that multiethnic, multi-lingual school programs should not be initiated?

3. Reverse the arguments now. What arguments can you make to support those individuals and groups who encourage multi-lingual, multi-cultural school programs?

4. Why is it important to recognize that prohibitions against multi-lingual programs were made to meet political, not educational goals?

5. What is the difference between the "remedial" or "transitional" view of bilingual or multi-lingual education in the 1974 ESEA Bill and the more recent "maintenance" concept of multi-lingual education?

6. What is meant by educational responsiveness? Why is the issue of parental and community involvement in educational decision-making so important to the achievement of pluralistic education?

7. The school is only one social institution. Why is it being singled out as the primary vehicle toward achieving a pluralistic society?

8. Suppose that several valid research studies demonstrated that English speaking children made slightly lower scores on achievement tests after multi-cultural, multi-lingual programs were introduced. Would you support those programs? Why?

9. Suppose that several valid research studies demonstrated that discipline and student control problems declined after multiethnic, multi-lingual programs were introduced. Would you support those programs? Why?

10. Suppose that in addition to rules and regulations designed to eliminate racial segregation in our schools, school desegregation programs included such elements as (1) human relations training on a multiethnic as well as a multiracial basis for teachers, administrators, students and parents; (2) careful monitoring by parents and educators of all desegregation experiences; (3) multiethnic and multiracial studies; (4) bilingual education; (5) increased involvement by local community groups in educational decision-making; and (6) opportunities for parents to select schools that more nearly matched the teaching, curriculum and disciplinary styles that they want for their children. Would you support such a school desegregation program? Why? If not, why not?

GROUP IDENTITY, MULTIETHNICITY,
AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN EDUCATION

-ACTIVITIES-

1. Randomly divide the group into two subgroups. One subgroup's task is to list all of the arguments supporting multi-lingual and multi-ethnic education. The other subgroup lists all the opposing arguments. The groups should work independently (preferably in separate rooms) and make their lists on poster paper. Then, give each group's list to the opposing group. They are to prepare a five to seven minute oral response to the other group. By this two-part process, all of the supporting and opposing arguments should become clear to all participants.

2. Other than minority language classes, many people are not fully cognizant of what multiethnic (or pluralistic) education might mean. Hold a "brainstorming" session in which all possible programs, classes, and activities that could be called multiethnic (or pluralistic) are listed. (Brainstorming rules require that all ideas are listed without discussion or evaluation.) Allow about ten to fifteen minutes for this activity. After the session, go back over the list. See if the ideas can be categorized. Rank them in priority order. See which ideas appeal to which interest group. For example, which ideas appeal to different ethnic and minority groups, educators, school administrators, etc., and why?

3. Another activity using the same brainstorming list from the above activity is to take the list immediately after it is compiled and write each idea on a separate note card. Divide the group into subgroups of four to six participants and give each group a complete "deck" of idea cards. Their goal is to select the most important and appealing seven ideas and then rank them in order of preference. Allow about twenty to thirty minutes for this task and then bring the groups together. Each group should report and tell why they selected those seven. A master list of "most selected" ideas should be compiled.

4. If you can encourage a few participants to do the following activity, it can be very effective. Assign the following roles:

   a. An immigrant father who knows English pretty well and speaks it at work, but prefers to speak his native tongue at home.

   b. An immigrant mother who knows very little English and wants her daughter to follow the customs of the old country.

   c. The 11-year old daughter. Born in America, she wants to be "like the rest of the kids." She resists speaking the "old country language" at home.

   d. The school counselor who feels that the new multi-cultural, multi-lingual program is confusing and simply prevents children from "adjusting" well to American society.

   e. The teacher of the new bilingual class in which the daughter would be enrolled if she signs up for it.

-ACTIVITIES-

The scene is at the school in the counselor's office. They are trying to decide on the daughter's schedule for next year. If she chooses the new bilingual course, she will not be able to take the home economics class which has both cooking and sewing in it.

Let the role-players "ad-lib" their roles. The rest of the group should observe. After ten to fifteen minutes, stop the session and call for comments and discussion. Emphasize that there is no "right" solution. An interesting variation is to encourage other participants to quietly come up, tap the shoulder of one of the role players, and take her or his place in the scene.

5. Have the group write a mock "letter" to a local school official in which they state their support of multiethnic, multi-lingual education. Then have them identify the physical and human resources within the community and neighborhood that could be used by the school if it initiates the program. This activity usually results in an astonishing list of resources that the group did not know existed.

6. Perhaps we are expecting the schools to carry too much of the load toward achieving the goal of a pluralistic society. Using the "brain-storming" approach again (see activity #2), have the group list as many other ways that a pluralistic society might be achieved. Then, through a ranking process, decide on the most likely three or four. Divide the group into as many subgroups as you have topics. Each group should take one of three ideas and work out a fairly detailed plan that would use the new idea as a "bridge" to pluralism. An example might be the mass media, or even religious institutions.