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AUTHOR   Ayalon, Aram
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ABSTRACT
                This paper addresses the relevance of multicultural
education in rural areas, particularly rural schools with a majority
white population. Multicultural education does not lend itself to a
single set of methods nor to a single curriculum. For example, one
approach enhances the educational opportunities of members of
minority groups, while another approach addresses diversity within
the larger society and the world. In the past two decades researchers
have found that rural residents were less tolerant than urban
dwellers toward civil liberties, sexual nonconformity, religious and
political nonconformity, support of minority office-seekers, and
racial and ethnic minority groups. Additionally, rural white
residents tended to view education about minority groups as
irrelevant to their communities. Population trends indicate
increasing growth in metropolitan areas and decreasing growth in
rural areas. With this population shift, the gap between rural and
urban incomes has widened. Rural schools could become instrumental in
improving rural economies but have been criticized as being
inadequate in preparing students for changing economic and social
realities. Multicultural education could become instrumental in rural
school reform by sparking examination of teaching strategies,
curriculum, staffing, and school organization, and by addressing
respect for cultural and ethnic diversity. Further research examining
possible links between rural schooling and multicultural education
are discussed. (LP)

Does Multicultural Education Belong in rural White America?

Aram Ayalon, Ph.D.

Department of Teacher Education

Potsdam College of the State University of New York

Potsdam, New York 13676

Tel: (315) 267-2505

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DOES MULTICUTURAL EDUCATION BELONG IN RURAL WHITE AMERICA?*

Multicultural education has re-emerged recently as an important reform movement. Multicultural education is usually dealt with in the context of urban areas where the population is more ethnically diverse. The question, I pose, is whether education that is multicultural is relevant in sparsely populated areas where social change is presumably slower and the community is more homogeneously European American than in urban areas.

I became aware of this issue after reading an article in the Daily Courier-Observer, which is published in Potsdam, New York, a rural white upstate community. The article documented the response of local educators to the well-publicized and controversial report on social studies curriculum revision by the State of New York Board of Regents (New York Social Studies Review and Development Committee, 1991). This report called for a "Curriculum of Inclusion," incorporating more multiculturalism in social studies. The article said the following: "Local educators argue, however, that the new curriculum is geared more toward the ethnically diverse areas of the state such as New York City...'Many of these things that come out are for New York City in particular' said...a social studies teacher" (Piche, p.2). Teachers in the article also indicated that since very few members of ethnic and racial minorities lived in the area the curriculum should not emphasize their heritage but instead reflect the heritage of those forming the majority in the locality and region. Similarly, on the national level, a study of 50 state departments of public instruction reported that personnel from rural all-white districts did not see multicultural education programs as important to them (Mitchell, 1985).

A literature survey of the past 10 years yielded few articles on the issue of multicultural education in rural s hools, especially in the context of majority white schools.

In the first effort to explore multicultural education reform in rural America, Spears, et al. (1990) conducted a study of five rural schools with a relatively advanced level of implementation of multicultural reform. The results suggested that rural schools, which enrolled mostly minorities or mixed ethnic populations, were more successful in sustaining educational change than were all-white rural schools. Oliver and Howley (1992) recommended incorporating multicultural education in rural schools because of the need to adapt to recent economic, technological and demographic changes in rural areas as well as to the rapid increases in ethnic and cultural diversity currently taking place in the U.S and the world. However, Oliver and Howley provided little detail about the actual changes occurring in rural areas, failed to address the unique characteristics of rural schools, and did not provide direction for future research.

This paper, therefore, will address the question of the applicability of multicultural education in rural areas with a special focus on majority white communities. This will be accomplished first, by describing what is meant by "multicultural education"; second, by examining the nature and the current needs of rural education; and third, by identifying whether the characteristics of multicultural education can assist in addressing the needs of rural schools in general and rural white schools in particular. Finally, I will attempt to establish a framework for research in order to further examine the possible links between rural schooling and multicultural education.

Multicultural education

Banks (1989) has stated the major goal of multicultural education the following way, "...to transform the school so that male and female students, exceptional students, as well as students from diverse cultural, social-class, racial and ethnic groups will experience an equal opportunity to learn in school" (p.20). A second major goal has been to help all students develop more positive attitudes toward various negatively stereotyped groups. A third goal has been to help members of marginalized groups become empowered by

enabling them to experience success in schools and equipping them with social action skills. A fourth goal has been to enable students to gain insight into reality from the perspectives of various marginalized groups (Banks, 1989).

Various strategies have been used in the schools to accomplish the above goals. Sleeter and Grant (1988) classified these strategies into five different approaches:

1. Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different. This approach assumes that such groups as the lower class, minority and students with disabilities are culturally deficient or culturally different and attempts to fit students into the mainstream by adapting their learning styles and skill levels.

2. Human Relations. This approach focuses on intergroup relations and the self-concepts of those belonging to oppressed groups. It suggests ways to improve relationships among members of different groups by teaching lessons about stereotyping and prejudice and encouraging cooperation and positive contact.

3. Single Group Studies. This approach attempts to promote social equality for and recognition of the groups being studied by helping students become knowledgeable about these groups through curriculum revisions. Revisions include studying the history, culture and current social issues of a target group.

4. Multicultural Education. This approach attempts to reform the total schooling process for all children and promote equal opportunities and cultural pluralism through various methods such as diversifying the staff, changing the curriculum to include various points of view, using cooperative instructional methods, etc.

5. Education That is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. This approach focuses on preparing citizens to work for social structural equality through involving students in democratic decision making, analyzing the students' life experiences and developing critical thinking and social action skills.

Proponents of each of these five approaches differ to various degrees in their conceptual views of schooling and society. The first two approaches are more

assimilationist in that they seek to place groups that are different into the "mainstream". The third and fourth approaches, on the other hand, adhere to the cultural pluralism theory, which emphasizes that while there is a common American culture, each cultural group has its own unique characteristics. The fifth approach sees culture in terms of adaptation to everyday life circumstances, which are partially determined by group competition over resources.

In addition to disagreeing about approach, advocates of the multicultural education movement disagree about which groups this term applies to. Although culture usually is defined in broad terms, the term multicultural education refers, in the literature, primarily to the ethnicity and race of minority groups. To a lesser extent, the term refers to the ethnicity of white groups, gender, class, exceptionality and sometimes to religion and sexual orientati)n. The conflict is between those scholars who fear that using the term too broadly will result in overlooking racial and ethnic minorities and perhaps de-emphasizing their oppression and those who wish to avoid excluding any marginalized group (Gay, 1983; Banks, 1992).

Using the broad definition of culture, some scholars claim, suggests that multicultural education may be necessary even in a monocultural society as Nieto (1992) indicates, "We might legitimately ask whether even the most ethnically homogeneous society is truly monocultural, given the diversity of social class, language, sexual preference, physical ability and other human and social differences present in all societies" (p.222). Moreover, advocates of the inclusive definition of multicultural education point to increased global interdependence and suggest that multicultural education can help prepare students more effectively for a changing world.

In summary, multicultural education does not refer to a single set of methods nor to a single curriculum. Neither does it refer to ethnic and racial diversity alone. In both approach and scope, there are deep disagreements among various proponents of multicultural education. Finally, while one rationale for multicultural education refers to

enhancing the educational opportunities of members of marginalized groups existing within the schools, some suggest that multicultural education may address diversity within the larger society and the world.

Rural education

Examining the characteristics of rural culture particularly in rural schools as well as current social and economic trends in rural America can suggest whether multicultural education is relevant in these communities. Despite the influences of modern life, such as TV and computers, rural communities have maintained a distinct culture due to the relative isolation, small size and limited resources. According to rural sociologists the notion of rurality encompasses at least three dimension: occupational, ecological, and sociocultural (Miller & Luloff, 1981). The occupation dimension refers to a population which derives its livelihood mostly from agriculture and extractive industries such as mining, fishing and forestry. This dimension might not be as typical to rural residents as it used to be (see later section for further discussion). The ecological element of rurality refers to a population which is small, sparsely populated, and relatively isolated from metropolitan areas. Finally the sociocultural factor refers to two aspects, the patterns of social interactions and the attitudes of rural society. Most of the literature portrays rural people as having frequent and intense social interactions as well as informal patterns of communication (Nachtigal, 1982). Bell (1992), for example, reported in an ethnographic study that residents of a rural community described the ideals of their social interactions in terms of slow pace, quietness, smallness of scale, knowing everyone, helping others, traditions, and lack of status competitiveness. As far as the value system aspect, the bulk of literature describes rural culture as being socially conservative. On one hand rural culture stresses independence, honesty and religiosity on the other hand it is characterized by prejudice, ethnocentricity, and intolerance to nonconforming ideas (Miller & Luloff, 1981). Due to the relevance of

this aspect of rural socioculture to multicultural education it will be further discussed in a separate section.

Attitude structure of rural culture

The literature provides some indication that rural residents tend to be more prejudiced and less tolerant toward diversity than urban residents. Wirth (1938) and Stouffer (1955) viewed the diversity and heterogeneity of urban life as the primary factors that underlie racial tolerance. Non-urban residents, on the other hand, typically are more homogeneous in their backgrounds and characteristics, come in contact primarily with others who have similar values, beliefs, and life styles, and do not have to develop tolerance of individual differences as do urban dwellers. In the past two decades researchers found that rural residents were less tolerant toward civil liberties, sexual nonconformity, religious and political nonconformity, support of minority office-seekers, and racial and ethnic groups than urban dwellers (Edward and McMullin, 1982; Smith and Peterson, 1980, Glenn and Hill, 1977). Miller and Luloff (1981) found that people who grew up in small communities tended to be socially conservative with regard to civil liberties, abortion, and racial segregation. Tuch (1987) concluded that in the future, if the current trend continues, the urban-rural disparity in racial tolerance might become even more pronounced.

Social and economic trends

The above sociocultural aspects of rural life have an important implication to rural education. But to further understand its implication it also is important to examine the current social and economic trends in rural America. Currently about one fourth of the nation's population lives in rural areas which represent about 97% of the land (Luloff and Swanson, 1990). Several trends in the past several decades have had an important impact on rural education. The population of rural America has been decreasing as the availability of natural resources in rural areas have been decreasing and the establishment of the interstate highway system and improvements in telecommunication networks have

encouraged faster growth of metropolitan areas. With this population shift the gap between rural and urban incomes has been widening. The rural middle class has shrunk substantially in the past 60 years while the rate of poverty has increased. The modern rural middle class is no longer involved in farming and small business but in the management of private and public institutions such as prisons and schools (Luloff and Swanson, 1990). The farm crisis of the 1980s has deepened rural economic problems, thereby perpetuating the process of rural ghettoization and the marginalization of rural communities (Davison, 1990).

Rural schools

Schools have a central role in the social and economic fabric of rural communities. From a social perspective, schools usually are the focal point in community integration and provide a source of pride, local identification, and social cohesion. Schools also are major employers in rural areas, consuming nearly 35% of local government expenditures and taking a central role in economic development efforts (Ilvento, 1990). The home/school relationship, unlike that found in urban schools, is typically a close one. The intense social interaction in rural communities between children and adults provides an important context for school change. Spears et al. (1990) noted that school reform is difficult to accomplish without strong support from the adults in the community.

Despite the central role of schools in rural communities, they tend to maintain what has been termed "premodern characteristics" (DeYoung, 1991). According to DeYoung (1991), modern educational practices and reforms tend to materialize very slowly in rural areas because traditional practices and leadership are strong. A combination of such factors as the influence of religion, lack of resources, limited variety in classes, physical isolation, and a preference for natives in hiring, all of which maintain a closed system, prevent the infusion of new educational ideas.

This grim picture of rural schools is further emphasized in a recent study which found that, although rural schools are small and serve as the focal point for their

community, they lack cooperation, collaboration and democratic organization among various components within themselves (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1990). In most rural schools, according to this study, teachers were isolated in the classrooms and did not cooperate with their colleagues. Administrators did not share responsibilities with teachers, and students' input was not incorporated into classroom or school affairs. The same study found that three fourths of the teachers typically lectured to rows of students. Another study found that while there was close contact between school and home in rural areas, it also enhanced categorization and stereotyping of children and hence was detrimental to the chances of some students to move up the social ladder (Dunne, 1977).

As for characteristics of rural school students, there has been a sharp increase in the attendance of poor and emotionally and intellectually needy children due, in part, to the economic crisis. While 20% of the nation's children were identified as poor, 33% of all poor children currently live in non-metropolitan areas (Tickamyer and Duncan, 1990).

With respect to the curriculum, rural schools have been criticized for having a curriculum that is irrelevant to the needs of the students, thereby causing many to drop out or leave the community upon graduation (Sher, 1977; Nachtigal, 1982). Bennet (1991), for example, portrayed a bleak picture of a reading instruction in a rural-like Appalachian first grade class. She concluded that, "...the basal readers and mandated curriculum guides which were provided for use by teachers in the form of a program of 'scripted' lessons ignored the cultural background and experiences of Appalachian children." (p.45).

Rural schools and multicultural education

The current economic situation in rural areas suggests an urgent need for revitalization. Schools, as in previous reform movements, have become a central focus in attempting to improve rural economies. At the same time, rural schools are being criticized as inadequate in preparing students for the changing economic and social realities of the

nation. Since rural school reform is essential, the question is whether multicultural education goals and strategies provide a viable approach for meeting these needs.

As we have noted before, a principal goal of multicultural education is to provide equal learning opportunities for neglected and oppressed groups. In rural schools, whether they have a large minority population or not, there is a large population of poor, female, and exceptional children. It is therefore desirable that the curriculum, teaching strategies and school structure be modified to address issues of gender, class and exceptionality. Furthermore, as research in rural areas suggests, rural residents do have a distinct culture created by their unique living environment and traditions. This culture, while not usually addressed under the label "multicultural education", should become an integral part of the schools' curriculum. Sher (1977) suggested that one of the main priorities in improving rural education is building a curriculum that reflects and utilizes the advantages of rural communities by emphasizing the communities themselves as resources. Learning and appreciating one's own background is the prerequisite for learning and understanding other cultures. An important and successful example of a program which encourages rural students to learn about their own culture is "cultural journalism". The term was first used to describe publications in the magazine "Foxfire" by high school students documenting the oral history of rural Appalachia. The concept of students publishing and researching their own communities was adapted by various ethnic groups around the country (Olmstead, 1989).

Does the lack of substantial numbers of ethnic and racial minorities in rural white areas mean that materials about them should be de-emphasized?
The isolation of rural schools, as well as their resistance to outside influences, tends to limit students' opportunities to be prepared for the workplace and to become participating citizens in a democratic society. In teacher education, for example, a recent survey reveals that most preservice teachers are white, female, monolingual, from rural communities and prefer to teach students like themselves (Zimpher, 1989). Only 15% of the respondents

indicated that they would like to teach in urban areas where ethnic and racial diversity is more visible. Incorporating multicultural education in rural schools may, therefore, have an important long-term impact on the way future generations of teachers approach and teach about diversity.

In other fields rural residents may find themselves working with racial and ethnic minorities on a daily basis. For example, prisons now represent a significant source of jobs in rural America (DeYoung, 1991). Correctional employees work regularly with urban African-American and Hispanic inmates. Without knowledge of and sensitivity to people from such cultures, workers may find that their racial prejudices and stereotyping are aggravated and the effectiveness of their efforts decreased. In a recent visit, I conducted, to a correctional facility in rural upstate New York containing predominantly African American and Hispanic inmates, I found that among the dozens of teachers, all of which were white, only one could speak Spanish. Furthermore, most of the teachers had lived most of their lives in rural white areas and had little contact with and understanding of urban ways of living and the culture of people of color.

As to the role of the school in preparing productive citizens, the relative intolerance among rural residents toward minorities, civil rights and various non-conformities suggests a need for addressing these issues in the schools. According to Allport's (1979) "principle of least effort", stereotypes and the categories humans construct will be maintained unless information is presented that contradicts these stereotypes. In rural areas, unless schools take an active role through various multicultural education approaches, stereotypes are likely to be maintained. It is important to note here, that although everyone can benefit from multicultural education, it has different benefits for different groups.

Addressing the relevance of the five multicultural education approaches to rural schools requires a focus on the way rural schools operate. As reported before, rural schools tend to be traditional in structure, in power, and in instructional approaches. Many approaches to multicultural education have the potential for school renewal. The Human

Relations approach, for example, can address the inflexibility of the rural school environment by promoting respect for human differences and similarities. Single Group Studies can help focus students' attention on their own cultural heritage as well as on those of other groups previously invisible in the curriculum. Most relevant, however, seems to be the Multicultural Education approach. This approach advocates comprehensive school reform that addresses not only teaching strategies and curricular concerns but also staffing and school organization. This strategy, however, will not be successful unless it is initiated from within. Top-down school reform initiatives which were prevalent during the 1980s have largely failed. Under conditions of isolation rural white schools might not feel the need for incorporating multiculturalism. Perhaps a comprehensive change can be initiated by, as suggested before, exploring the local culture and increasing the local community input into the school affairs on one hand, and on the other hand reducing the rural schools' isolation by exposing them to the rich diversity available outside of their communities.

Having established the relevancy of multicultural education to rural schools, I will outline in the last section an agenda for future research in order to promote multicultural education goals and approaches in rural schools.

Framework for further research

As was indicated at the beginning of this article, few studies exist on the issue of multicultural education in rural areas. Furthermore, while definitions of culture are general, culture in the context of multicultural education centers on issues of race, gender, and class and overlooks such elements as rural culture. Another issue raised in this article is that rural white residents tend to be more prejudiced toward ethnic minorities and view education about minority groups as irrelevant to their communities.

Research, therefore, needs to focus on several areas simultaneously: First, there is a need for descriptive studies on how oppressed and marginalized groups, including

groups within rural white communities, are portrayed or neglected in rural schools both in the hidden and the overt curriculum. For example, a study might describe how females are presented by teachers and curriculum materials used in rural schools as well as how they are treated within the schools. Another example is social class. Social class is rarely studied in the schools, and the perspectives of the working and lower middle class is excluded from the curriculum (Sleeter and Grant, 1988). Studies on such factors as gender and class in the context of rural communities may help focus the attention on the degree of need for multicultural education in rural schools. It would also be of interest to assess the way rural America itself is portrayed in schools. As feminist postmodernists, critical theorists, and multicultural scholars have indicated, knowledge is not neutral but reflects power relationships and group interests (Harding, 1991; Giroux, 1983; Banks, 1993). In the case of rural culture, knowledge presented in rural schools might reflect the interests of powerful and influential white, urban and suburban America at the expense of rural concerns.

Second, there is a need to document the experiences and attitudes of children and adults in rural communities in order to be able to make the school curriculum more relevant to the needs and the culture of this population. For example, in agricultural communities, the way children interact with their environment may affect their learning styles because they are accustomed to working independently and with a variety of machinery. Also, in rural areas there is a large number of children identified as "at risk". Identifying how much of this categorization is due to cultural discontinuity between home and school as well as to the marginalization of rural poor students could be an important aspect of exploring multicultural issues in rural schools. Furthermore, Dunne (1977) indicated that, "rural schools provide a kind of heterogeneity rarely found in urban or suburban settings - heterogeneity of social class." (p.98). Since children of different social class and occupational background attend the same school, studies could describe how this contact affects the equality of educational opportunities in these schools. Describing adult

experiences in the workplace may also help reshape the way rural schools prepare their students for the world of work. Common present-day rural workplaces such as prisons and social service sites provide culturally diverse experiences not usually known to rural residents until recently.

Third, studies could document the approaches to multicultural education that rural schools are employing currently and compare their efficacy in providing for equal educational opportunities for all students. Describing case studies of effective application of multicultural education in rural schools could help other schools in implementing multicultural education. Spears, et al. (1990) identified five case studies of effective multicultural education reform in rural areas west of the Mississippi. Only one of these cases involved an all-white community. More case studies need to be studied in various geographic locations in the U.S., including majority white rural schools.

One successful approach to multicultural education was originated by Jane Eliot, a third grade teacher in an all-white rural town. She created the now famous simulated lesson on discrimination of blue-eyed and brown-eyed children documented in the TV documentary The Eye of The Storm. A follow-up reunion 14 years later indicated that this simulation had a lasting effect on the racial attitudes of these rural white students. This illustrates how the Human Relations approach may be used effectively in rural schools. Another approach,

Fourth, as previously indicated, in rural areas community attitudes and involvement are key in implementing any reform in the schools. Studies should investigate community intervention programs that attempt to change adult attitudes toward ethnic and racial minorities and other marginalized groups. In addition, studies of effective school-community relationship could be incorporated into effective multicultural reform attempts. Similarly, intervention at colleges serving rural communities can prove effective in further changing attitudes of rural professionals and leaders.

Fifth, the inflexibility of the school structure in many rural schools and their resistance to change have been documented. Multicultural education advocates using democratic practices in the school, providing a voice for all groups. Research on school restructuring and practices such as shared decision-making can help inform how implementation of multicultural reform in rural schools might be possible.

Conclusions

This article argues that multicultural education and rural education have much in common. Multicultural education, while not a panacea, has much to offer in improving education and in implementing school reform in rural communities. It is suggested that research is important in exploring the shape multicultural education can take in such areas.

It is hoped that rural communities might realize that more than anything else multicultural education is simply good instruction. Nieto (1992) says, "In the final analysis, multicultural education ...is simply good pedagogy. That is, all good education takes students seriously, uses their experiences as a basis for further learning, and helps them develop into critical empowered citizens...To put it simply, in our multicultural society, all good education needs to take into account the diversity of our student body." (p.222)

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